



Mainstream

ANTON CHEKHOV

Thomas Mann

BATTLE REPORT FROM BERLIN

Edith Anderson

THE MEN BEHIND THE NOBEL PRIZE

John Takman

CARL MARZANI'S POLITICAL NOVEL

Charles Humboldt

William Z. Foster Reviews Walter Lippmann

March, 1959

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PROSEY POEM ON AN OLD THEME

IF WE were an item in the state budget, or a speck of dust on
the national debt
we could land within three hundred miles of a pinpoint-
target in the South Pacific
we were last year's rusty bomber or the newest thing in gas
airfare

we were experts in planned obsolescence, inventors of a cooling
system for Geiger counters

we were two snoopers in a union hall, or the Committee to
Investigate Poems and Paintings of Any Significance

our worries would be over, we'd be hidden away in your income
tax, your sales tax, your movie tax, your gasoline tax, your
cigarette tax, your soak-the-poor-and-spare-the-rich tax.

BUT since we're on your side of the tracks, not on theirs, we
can't appeal for relief to the Old Believer in the White
House, nor to the smiler with the knife in Albany.

and we absolutely need \$7,000 to keep going—not a buck, not
a dime, not a red cent less

friends, if you like what you read in this number, let us know
the way that counts this time of the year

send us a check, a money order, or cash. It will go a long way
help us circle the earth with some grains of truth.

—*The Editors*

← The address is to the left as it should be ←

ANTON CHEKHOV

THOMAS MANN

WHEN in July 1904 Anton Chekhov died at Badenweiler of tuberculosis of the lungs, I was a young man who had just come to literature with several short stories and one novel, and was deeply indebted to the 19th-century Russian school of narrative writing. Vainly do I seek today to remember what impression the announcement of the death of the Russian short story writer who was fifteen years my senior made on me then. Nothing comes back to me. The news, reported and commented on, of course, by the German press, must have left me almost untouched, and what was written about Chekhov on the occasion must have been too insignificant to give me any deep sense of *who* it was that had passed away too early for Russia, too early for the world. The obituaries obviously reflected the same state of ignorance that defined my own attitude to the life and work of the writer, one that was dispelled but slowly with time.

What was the reason for this? Personally it was a case of fascination for the "great work," the sustained effort, the epic monument executed and completed with tremendous patience—of deification of the master of the big forms, like Balzac, Tolstoy and Wagner, whom it was my dream if only in slight measure to imitate. But Chekhov, like Maupassant, a writer with whom I was far better acquainted by the way, was a master of small forms, of short stories, which do not require the heroic persistence of years or decades, and can be written by an able craftsman in a few days or weeks. For these I entertained a certain contempt, without properly understanding how much inner meaning the power of genius can lend to brevity and laconism and to what an extent—perhaps the greatest wonder of all—such conciseness can encompass all the fullness of life, rising to unquestionably epic heights, yes, and how in its artistic intensity it can quite excel even the large, the major opus, which so often and inevitably tires and lapses into a respectable tedium. If later in life I came to understand this better than in my youth, I owe it mainly

my study of Chekhov's narrative art, which belongs with all the strongest and best in European literature.

Speaking more generally, that Chekhov was underestimated in Western Europe and even in Russia for many years seems to me to have been associated with his own extremely sober, critical and sceptical attitude towards himself, and the dissatisfaction with which he viewed his own work, in other words, with his *modesty*, which was very appealing, but hardly likely to win for him the respect of the world, setting the latter, as it were, such a bad example. For the opinion we have of ourselves is not without its influence on the idea people form of us; it colors and, under certain circumstances, distorts it. This writer of short stories had believed too long in the insignificance of his own abilities, in his own unimportance as an artist; he was very slow and reluctant to acquire even a little faith in himself, the faith we must have in ourselves if others are to have faith in us. To his last day there was nothing of the literary lion about him, or even less of the Wise-Man-and-Prophet à la Tolstoy, who regarded him with friendship and, according to Gorky, considered him a "charming, quiet and *modest* man."

THIS PRAISE from one who was so colossally lacking in modesty and in that respect ceded nothing to Wagner, is rather overwhelming. In all likelihood Chekhov would have replied to it with a quiet, polite and ironical smile, for politeness and dutiful respect, tintured with a modicum of irony, in general defined his attitude to the Great Man of Yasnaya Polyana. Sometimes, and not, of course, in the immediate presence of that overwhelming personality, but rather in his letters to others, his irony became open rebellion. After his return from Hades, from his self-sacrificing journey of inquiry to the convict island of Sakhalin, he wrote: "What a dour picture I would make if I closed myself up within my own four walls. *Before* the journey, Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* was a big thing for me; now it strikes me as funny, it sounds rather silly. . . ." The imperious—and dubious—manner of the Prophet got on his nerves. "The devil take the philosophy of the great of this world!" he wrote. "All the big, wise men are as despotic as generals and just as crude and ignorant as generals, because they feel they can say what they like with impunity!"

This was provoked chiefly by Tolstoy's having called doctors ignorant rascals. Chekhov was a doctor, and a devoted one; he was a man of science and a believer in it, in its powers for progress, for ridding the hearts and minds of men of what degraded them, to which it acted as a potent antidote. The wisdom of "non-resistance to evil" and "passive resistance," the contempt for culture and progress the Great permitted

themselves seemed to him so much reactionary twaddle. No matter how great the man, he had no right to approach important problems like an ignoramus—that was what he had against Tolstoy. "Tolstoy's morals," he wrote, "no longer touch me, and deep down in my heart I regard them with antipathy. . . . I have peasant blood in my veins, and cannot go into raptures over the peasant's virtues. From childhood I have believed in progress. . . . Common sense and justice tell me that there is more love for man in electricity and steam than in chastity and abstinence. . . ."

In short, he was a positivist out of modesty. He was a simple servant of the wholesome truth who never, not for one second, claimed official recognition of his greatness. Once, speaking of Bourget's *Disciple*, he came out very definitely against the sham idealistic attacks on scientific materialism. "Forgive me, but I do not understand such excursions. To prohibit man from taking a materialistic approach is to prohibit his search for the truth. Outside of matter there is no experimentation, no knowledge, and consequently, no truth."

His persistent doubts in himself as an artist extended, if I am not mistaken, beyond the bounds of his own person, and reached out to art and literature as a whole; it went against his grain to live alone with them, closed up within his "four walls." He felt that association with them had to be supplemented by manly, practical, social activity out in the world, among the people, in the thick of life. Literature was, to use his own expression, his "mistress," while science and medicine were his "lawful wife," to which he felt guiltily that he had been unfaithful. Hence the exhausting and for his already failing health dangerous journey to Sakhalin and his shocking account of the terrible conditions there, which actually resulted in certain reforms. Hence the tireless activity as a practising country doctor which he always coupled with his literary work and his supervision of a provincial hospital in Zvenigorod near Moscow, hence the fight he waged against the cholera at Melikhovo village, where he saw to the construction of barracks for the sick, and also his services as the patron of the village school. Meanwhile his fame as a writer continued to grow. But he took it sceptically and shamefacedly. He was always asking himself: am I not deceiving the reader, in not being able to answer his most important questions?

NO OTHER utterance ever had such an impact on me; in fact it prompted my close study of Chekhov's biography. Of all the biographies I know, his is one of the most engaging and touching. He was born in the south Russian town of Taganrog, on the shore of the Sea of Azov—

a sleepy town where his father, a bigoted burgher, whose father before him had been a serf, engaged in petty trading and tyrannized his wife and children. This man was also a clumsy hand at painting ikons and playing the violin, in which art he was selftaught. He had a passion for liturgical music and started a church choir in which he made his sons sing. These many side lines were probably responsible for his bankruptcy while Anton Pavlovich was still at high school, and his flight from his creditors to Moscow. But in that narrow, hypocritical, philistine world lurked the shadow of the dark Muse which was to become radiantly incorporated in only one of his offspring. True, an older brother of Anton's was a "publicist," and another a painter—an insignificant journalist and a painter who, like the former, drowned whatever talent he had in vodka—weak, uncontrolled natures which this strong one, alone among them fitted for life and labor, tried in vain to keep on their feet.

At first the boys had to help their father sell his wares, run errands, and, on holidays, rise at three in the morning to perform their holy work of rehearsing with the choir. On top of that came the school, the Taganrog gymnasium, a drilling station whose doors were closed to things of the spirit, where teachers and pupils were guarded, by orders from above, against the least signs of free thought.

Life was all hard work, a dull, oppressive void. But to Anton, the chosen one, there had been given an original compensatory gift of laughter and fun, clowning and mimicking, a talent which fed on observation and expressed itself in imitative caricaturing acts. The boy could imitate the simple-minded deacon, the lordly official prancing at a ball, the dentist, or the church manner of the chief of the police with such amusing, and apt truth to life that others cried out: "No, it's really too good! Do it again! We saw them too, but they didn't seem so funny until that ragamuffin showed them to us, though they must have been funny indeed if they make us laugh so when he takes them off. Why, this is quite new, for someone to be able to copy everything he sees more naturally than we saw it. Ha, ha, ha, how droll! Enough of your unseemly antics, you rascal! But the chief of the police going to church—do that again now, won't you?!"

This is the primitive, apish basis of art, the talent, the comic urge and ability to amuse which later turns to different means and different forms of expression, drawing closer to the intellect, becoming morally finer, rising from the ridiculous to the sublime, but never losing the sense of fun, and always, even in the most intense, serious, bitter moments, retaining much of the talented imitations of the chief of the police and the dancing official. . . .

AND SO the father had to close his shop and make for Moscow, while Anton, who was sixteen at the time, stayed behind in Taganrog for three more years to continue his schooling. For he had to finish high school if he was to realize his dearest wish—to study medicine. He finished high school, getting through the last three grades on a tiny stipend and what he could make by his ill-paid private lessons to pupils of the lower grade, received his diploma, and could now follow his parents to Moscow in order to enter the university.

Was he happy to change his narrow provincial life for that of a big city? Did he breathe freely at last? But Russian life at that time did not let anyone breathe freely when it came to that. It was cramped, dumb, cringingly-submissive, bullied and crushed by brutal authority; it was goose-stepped and censored, yelled at and shouted down by the State. The whole country was held in the strangling grip of the absolutist conservative regime of Alexander III and his awe-inspiring Pobedonostsev. It was a regime of despair.

This despair literally possessed many of the more sensitive natures close to Chekhov, who needed the ozone of freedom to live. It deprived Gleb Uspensky, true artist of the life of the Russian peasants, of his reason. It drove Garshin, whose gloomy stories Chekhov admired, to suicide, and the painter Levitan, with whom he was on friendly terms, to make an attempt on his own life. Vodka began to exercise an increasingly alluring attraction for the intelligentsia. People drank because they had lost hope. Both of Chekhov's elder brothers drank, and went down rapidly despite the entreaties of their younger brother that they take themselves in hand. You may say they would have been drunkards without Pobedonostsev, but unfortunately they could point, among others, to the excellent Palmin, the poet and another of their brother's friends, who also drank.

Anton Pavlovich did not drink, did not yield to despair, and did not lose his reason. In the first place, he was too busy with his medical studies, in which Mr. Pobedonostsev did not interfere. As concerns the general mood of despair, he fought against that by the same happy device that had once helped him to cope with the boredom of life in Taganrog—he laughed and imitated the chief of the police, the stupid deacon, the official at the ball or others of that ilk, but in writing now instead of mimicry. In the flat he shared with his parents, noisy and disorderly as it was (he himself had brought two boarders with him from Taganrog), he sat and wrote for humorous journals that made room for a bit of satire now and then—all kinds of funny little pieces, very

short and fleetly done, too, they seemed; anecdotes, dialogues, amusing incidents, sketches parodying middle-class marriages, tipsy merchants, nagging or unfaithful wives, the retired officer who kept on shouting at the world—and he did it in a way that made people exclaim, as they had before in Taganrog: "I say, how cleverly he does it! Repeat that, won't you?"

And he repeated it again and again, tirelessly, with hilarious mirth, out of his inexhaustible fund of minute observations of everyday life, although it was a heavy load for a young man to carry this job of trying to amuse the public on top of a medical course, which takes a lot of one's time. The little pieces had to be given form and point, and that also required intellectual effort. Besides, he had to write great numbers of them if the miserable fee he received for his work was to add up to a sum large enough not only to pay for his education, but also to suffice for the support of his parents and younger sister and brothers, as his father earned next to nothing, and at the age of nineteen, Anton had to become the mainstay of his family. He signed his name to his comic stories: *Antosha Chekhonté*.

AND THEN something happened in the strange way the spirit and will of literature dictate, showing what unexpected results are liable to ensue when one enters into any relations with it, however practical, or incidental, or jocular. Its spirit "bangs relentlessly at one's conscience" said the jester, Antosha Chekhonté. In one of his letters he speaks of himself writing in the home of his parents amidst the screams of a baby, much coming and going, the sounds of a music-box and the voice of his father reading aloud in the next room, sitting at his unsheltered desk, with his literary composition in front of him "banging relentlessly at his conscience." But it really should not do so, its purpose being simply to entertain, to amuse the bourgeoisie.

But the surprising, peculiar and unexpected thing is that gradually, without his desiring or without his even being aware of it, something begins to creep into his little stories that originally had nothing to do with them, something stemming rather from the conscience of literature and at the same time his own individual conscience, something still funny and amusing, but in addition bitter, sad, pointed against life and society, intensely critical—in a word, something literary. It creeps into his writing because it is intrinsic to the very process of writing, to form and style . . . that critical discontent and unsubmission, expressing the craving for a better reality, a purer, juster, more beautiful and noble life, for a human society more acceptable to the mind. This craving is

reflected in style and the need to work creatively for it, a "relentless" need unquestionably related to that something that began to creep into the light and entertaining stories of Antosha Chekhonté. Fifteen years later Maxim Gorky was able to say of Antosha: "As a stylist Chekhov cannot be excelled, and the future historian of literature, in speaking of the development of the Russian language, will say that the language was created by Pushkin, Turgenev, and Chekhov."

That was uttered in 1900. We are still at the years 1884-1885; Chekhov then twenty-four, had just finished his studies and begun his internship at the Voskressensk provincial hospital, dissecting the bodies of persons who had committed suicide or died under suspicious circumstance.

He continued to write his humorous stories, for that had become habit, and among these there chanced to be several pieces—"The Death of an Official," "The Fat and the Thin," "The Villain"—the writing of which afforded him unusual pleasure. They were probably not much to the liking of the majority of his readers, for their humor was bitter. But here and there a reader raised his eyebrows as he read them. So it was with D. V. Grigorovich. Do you know who Dmitri Vassilievich Grigorovich is? I didn't. To be frank, I had never heard of any writer of that name until I began to study the biography of Chekhov. And yet in his day he was a famous author, a big figure in literature, who had given many years to his novels about feudal life. From him in Petersburg the young Dr. Chekhov serving at Voskressensk near Moscow received a letter, a very serious letter which was perhaps the most thrilling, outstanding, epochal event in Chekhov's life.

The famous old man, who had been a friend of Belinsky's, and then of Turgenev's and Dostoevsky's, and who died in 1899, wrote the following: "Yours is a real talent . . . a talent which raises you far above the circle of the writers of the younger generation . . . save your impressions for work that is carefully thought out and executed, written not at one sitting, but in the happy hours of the inner impulse. . . . You, I am certain, are destined to write several truly splendid works of art. You will be guilty of a great moral crime if you do not live up to these expectations. What is needed is respect for the talent that is so rarely granted to any man. Give up your hasty work. . . ." Chekhov read this, in black and white, over the signature of a great man. He was stunned, thrilled, shaken as he had never been before in all his life. "I almost cried over it. I feel it has stamped itself indelibly on my soul. I am in the seventh heaven. I have not the will to ask myself whether I deserve such high praise. . . . If I have a gift worthy of respect, I swear before the purity of your heart that I have never shown it such respect before."

... A body can find plenty of reasons to be harsh towards oneself, to be extremely mistrustful and suspicious. . . . Until now my attitude to my literary work has been utterly frivolous, careless, thoughtless. . . . I wrote, and yet all the time I was trying not to spend the images and pictures I cherished on my stories; God only knows why I kept them to myself, carefully hidden away."

So wrote Chekhov in his letter of thanks to the old man, a letter which subsequently became widely known. After he sent it, he proceeded either to another autopsy, or to a typhus case in the provincial hospital. We are inclined to believe it was the typhus case when we think of Lieutenant Klimov, the story of whose illness, which seems to come straight from the soul of the sick man, was related not long afterwards with remarkable artistry by Anton Chekhov—never again, after the above letter, did he return to the pseudonym of Antosha Chekhonté.

ANTON CHEKHOV was not fated to live long. The first symptoms of tuberculosis appeared when he was twenty-nine. He was a doctor, and he knew what they meant. He could hardly fool himself into believing that his vitality would last him to the age of a patriarch like Tolstoy. One wonders whether knowledge of the brevity of his span on earth did not contribute to the development of the rare and charming, sceptical and quiet modesty that forever after characterized his whole spiritual and artistic make-up, intrinsic to which was an instinct that turned his modesty into a distinct quality of his artistic nature and so endowed his being with a unique appeal. About twenty-five years were all that remained to him for creative work and perfection, and he made the most of them, to be sure. Over six hundred stories bear his name, not a few of long short-story size, and, among them, masterpieces like "Ward No. 6," the story of a doctor who, out of irritation with the dumb and miserable world of the normal identifies himself so closely with the interests of his patients that he is judged insane himself by that world, and is locked up with his patients. Written in 1892, eighty-seven pages long, this story is, without directly denouncing them, so symbolic of the hopeless moral corruption of Russia and of the degradation of human dignity which characterized the closing years of the autocracy that upon reading it in his youth Lenin said to his sister: "When I finished reading the story last night, I was simply frozen with horror. I couldn't stay in my room; I got up and went out. I felt exactly as though I had been locked up in ward no. 6."

However, if we are to name and praise, let us not omit so truly extraordinary and fascinating a work, of a soft melancholy quality with-

out its like in literature, as "A Tedious Story" which I value above any other of Chekhov's stories. It is outstanding if only by virtue of the fact that it calls itself "tedious" while being a most powerful piece of writing by a young man not yet thirty, told with remarkable insight through the lips of an old man who is a scientist of world fame, with the title of general . . . "His Excellency." In moments of self-revelation, this general speaks of himself as "My Excellency" in a tone that means "Lord help us!" Although he stands high in the official hierarchy, he also stands high enough spiritually, self-critically and critically by and large to despise his fame and the admiration meted out to him, and, deep in his soul, to despair because he knows that his life, for all its merit, has been without a spiritual centre, without a "general idea"—because he realizes that essentially it has been a meaningless life, a life of disillusionment. "Each feeling and thought lives detached in me, and in all my ideas on science, the theatre, literature . . ." and so on and so forth, "not even the most cunning analyst will discover what is called the general idea of the god of the living man. And without that there is nothing. . . . No wonder I have darkened the last months of my life by thoughts and feelings worthy of a slave or a savage, and that I have become indifferent. . . . When there is lacking in a man that which is higher and stronger than all external influences, a good cold in the nose is enough, verily, to make him lose his balance . . . all his pessimism or his optimism, with all his big and little thoughts, have importance only as symptoms and no more. I am beaten. And that being so, it is useless to go on thinking or talking. I shall sit and wait in silence for what is to be."

Prospero's last words, "and my ending is despair" involuntarily come to mind when one reads the admissions of this famous old man, Nikolai Stepanich, who says "I do not like my popularity. It seems to me that it has deceived me." Anton Chekhov was not an old man when he made his hero say these things; he was a young man, but he did not have long to live, and that was perhaps why he could imagine with such incredible and terrible truth how the old feel. He put much of himself into his old dying scientist, above all: "I do not like my popularity." Chekhov did not like his growing popularity either. He was "afraid of it for some strange reason." Was he not deceiving his readers and blinding them with his talent "without being able to answer their most important questions?" What was he writing for? What was his purpose, his credo, his "god of living men?" What was "the general idea" of his life and work "without which there is noth-

ing"? "A life of thought devoid of a definite philosophy is not life, but a burden, a horror," he said in one of his letters to a friend.

When the famous scientist's ward Katya, an actress who failed in her career, the only person for whom he cares and secretly feels an old man's love, asks him, at what is a very dark and critical moment in her life: "Nikolai Stepanich, for God's sake, what shall I do?", he can only say, "I do not know, Katya. Believe me, Katya, I do not know." After that she leaves him.

THE question of "what is to be done?" recurs in a deliberately confusing form in all of Chekhov's stories. It is made almost ludicrous by the strange, helpless, clumsy manner in which the characters of his stories pose this vital question. I cannot remember for the moment in which of his stories he has a lady appearing and saying "It is essential, first of all, that life should pass as if through a prism . . . that is, in other words, in consciousness life should be divided into its simplest elements . . . and each element studied separately."*

Sentiments of this kind abound in both his stories and his plays. In part it is simply his way of ridiculing the Russians' vast and infertile love for philosophizing and disputing, as other authors have also done. But with Chekhov it bears a distinct undertone, a special and very comical artistic function. His story in the first person, "My Life," is chock-full of such contentions. The main character is a misfit nicknamed "The Little Prophet." He is a social idealist, an opponent of the existing order, and a propagandist of the necessity of physical work for all. He leaves his own class and culture to join the hard and sordid life of the proletariat. But grim reality has many painful disappointments in store for him. His eccentricities torment his conventional father; it is his fault, too, that his sister makes a mess of her life. One of the other characters, Dr. Blagovo, says to him: "You are a noble soul, an honest, high-minded man! . . . Don't you think that if you concentrated your will-power, your efforts, and all your energy on something else, say, on becoming a great scientist or artist, your life would be both wider and deeper, and more productive in every way?"

"No," replies the misfit, "first it is necessary that the strong shall not enslave the weak and the minority shall not be parasites on the majority; it is necessary for all, the strong as well as the weak, the rich as well as the poor, equally to take part in the struggle for existence,

* The quotation is from the story "The Betrothed" and the words belong to the heroine's mother, Nina Ivanovna.—*Editor's note.*

every man for himself, and there is no better means of levelling than physical work, compulsory for all." "But don't you think that if all, even the very best minds, thinkers and great scientists included, were to take part in the struggle for existence, each on his own behalf, wasting their time on breaking stones and painting roofs, don't you think that would be a serious menace to progress?" The question is well put. But not too well for his interlocutor not to be able to answer it with better, or, at least, equal cogency. Now that the conversation has turned to the question of progress, its goals are aired. In the view of Dr. Blagovo the aims and limits of universal human progress lie in infinity, and to speak of progress as if it could be defined or limited by the needs or temporal conceptions of one's own day is out of the question.

What argumentation! "If the limits of progress are in infinity, then it follows that its goals are indefinable." "What is the good of living and not knowing exactly what you are living for?" "Admittedly, but that 'not knowing' is not so boring as your 'knowing.' I am climbing a ladder which is called progress, civilization, culture; I go up and up without knowing exactly where this will lead me to, but, believe me, that wonderful ladder itself makes life worth living. Well, and do you know what you are living for—to prevent the few from enslaving the many, or to ensure that the artist and the man who mixes his paints shall both have the same food to eat? But that is the bourgeois, kitchen side of life, and to live only for that, isn't it disgusting? . . . We must think about the great X which awaits all mankind in the distant future. . . ."

Blagovo argues hotly, but clearly he is disturbed by some outside thought. "Your sister is evidently not coming," he says with a glance at his watch. "Yesterday she was at our house and said she was going to see you." In other words, he has come to see the girl he loves, and he is talking merely to pass the time until her arrival. This simple human motive, concealed behind his words, written all over his face, throws an ironical, ridiculous light on everything he says.

The radical change in the life of the misfit loses its significance or at best is made problematical by the ugly disappointment he feels and the guilt he thereby assumes. The arguments of his guest mock at themselves by serving only to pass the time until the arrival of the girl. Truth to life, to which the writer owes his greatest loyalty, makes ideas and opinions valueless. It, this truth, is by its nature ironical, with the result that the writer who holds the truth highest of all is often

reproached with lacking a standpoint, of being indifferent to good or evil, of ignoring ideals and ideas. Chekhov warded off such reproaches. As he said, he left it to the reader to fill in what was lacking in the story . . . the concealed subjective elements, that is, the declaration, the statement of a moral position.

WHY, then, was he "afraid"? Why did he not like his fame? Why did he feel that he was deceiving his readers in not being able to answer their most important questions? And where did he get that terrifying ability to dig down into the very soul of the despondent old man who knew that his life had been without a "general idea" and that "without it there is nothing," and who, when his disillusioned friend asked him: "What shall I do?" had nothing to say but "To tell the truth, I do not know. . . ."?

If the truth of life is by nature ironical, is not art by nature nihilistic? And what a thing of work it is to boot! It is, so to say, work in its purest and most abstract form, the paradigm of all work, work in and for itself. Chekhov liked to work as did few others. Gorky said of him that he had never known "another who left the significance of work as the foundation of culture so deeply and fully." He worked tirelessly and continuously despite his weak constitution and the illness that consumed so much of his energy; he worked day in and day out to the very end. Moreover, he performed this heroic work in the face of doubts as to its meaning, of a sense of guilt that it lacked a central or "general idea," that he could not answer the question of "what is to be done?" and that he was evading an answer by merely portraying life as it is. "We paint life as it is," he said, "and beyond that . . . nothing . . ." Or again: "As things are, the life of an artist has no meaning, and the more talented he is, the more outlandish and incomprehensible is his role, since it proves that he works to amuse an unclean beast of prey and so upholds the existing order."

By the existing order he meant the impossible conditions under which he lived in Russia during the nineties. But his dissatisfaction, his doubts as to the meaning of his work, his sense that his role as an artist was strange and incomprehensible do not refer to a definite period and are not related to conditions in Russia then. What I want to say is that there are always difficult conditions when a gulf divides the truth from the reality, and that today Chekhov has brothers in sorrow who also do not like their fame, do not like it because they are serving the function of amusing a lost world, without being able to offer it even

a drop of saving truth—or at least so they say. Like him, they could put themselves in the place of the old man in "A Tedious Story" who did not know how to answer the question of "what is to be done?" Like him, they cannot say what the meaning of their work is. But they go on working and working to the end just the same.

NEVERTHELESS, there must be something in that strange "just the same"; it must have some sense, and therefore their work too. Although it looks like idle amusement, perhaps it contains something ethical, useful, social which in the end leads to the "saving truth" a disillusioned world is crying for?

A little earlier I spoke of the will of literature itself, of the unlooked for results it sometimes has, and of how its spirit, without his wanting or expecting such a thing, crept into the entertaining stories of the young Chekhov and lifted them up morally. This process continued all through his life as a writer and made itself felt in everything he did. One of his biographers said that his development as a writer was characterized, in addition to the mastery of form, by a changing attitude to his times, reflected not only in his choice of material, but also his treatment of character and plot; that it infused everything; that not infrequently he made his "heroes" say and think things expressive of his own instinctive and profound grasp of the fact that beside the forces which have their roots in the past, there also exist signs of the times which point to the future.

In this statement what interests me is the idea that there is a connection between the writer's mastery of form and his increasingly acute moral critique of his times, in other words, with his growing awareness of what is socially passing away and dying, and what should come to take its place—that is to say, that there is a connection between aesthetics and ethics. It is not through this connection that work imparts value, meaning, and usefulness to art? Was it not from it that Chekhov's love for all kinds of work came, as well as his condemnation of all idlers and parasites; was it not the source of his growing negation of the life which he said was "built on slavery"?

This is a grave charge to make against bourgeois-capitalist society, which boasts of its humanity and refuses to admit the fact of slavery. And yet Chekhov, the short-story writer, showed remarkable insight in questioning the reality of progress after the liberation of the peasants in his native land—progress in the humane, social and moral sense, in which it takes on universal significance.

"Alongside the process of the gradual development of humane ideas," he makes his "misfit" say, "the gradual emergence of ideas of an entirely different kind is also to be observed. Serfdom is gone, but (he might have said—"and therefore") capitalism grows. Even while liberation ideas are in the ascendancy . . . the majority feeds, clothes and defends the minority, remaining itself hungry, ragged, and defenseless. This state of affairs harmonizes with all the trends and currents, since the art of enslaving others is also one that is gradually cultivated. We no longer flog our servants in the stable; we give slavery more refined forms, and at the least can always find a justification for every individual case. Ideas may be ideas, but even now, at the end of the 19th century, if we could foist upon the workers our most unpleasant physiological functions, we should do so, and then, of course, we should say in our own justification that if the best people, the thinkers and great scientists had to waste their precious time on such functions, that would seriously endanger progress."

That is an example of how he ridiculed the smugness of the progressive bourgeois. As a doctor he was outspoken in his dislike for the palliatives with whose help the progressive bourgeois hopes to cure social ills. It is very funny, in the story "A Case from the Doctor's Practice," to hear the governess in the home of a rich mill owner speak, over a plate of sturgeon and a glass of madeira, of how beneficial such palliatives are. "The workers are extremely contented with us," she says "Every winter we have plays at the factory; the workers themselves perform, and then there are the lectures illustrated by magic lantern, the fine tea house, and so what else do you want? The workers are very devoted to us. On learning that Liza's condition was worse, they held a special prayer meeting. They are ignorant, but they can also feel."

The man from whose practice the case in question is taken is the house-physician, Korolev, otherwise known by the name of Anton Chekhov. Listening to the governess, he can only shake his head. "At the sight of factory buildings and the barracks where the workers slept," continues the story, "he had the same thoughts that always came to him when he saw factories. In spite of workers' plays, magic lanterns, factory doctors, and all the other improvements, the workers he had met that day on his way from the station looked exactly like the workers he had seen years before, as a child, before the advent of workers' plays and factory improvements. As a doctor with a sober view of the chronic ailments whose basic cause is so elusive and incurable, he

regarded the factories too as an anomaly whose cause was incomprehensible and ineradicable, and while he did not consider all improvements in the life of the factory workers unnecessary, he compared them to attempts to treat incurable diseases." "What we want to cure," he said, "is not the diseases, but their cause. Clinics, schools, libraries and chemists, shops also serve, under present conditions, merely to enslave—of that I am profoundly convinced." But though he says he is convinced of it, let us not forget that Chekhov himself built schools and hospitals in his district, little peace though that gave him. The idea to which he came the more he lived and wrote was: "The main thing is to change life; that's all that matters."

BUT how can life be changed when all is "given" and must go on as before by force of imperious necessity? "What is to be done"—what was the answer to this question, which agitated so many of the characters in Chekhov's stories? In "A Case from the Doctor's Practice" Chekhov uses the expression "praiseworthy insomnia" in speaking of the intelligent, unhappy heiress of the factory and its millions whom the doctor is asked to treat for insomnia and nervous fits. She herself says: "I don't believe I have any disease at all. It's simply that I am worried and afraid, and that is the way it must be." He knows he ought to tell her: "Throw up your five factory buildings and your millions, leave that devil." He also knows that she is of the same mind, and is only waiting for one she trusts to confirm her in it.

But how shall he say it to her? "Just as one is reluctant to ask the condemned why they have been condemned, so one hesitates to ask the rich what they want with so much money, why they make such poor use of their wealth, and why they do not give it up when they see how unhappy it is making them . . . if such a subject is ever broached, the discussion usually turns out to be shamefaced, clumsy, faltering." Therefore, he replies frankly but as if to console her: "You are not satisfied with your position, as the owner of a factory and rich heiress, you do not believe in your right to them, and so now you cannot sleep. Of course that is better than if you were contented, slept soundly, and thought that everything was as it should be. Your insomnia is praiseworthy; say what you will, it is a good sign. Of course, this kind of talk would be impossible with our parents; they did not spend the nights talking. They slept soundly. But we, our generation, we sleep badly, torment ourselves, talk a lot, and are forever trying to decide whether we are right or not. For our children or grandchildren this

question of whether they are right or not will already be settled. Things will be clearer to them than they are to us. Life will be better fifty years from now. . . ."

Will it? One cannot help thinking that man is an imperfect being. His conscience, the child of his reason, will probably never live in perfect harmony with his nature, with reality, with social conditions; and those who for some vague reason feel that they bear responsibility for the destinies and life of mankind will always suffer from "praiseworthy insomnia."

If ever there was a man who suffered from such insomnia it was the artist Chekhov. All his creative work was praiseworthy insomnia, was a search for the right, the saving answer to the question of "what is to be done?" It is a hard question to answer, if it can be answered at all. But one thing he knew for certain: that the worst thing of all is to do nothing, that a man must work, because idleness means the enslavement and degradation of others. The student Sasha in Chekhov's last story, "The Betrothed," who like the author was consumptive and did not have long to live, says to Nadya, a girl who also sleeps badly: "Do understand that if, for instance, you and your mother and your grandmother do nothing, it means that someone else is working for you, that you are eating up someone else's life, and is that clean? Isn't it filthy? . . . Dear, darling Nadya, do go away! Show them all that you are sick of this stagnant, grey, sinful life. Prove it to yourself at least! I promise you, you will never regret or repent it; you will go away, you will study, and then let fate take you where it likes. When you turn your life upside down, everything will be different. The great thing is to turn your life upside down, and the rest will take care of itself. And so, we will set off tomorrow?"

Nadya goes away, leaving her family, her uninteresting fiancé and her marriage. She flees. This is the same flight from the conventions of one's class, from a way of life which is shown to be outdated, wrong and sinful that one meets repeatedly in Chekhov's stories. For such a flight the old man Tolstoy found the courage in the last minutes of his life.

When Nadya, the runaway bride, visits her home again after the lapse of some time, it seems to her that everything in the town "has grown old, outlived its day, and is only waiting for the end, or for the beginning of something young and fresh. Oh, if only that new, bright life would come more quickly! The time will come when of Granny's house, where things are so arranged that the four servants can only live in one filthy

room in the basement—the time will come when of that house not a trace will remain.” Had not poor Sasha told her:

“Not a stone will be left standing in your town. The old will vanish and everything will be changed as if by magic. And then there will be very large and magnificent houses here, wonderful gardens, marvelous fountains, remarkable people . . . and every man will know what he is living for.” This is one of the pleasant visions of the future the writer who knows that life was “an insoluble problem” occasionally permitted himself or certain of his characters.

These visions are slightly feverish and resemble the fragile dreams of the consumptive, especially when he speaks of “the time, perhaps already near, when life will be as bright and joyous as this quiet Sunday morning.” The outlines of his picture of the socially perfect future are vague. It is a picture of the marriage of truth and beauty founded on labor. But in his dream of “very large and magnificent houses, wonderful gardens, marvelous fountains” which will replace the obsolete town only waiting for its end, is there not a suggestion of the constructive élan of socialism, thanks to which contemporary Russia has made such a great impression on the West?

Chekhov had no relation to the working class, nor did he study Marx. He was not a workers’ writer, like Gorky, although he was a poet of work. But he struck notes of social grief which gripped the hearts of his people, for example, in that magnificent gloomy picture of life, the story “Peasants.” On the occasion of a religious holiday, a “life-giving” ikon is carried by a procession from one village to another. A large crowd of local people and visitors from other villages move noiselessly through the dust towards the ikon, and all stretch out their arms to it, gaze passionately at it, and cry: “Protectress! Mother! All appear suddenly to realize that there is no void between earth and heaven, that the rich and strong have not laid hands on everything yet, that there is still protection against abuse and slavery, against unbearable and crushing need, in which they live, against the horrors of vodka. . . . Protectress! Mother! But the service ends, the ikon is carried away, and everything goes back to the old rut. Once again rude, drunken voices are heard coming from the inn.”

This is Chekhov at his best—elated and then bitter that everything has returned to the old rut. I should not wonder if the writer’s popularity, which seemed suddenly towards his death and during his funeral to rise tremendously, stemmed from such descriptions. A certain loyal newspaper saw fit to observe in this connection that Anton Pavlovich evidently belonged to the “stormy petrels of the revolution.”

HIS photographs show us a slim man dressed in the fashion of the late nineteenth century, with starched collar, pince-nez on a ribbon, a pointed beard, and a rather sad, sympathetically melancholy face with regular features. His expression is one of intelligent concentration, modesty, scepticism, and good-nature. He has the face and bearing of a man who does not like to attract attention. There is no trace of pretentiousness about him. And if he even found Tolstoy's prophetism despotic and Dostoyevsky's novels good but pretentious and presumptuous, you can easily imagine how grotesque stuffed nonentities must have seemed to him. When he portrays them he does it with wonderful humor.

Many, many years ago on the Munich stage I saw one of his plays, all of which are so restrained and yet so full of a sense of the passing of what is no longer necessary to life and exists only in name—I saw his "Uncle Vanya," a play about the life of the landlords in which all the usual dramatic effects were replaced by a lyrical mood of the strongest and most delicate intensity, a mood of the end and the farewell. It tells of a famous old man, a caricature of the hero of "A Tedious Story," a retired professor and Privy Councillor, who writes about art without understanding what art is, and in general tyrannizes his household with his senile complaining, his fictitious importance, and his gout . . . a zero who believes in his own importance. A good woman kisses him on departing and says: "Alexander, *have your picture taken again* and send it to me. You know how dear you are to me." All my life I have felt an uncontrollable desire to laugh whenever I have remembered that "Alexander, *have your picture taken again*"; it is Chekhov's fault that I have sometimes said to myself about certain people, "That person ought to have his picture taken."

He also had his picture taken sometimes, when it was absolutely necessary. His photographs express the essence of modesty. They do not speak of a stormy emotional life. One gets the impression that the man was too modest even for passion. One cannot find in his life a great passion for any woman and his biographers believe that the writer who could describe love so beautifully never himself felt the intoxication of a great love. At Melikhovo in the country a beautiful, temperamental girl who was visiting there for a while fell deeply in love with him, and he even corresponded with her. But in his love letters there is a touch of irony, and also one of fear of the feeling growing deeper—due, perhaps, to his illness. Beautiful Lydia herself admitted that he had twice rejected her, whereupon she contented her-

self with the love of another frequent guest at Melikhovo, one Potapenko, who was by the way already married. But if there was nothing one could do about that man Chekhov, at least he knew what to do about the whole story—he used it for an episode in “The Seagull,” his most frequently revived play in our country.

Three years before he died, he nevertheless married. The marriage was the result of his happy relations with the Moscow Art Theatre and his friendship with Stanislavsky, and his wife was the gifted actress Olga Knipper. We have letters to her in his hand, but these too are extremely restrained in feeling and jestingly ironical in tone.

THE happiest years of his life were probably those last years at Yalta in the Crimea where he was obliged to live because of his lung trouble and where he was visited by the whole cast of the Moscow Art Theatre which showed him its productions of his plays. Most happy because of his marriage, because of his friendship with Gorky, and because of the illustrious company of Leo Tolstoy, who after a serious illness spent some time convalescing at a seaside place not far from Yalta. He received his election to honorary membership of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences in the department of belles-lettres with child-like joy. But two years later, when the government cancelled Gorky's election to the Academy because of his radical views, he—like Korolenko—resigned his membership in protest. “The Betrothed” (1903), his last story, and “The Cherry Orchard,” his last play, are works in which his spirit, stoically waiting for the end, silently enduring illness and the knowledge that death was near, nevertheless sent out a message of hope.

His life work was a rejection of the epic and the monumental, and yet it embraces all of vast Russia with its eternal nature and all of its hopeless, unnatural social conditions before the revolution. “The insolence and indolence of the strong, the benighted and brute-like condition of the weak, and all around terrible poverty, persecution, degeneration, drunkenness, hypocrisy, falsehood. . . .”

But the closer his end, the more powerfully is his vague vision of the future adumbrated, the more brightly does the proud, free, and active community of men in the future appear before the artist's admiring eyes, the “new, lofty and intelligent way of life” . . . “at the threshold of which we perhaps already stand, and which we sometimes already feel.”

“Farewell, dear Sasha!” whispers Nadya, in “The Betrothed,” to her

dead friend who had convinced her to flee from her false life. "And before her mind rose the vista of a new, wide, spacious life, and that life, still obscure and full of mysteries, called to her and drew her to it." This was written by a dying man before his very end, and perhaps it was only the mystery of death that was calling him and drawing him to it? Or perhaps it is worth believing that the poet's dream is truly capable of transforming life?

I SHOULD like to say that I have written these lines with the deepest sympathy. I am a great admirer of his art. His ironical attitude to renown, his doubts as to the meaning and value of his work, his refusal to believe in his own greatness are full of a quiet, modest greatness. "Dissatisfaction with oneself is one of the basic elements of all real talent," he said. That statement reveals to us the positive aspect of modesty. Be content with your discontent, it means. It shows that you are better than the smug and self-satisfied, perhaps even great.

But essentially it does not detract from the sincerity of one's doubts and dissatisfaction, and hence the urge to work, all the time, without surcease, to the very end, and the knowledge that just the same there is no answer to the final questions and pangs of conscience that the reader has been fooled. That strange "just the same" persists as before. Nothing has changed: one entertains a doomed world with one's stories without being able to give it a drop of the saving truth. To the question of poor Katya "what shall I do?" the answer is still: "To tell the truth, I do not know." But just the same one continues to work, to tell stories, to reflect the truth, to entertain the pitiful world in the vague hope, almost the certainty, that truth presented in interesting form acts refreshingly on the spirit and can prepare the world for a better, more beautiful life, a life which corresponds more to the spirit of all men.

(We are indebted to the Soviet cultural periodical *Voks* for this original translation.)

BATTLE REPORT FROM BERLIN

EDITH ANDERSON

WHEN I first witnessed the ruins of Berlin, reflected in soupy puddles on a mild, disconsolate Christmas morning in 1947, the misery around me was the simple misery of post-war destitution. "Simple" is not exactly the word for the peculiar misery of a Germany which had broken its neck a second time, but it could still be explained, analyzed, tabulated, and everybody could still agree on the data collected. It was *relatively* simple. I emphasize this somewhat nostalgically, looking back over these eleven years in which the Berlin situation has grown so complicated that no one living outside it could imagine it in his wildest dreams. Berlin is no longer hungry. The ruins are gradually giving place to new buildings. But the misery of a city without a profile, a city without a country, a city divided against itself—a moral misery—this is the misery that set in after Berlin was split in 1948, and this misery is still here flowing through the city with the Spree and the Panke, riding east to west and west to east with the people, in the subways and the elts, alienating families and friends, demoralizing Germany and threatening the world.

I did not merely see, as a reporter sees, the ominous breakdown of the city's unity. I lived it, both in the western and the eastern sectors of town. I know that the laboriously dignified State Department booklet on Berlin published in January, 1959, is a falsification of the facts, because I experienced the facts. The booklet is the State Department's attempt to answer the Soviet note proposing to turn West Berlin into a free city and the whole of Berlin into a city freed of all occupation. The Soviet Union's argument that the western allies had undermined their own right to remain in West Berlin, by systematically undermining the Potsdam agreement, had been painfully trenchant. It had called for a fast job of smokescreening. Heaven knows, it is easy enough to smokescreen the Berlin situation, which by now has been so confused

super-confused and hyper-confused by the tattle of western press hirelings that readers have become punch drunk and scarcely able to tell one argument from another.

Permit me, then, to tell you how the split of Berlin actually came about. The State Department version is that the Soviets "walked out of the four-power Allies Control Council for Germany and instituted the Berlin blockade in 1948 to try to force the Western Allies out of the city." It carefully says nothing about the provocation. The provocation was money—yes, our old friend filthy lucre. It was the introduction of the currency of the western zones of Germany, the "west mark," into Berlin. This and nothing else, not any squabbles in the Allied Control Council or any overt political act, split the city and disrupted its life more disastrously than an earthquake.

The State Department booklet does not mention the west mark, but this could hardly have been an oversight. There was official American correspondence with the Soviet occupation powers about it in June, 1948. In fact, the Bi-Zone commandants (the occupation chiefs for the United States and Britain) wrote a letter on June 18, 1948 assuring the Soviet commandant that the new, dollar-based currency of the western zones (which in itself was a breach of the Potsdam agreement) would *not* be introduced into Berlin. Five days later they introduced it. The Soviet blockade of 1948 was a retaliatory action.

Mind you, this does not mean that there hadn't been any overt political acts. There had been, but most people had paid no attention to them and did not subjectively feel affected by them. Life was such a bitter struggle in those days that the formation of the Bi-Zone on December 2, 1946 had left them quite cold. Who cared? They did not even rejoice that their victors were fighting among themselves, they were too worried over fuel and fat. They were utterly indifferent when the western powers violated the decrees of the (German) city assembly by setting up separate sector administrations. They couldn't have cared less when the commandant of the American sector, way back at the beginning of 1946, forbade West Berlin business men to accept orders from the Soviet sector without American military permission. And as you can imagine, they shed no tears when the western sectors refused to enforce the city law confiscating the fortunes of active Nazis and war criminals. They were equally unconcerned that in violation of another city assembly ruling, the trusts of West Berlin were not expropriated or handed over to become national property.

But the west mark! There was no ignoring that. It changed life in Berlin overnight, drastically. I will never forget how it came.

SINCE everybody's radio was *kaput*, radio cars drove up and down the streets—I lived in the American sector then—with their loudspeakers roaring at the population to hurry, hurry, hurry and get their seventy-five west marks for nothing. In stores, barber shops and such locations, the new currency was being handed out, seventy-five new marks to a customer, in exchange for seventy-five old marks. Long lines formed. But since the Soviet commandant had issued a decree making the new marks illegal, not everybody joined the lines. In a few days the people who had not joined got their punishment. The offer was closed, and suddenly goods of unimaginable value and attractiveness, such as (don't laugh) candles and matches and underwear panties, began to appear in the hitherto empty shop windows of West Berlin—for west marks.

How can I tell you what it means to stand in front of a shop window and see candles and not be able to buy them? Berlin was such a mess at that time that there was barely enough electric current to supply the most essential industries. Current for households was shut off whenever it was needed most, i.e. at night, when the run on it was heaviest and threatened the factory night shifts. The task of cleaning out Berlin's Augean stable made it impossible to finish the day's work in the office. Many people brought paper work home with them and needed light. My husband was a theater critic, among other things. About midnight he got home and started banging out his review—by electric light if he was lucky, or by candle-light. His eyes were weak and I hated to see him struggling with the dreadful little flickering candle that was still available for east marks. It guttered, it hissed, it bent its head down and snuffled in its own sauce. It hardly even had a head, it was nothing but a wick waving about in a cardboard jam-jar cover that was filled with adulterated tallow. And there in a shop-window were tall, firm, normal, white candles! I could imagine them in a candelabra on our all-purpose table where my husband scribbled his reviews—four candles, never mind the cost, silently, cozily flaming. Why, with such candles I might even be able to read at night!

The tremendous temptation of material things in that wrecked town made it very easy for the western allies to establish their currency. Since one alluring item after another appeared in shop windows for west marks, west marks were the thing to get. At first they were just eased into town ingratiatingly. You didn't *need* them, heavens no. Rent, current, gas and rationed food were still available for the old marks. This was necessary during the transition period. West Berlin firms began paying an increasing percentage of their wages in the new currency

which was not yet the *sine qua non* of daily existence of the west sectors but merely represented glamor and privilege.

Merely. It was an insidious, a Mephistophelean invention, particularly in a country which, after twelve years of enthusiastically supporting Hitler, was none too firm morally. If Frau Edeltraud Schmidt had condoned the Spanish massacre just so that she could get a black lace mantilla out of it, what was going to deter her from grabbing at west marks, just because the Soviet commandant (pfui Deibel!) had declared them illegal?

A whole new psychology developed. People who had west marks began to despise as suckers, schlemiels or reds, fellow-citizens who still used tallow candles in jam-jar covers or were unable to buy their children an orange. Yes, even oranges appeared—even (fantastic!) endives—and Spanish olives—and all kinds of wurst that made your mouth water to look at it. Rapidly, everything else began to appear, and according to the new psychology, everything that cost west marks was superior; everything you could get for east marks (which in those early years was precious little) was contemptible. The fact was that the shops on Kurfürstendamm in West Berlin did display some lovely if fabulously expensive things, either imported from the victorious nations or produced in West Germany with the help of western credits, while the Soviet sector was trying to pull itself up by its bootstraps, aided only by the devastated Soviet Union which barely had enough to feed its own population.

This is described in the State Department booklet as follows: "The Soviet Union continued to extract reparations from its zone at a time when the Western powers were forced to maintain a minimum economic level by financing imports to Germany."

I saw with my own eyes the "minimum economic level" that the Western powers were "forced to maintain." West Berlin's shop windows filled up with hothouse fruits, slick hardware, gorgeous woolen textiles and nylon underthings, while eastern government officials grimly looked the other way and tightened their belts. It would seem odd, if one didn't know the explanation, that the State Department finds this quite all right but condemns the Soviet Union, whose industry and agriculture had been physically destroyed by the war, for "extracting" reparations. As a matter of fact, the Soviet Union cancelled all payment of occupation costs before the west did. West Germany is still paying occupation costs. The explanation of the very special "minimum economic level" brought to West Berlin is the very special role assigned it by its occupants—the role of a virus in the body of socialism.

Even before the coming of the west mark, the black market had flourished in Berlin. Now it really had a ball. We used to see the black marketeers at first nights in the theater with their lights of love, all looking like something out of Georg Grosz, living wursts decked out in furs and glitter, a revolting contrast to the gray hardship in the streets. They bellowed with delight at such dramatic ideas as having a horse-drawn carriage pass across the stage or raising the curtain on a scene exactly reproducing a famous sentimental painting by Spitzweg. During the intermission they stood fatly in the lobby, displaying themselves and cramming their hideous mouths with goodies they had brought along.

The rest of the west sector was eating dehydrated potatoes, cabbage, carrots and apples at that point, for the Soviet blockade had begun. The potatoes had to be soaked before you cooked them, but it didn't matter how long you soaked them—I tried doing it for three days once—they still chewed like plastic, tasted like absolutely nothing, and had to be swallowed by will power. Electricity was supplied only two hours a day (the power plants were in the Soviet sector) and as often as not those two hours were between 2 and 4 A.M. Some people were in real trouble because of this. We had nothing to cook on but an electric burner. I remember tearing home from the hairdresser like a maniac one afternoon to use the last fifteen minutes of electricity to fry myself a pork chop. The hours of electricity were always announced a week in advance. I remember that pork chop distinctly, because it was so unusual to have one. And just as it was half done, the fuse—the irreplaceable fuse—blew. I wept, being pregnant at the time. On top of everything else there was the permanent roar of western planes passing over all day long bringing the dried potatoes to Tempelhof Airport. One afternoon, lying in the sun on our balcony, I counted a hundred and twenty-five planes in an hour.

MUCH has been written in the American press about West Berlin's "heroism" during the blockade. I saw pig-headedness but I did not see heroism. There was no call for heroism. Shortly after the blockade began, the Soviet commandant had told the people of West Berlin that they needn't eat dried potatoes or go short of fat; they could come over to the Soviet sector and get whatever they needed on presentation of their ration card. The blockade, he pointed out, was not directed against them. Some went, but most didn't. Housewives ran after their husband down the street when they saw him cheerily swinging a new shopping bag crammed with honest-to-God potatoes. They thought

miracle had happened. "Where did you *get* them?" "Soviet sector." "Oh. . . ." They drew back as if he were a leper. This was the majority attitude, compounded of violent, Nazi-fostered anti-Soviet sentiment and a cringing adulation of American prosperity. In any case, the West Berlin authorities had let it be known that they would not regard it kindly if the Soviet offer was accepted, and later on reprisals were actually undertaken against many people who had been guilty of eating real potatoes during the air-lift.

The blockade collapsed. It was not long before the whole economy of the west sectors was tied to that of the western zones. It was a strictly imported, borrowed, and in fact *cadged* economy in the beginning. The industry that existed in the west sectors at that time could never, alone, have paid for the disgusting bath in luxury which the State Department now calls a minimum economic level. It, plus the air-lift, cost the United States a vast, unjustifiable amount of the American taxpayers' money.

By 1949 the final economic blow had fallen: Rent, current and gas were also payable in west marks only. West marks were demanded for every commodity and every service in West Berlin. Rationing ceased. Why ration? The food wasn't produced by West Berlin's economy anyway. It was a gift, and many of the people receiving it had right arms that were still quivering from the repressed impulse to shoot up in a "Heil!"

The people who lived in West Berlin but worked for east marks in the Soviet sector were nicely snagged. Some of them got themselves jobs in West Berlin, but there weren't nearly enough to go around. Others chose declared unemployment, of which there was more than enough—for most of the work was in the Soviet sector and the Soviet zone. They collected unemployment insurance in west marks. The remaining group was permitted a minimum exchange, up to two hundred marks per month, on a one-to-one basis. This enabled some to get by. Others couldn't. We, for instance, had a rather expensive apartment; now we had to pay 150 west marks a month for it. Like all people who are up against it, I solved the problem by buying food and letting the rent go. My daughter had been born with rickets, which was no wonder, and I was determined to get as much orange juice into her as I could. We were evicted.

Meantime a highly lucrative new business had started in West Berlin—the Wechselstuben, money exchange bureaus that spread all over the western sectors like a plague of cockroaches. There you could buy west marks at a usurious rate and east marks dirt cheap. People apologizing for living, because they had only east marks, lined up to accept, humbly, one mark west for over 4.25 east. There were times when this

rate climbed to five and more, but the people accepted it. Or more fortunate persons, with west marks, bought east marks at a huge profit, toddled over to the Soviet sector, and had a field day. They ordered luxurious dinners with wine, visited the theater, went dancing, took taxis; they marched into the newly established state shops, which had smashed the black market in East Berlin, and bought off-ration dresses, blouses and shoes—all at twenty-five percent, or less, of the price they should have been paying.

The reprisals came down on the people who had dared to eat Soviet rations during the air-lift. They were denied the one-to-one monthly minimum exchange of their wages. This was a real catastrophe for them. They were forced to patronize the Wechselstuben, at a crushing loss. Those who could move to the Soviet sector did so, but the Communists had to stay so that there should be a nucleus of resistance in West Berlin. They have had a rough time. If anybody would like to know who the real heroes of Berlin have been, this is where to look.

THE system of Wechselstuben was like a tapeworm devouring the economy of east Germany, which was just about able to drag itself along. The usurious rate was supported by demand; the people of East Berlin wanted the good things of life which east Germany was not yet able to produce. East Germany traditionally had no steel industry; it had no anthracite. In the past the eastern part of Germany had depended on the Ruhr. Now the western powers saw to it that the Soviet zone was denied the Ruhr coal and steel. IG Farben was in the west too. The flourishing, highly inventive chemical industry of the German Democratic Republic barely existed then. Textiles were shoddy, dyes were drab. The pharmaceutical industry of Germany was also, as of old, located in the west. Sick people in the Soviet sector mistrusted the new medicines with their strange names, even when they had exactly the same chemical components as the familiar Bayer products. They were convinced that if they could only get medicine from West Berlin they would be cured.

The east marks shoveled in by the Wechselstuben changed hands and returned to capture, for practically nothing, the east German wares that had cost so much to produce. Goods disappeared from the East Berlin shops before the East Berliners got a sniff at them. Thus the national income of the Soviet zone, later the German Democratic Republic, was quite literally being thrown away. That is why, in the past few years, no one has been permitted to buy anything in East Berlin (except books and theater tickets) without showing his identification papers as a citizen

of the GDR. It is also against the law for a citizen of the GDR to buy in West Berlin. Yet the rate of one to approximately 4.25 persisted in the Wechselstuben, indicating that for many people the law was merely a challenge to disobedience.

I have emphasized the economic aspect of the Berlin situation because the split was fundamentally an economic one. It was the division of one city into two economies. The formal political division followed the introduction of the west mark into Berlin, and not the other way round. In defiance of the constitution of Greater Berlin adopted by the city assembly elected under four-power sponsorship in 1945, the western sectors ran a separate election on December 5, 1958 and elected a city government of their own. The Soviet sector had no other alternative than to elect a city government of *its* own, which it did on November 30th of the same year. On September 7th, 1949, the formation of the west German separatist state completed the formal division of Germany. The German Democratic Republic was constituted in east Germany a month later, with Berlin as its capital.

Berlin's two economies rapidly developed into two opposing economic systems, locked in a death grapple. Berlin had become the geometrical center of the world struggle between capitalism and socialism. While poverty-stricken socialism gritted its teeth and got on with the business of making something out of nothing, West Berlin became a dirty little Babylon, with its money-changers, its material temptations, its painted face—the luxurious facade of Kurfürstendamm—and its sixty-odd foreign sabotage organizations working day and night to undermine the socialism all around it. No holds were barred. West Berlin agents shot at East Berlin policemen across the border, killed them and fled just a block away, where the East Berlin police had no authority to pursue them. On June 17, 1953 two thousand West Berlin gangsters stormed through the Brandenburg Gate at the sector frontier armed with bottles of gasoline and clubs. They burned down newsstands, turned over automobiles, dragging out the people in them and beating them up, and only retreated two hours later when Soviet tanks sped down Unter den Linden, shooting into the air.

And all this time, American, British and French government representatives kept their cuffs clean in clean administration buildings in the west sectors and looked as innocent as the new moon. It was a case of "Let's you and him fight." To be sure, those were not Americans, those thugs with the gasoline bottles and the clubs. Those were typical Nazi thugs with a practiced style of their own. It was like what happened at the West Berlin Sportpalast not long ago, when Bill Haley gave a

rock-'n'-roll concert there. Those were German kids, not Americans, who tore the place apart, ripping out seats and using them to hit each other over the head. They did an estimated 50,000 marks damage. But how had they got that way? Kids don't tear down theaters in the east sector. Bill Haley, from what I hear, tried his best to stop the mayhem. He was horrified at what had happened. But this does not clear us Americans of responsibility. It was the unwholesome nature of the continued West Berlin occupation with its infernal west mark that brought corruption to West Berlin; and it was a tolerated corruption with a thousand tolerated—if not encouraged—ramifications. It was more than those kids, with the dubious family background so many of them have, could withstand.

ELEVEN years have passed since the west mark divided Berlin, and a lot of water has flowed under the city's repaired bridges. The German Democratic Republic is no longer an orphan in a paper dress, gazing through a frosty window into the warm room of the rich. The war-torn socialist countries have banded together and helped one another. What one didn't have, the other supplied, with the result that all of them are out of the woods now, and some—with the German Democratic Republic at the fore—are getting rich. The Germans, as the whole world knows, are an enormously gifted people in technique and science. In many fields the Soviets are ahead of them. By putting their heads and their investments together, they have turned east Germany into a prospering republic which plans to outstrip west Germany by 1962. It will succeed. It has developed soft coal mining on an unprecedented scale, adequately substituting for anthracite; it has figured out how to make coke out of soft coal, and is doing it—something completely new in the world; its chemical industry is performing miracles; it will soon have all the petroleum it needs, through a pipeline from the Soviet Union that will supply eight tons per minute. Next year there will be enough television sets on the market so that every fourth family in the GDR has one. The Soviet Union isn't doing all the giving. The biggest uranium deposits in Europe turned out to be in the GDR. The atomic reactor presented by the Soviet Union to the GDR was a kind of quid pro quo.

The mounting prosperity in the GDR is making itself felt in the divided capital. The temptations of West Berlin are beginning to look slightly tarnished. The whore's teeth are falling out. No sooner had the Soviets made their proposal about transforming West Berlin into a free, unoccupied city than the Siemens firm transferred a large section of its production to West Germany. Other industries followed suit.

There had already been a trend to shift investments to West Germany. Now this is increasing. At the end of 1958 the 5.5 million west marks which were to be appropriated for rebuilding the West Berlin opera were blocked. With money so scarce, highly paid theatrical artists are making sure of their futures by taking jobs in Cologne, Frankfurt-on-Main, and other west German cities. Most significant of all, the west mark has fallen below the rate of four to one. Even during the past Christmas season it could not be coaxed above 3.75.

While the complications of the Berlin conflict may have puzzled the world at large, there is increasing general clarity of late about the government of west Germany—the German Federal Republic. Conservative western newspapers are beginning to admit that not a single Federal ministry, not a single department of the Federal government is free of Nazis; that in fact they are in the majority and making policy. One ministry is even headed by a former Storm-trooper, Schröder, Minister of the Interior. The bench is graced by Judges who officiated under Hitler. The *London Times* recently protested emphatically against this Nazi infiltration and against the rising, open anti-semitism. A favorite outdoor sport in west Germany is the desecration of Jewish cemeteries. The west likes to pretend officially that Chancellor Adenauer is above all this sort of thing and is horrified when it is brought to his attention. "Adenauer Piqued by Anti-Semitism" says a *New York Times* headline of January 11, 1959. But Adenauer himself, in the presence of Paul Henri Spaak and other west European statesmen, referred to Mendes-France as the "Jew boy" and the "Jew lout." As you have read the most flagrant recent case of official anti-semitism took place in Hamburg a week before this writing, when a timber merchant, Friedrich Nieland, and a publisher, Adolf Heimberg, were acquitted of publishing an anti-semitic pamphlet because, as the court put it, the pamphlet was not directed against the Jewish people but "against international Jewry." In the streets of West Berlin, you can hear frank, public anti-semitic utterances every day, every hour.

NONE of this is accidental. If West Berlin was appointed to be the virus weakening socialism from within, west Germany has been assigned the role of frontal attacker. West Germany is now openly manufacturing its own atomic weapons. It is building atomic submarines. Leading government representatives are calling for the "return" of the Sudetenland and parts of Poland and the Soviet Union. The NSDAP—the Nazi Party—has been made legal again. Duelling is legal again—no monocle without a scar below it. There are dozens of rabidly nation-

alist veterans' and soldiers' organizations in addition to the large and growing conscripted Federal army, the Bundeswehr.

And now the Soviet Union has come along with a draft for a peace treaty. Adenauer has said "No" to it—Adenauer, Chancellor of the defeated nation. He never even waited to hear whether his other conquerors, the western allies, might have had anything polite to say about the proposed peace treaty. He hardly expected such an eventuality, for

"After such kindness, that would be
A dismal thing to do!"

After a brief period of perfunctory dismantling of war industry and "de-nazification" proceedings, west Germany has revived its war industry on a tremendous scale, remilitarized, and renazified. It has become scandalously wealthy, it is a heavy creditor of Great Britain, it is shouldering its way into the North African colonial game, and it has its old Nazi generals placed in influential NATO positions. The Frankenstein of west Germany wants no part of the peace treaty. It didn't remilitarize at such expense just to demilitarize again—and for good.

But this does not mean that there won't be a peace treaty. The Nazi-riddled government of west Germany may find itself suddenly abandoned by an increasingly realistic United States. For there is not a shadow of a doubt that the German fascists are using the United States for their own purposes just as the United States is using west Germany. The Adenauer government is no less likely to turn on its protectors than the Hitler government was. Britain has begun to see this, having been through the mill once. And there is danger, for Adenauer, that the United States will see it too, before it is too late.

With a peace treaty and a Berlin cleansed of foreign occupation, there would be some hope that the long overdue moral regeneration of Germany as a whole could start. It must. For if it does not, the zigzag crack running through Berlin will shatter the entire globe some day in one terrible seismographic tremor. A war beginning in Berlin could not be kept localized. It would mean, for all practical purposes, the end of the world. Deliberate misrepresentations of the situation here, from the official State Department booklet to the "Letter from Berlin" by Joseph Wechsberg in the *New Yorker* of December 13, 1958, are no less than criminal in their irresponsibility. We can no longer fiddle while Berlin burns. The fire is licking too close to our own homes.

THE MEN BEHIND THE NOBEL PRIZE

JOHN TAKMAN

No literary event in recent years has occasioned so much discussion as last October's choice of Boris Pasternak for the Nobel Prize in literature. Since little is known here of the history of the Nobel awards or of the character of the bodies responsible for them, they have acquired an aura of infallibility. The Swedish Academy, for example, has become a kind of collective literary Pontiff whose judgments are beyond dispute, at least in the so-called free world.

To ascertain whether or not this widespread opinion is justified, we wrote to Sweden for information on the subject. Our correspondent is a physician, Medical Officer of the Stockholm City Child Welfare Board, member of the Stockholm City Council, and former editor-in-chief of the Swedish cultural quarterly, *Clarité*, from 1947 to 1957.—*The Editors*.

WHEN in 1901 the first Nobel prize for literature was awarded to the French poet Sully-Prudhomme, forty-two Swedish authors, among them Selma Lagerlöf, August Strindberg, Carl Larsson and Anders Zorn, sent a message of greeting to Leo Tolstoy, to whom they believed the prize should have been given.

Tolstoy died in 1910, Chekhov in 1904, Ibsen in 1906, Strindberg in 1912, Mark Twain in 1910, and Zola in 1902. There was no lack of worthy candidates when the Swedish Academy first began to select Nobel Prize winners. Yet none of the aforementioned writers received the award. The Academy was to prove during the years that followed, and still proves, that the rejections were no accident.

Alfred Bernhard Nobel, inventor of high explosives and donor of the prizes which bear his name, died in 1896. His will was published the following year in the Swedish press. Ironically—when one considers its later dispensation, particularly in the fields of peace and literature—it was severely criticized by conservative newspapers which suspected revolutionary tendencies in its provisions. Nobel wanted

his great fortune used to further international relations, peace and progress. The great chemist, technician, inventor and financier was actually a most disturbing figure in the bourgeois Sweden of Oscar II. His personal assistant during the last years of his life, Ragnar Sohlman writes that Nobel was a talented satirist who "in theory considered himself a Social Democrat, or in any case described himself as such" (*Nobel, the Man and His Prizes*). Social Democracy before the turn of the century was a revolutionary movement in many countries. Nobel was a personal friend of Berta von Suttner, his one-time secretary and supported her anti-war activities, for which she was awarded the Peace Prize in 1905. He was a singularly intelligent and original personality who could hardly have intended that the prizes for literature and peace, the most politically significant of five Nobel prizes, should serve the cause of reaction.

Unfortunately, Nobel wrote two wills, one in 1893, the second in 1895, both of them without a legal adviser. After his death, their unclear and contradictory phrasing gave rise to prolonged argument on the manner of administering the fund.

While Nobel's aims were attacked by the reactionary press, the interpretation of the terms of the wills was criticized by representatives of the working-class movement. In 1897, Hjalmar Branting, leader of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, referring to the prize for literature wrote: "It must be said frankly that the whole donation has become discredited and bungled through the unfortunate choice of the Swedish Academy as the distributor of the prize." When the prize in literature was awarded to Sully-Prudhomme, Branting again wrote: "The Swedish Academy is already discredited on this first Nobel prize day. It will certainly not be the last time so long as the collection of literary mummies . . . remains responsible for the most critical choice among the Nobel prizes." (*Social-Democraten*, Dec. 1, 1901).

At this point it might be well to clear up the considerable confusion which exists concerning the various prizes and those responsible for choosing the recipients. For example, a recent article in the *New York Times* would leave readers with the impression that the prizes for physics and literature were awarded by the same academy. Almost concurrently, the West German *Morgenpost* stated that the peace prize awarded to Carl von Ossietzky in 1935 had been bestowed upon him by the Swedish Academy. As a matter of fact, in his first will Nobel made the Royal Swedish Academy of Science the main beneficiary and

distributor of all the prizes "for the most important and pioneering inventions or ideas in the broad realm of knowledge and progress, with the exception of physiology and medicine" (in which field the prizes were to be distributed by the Caroline Institute in Stockholm). Subsequently, the Swedish Academy, a quite distinct institution, was assigned the function of choosing the literary beneficiary; while the peace prize-winner was chosen by a committee of five elected by the Norwegian parliament. The Royal Academy of Science still makes the awards for physics and chemistry, but not for literature, medicine, or peace.

THE Nobel awards have often brought honor to Sweden. Although there have been occasional intrigues and political considerations influencing the awards in science, the candidates have generally been judged in terms of their scientific accomplishment. There may be political reasons why no Soviet research worker received a Nobel prize before 1956, but it is just as probable that ignorance of the Russian language impeded authoritative study of the field. Nowadays Swedish scientists follow work in Soviet science with great interest, and it may be presumed that, beginning with 1958, leading Soviet scientists will no longer be passed by as heretofore.

The peace awards, on the other hand, have acquired a somewhat dubious reputation as a result of many grotesque choices. True, not all the prizewinners have been unworthy of the honor. But almost invariably progressive individuals who have been awarded the prizes for peace—as for literature—have required far greater qualifications than the moss-backed or openly reactionary candidates.

The institution known as the Swedish Academy is a literary body. It was founded by King Gustav III in 1786. Since its inception nearly two hundred years ago it has had its periods of profound degeneration, not unlike those of the Papacy. Like the leaf louse and other lower organisms the Academy reproduces itself by a kind of organizational parthenogenesis. When one of its eighteen members dies, the others select his successor. Usually the replacements were conservative authors, professors, bishops and other persons who had already acquired a reputation for being housebroken in the royal court or by association with the Swedish aristocracy. When the Academy finally recognized that there were working-class writers in Sweden and felt itself obliged to take their wide popular appeal into consideration, it elected as members Eyvind Johnson and Harry Martinson. Both of these had been workers in their youth—Johnson a timber-floater and sawmill hand,

and Martinson a sailor—but the first had reacted with renegade hatred against the Marxist movement; while Martinson began to display a bourgeois servility toward the throne, the altar and the money bags.

When Branting issued his denunciation of the Academy in 1897 its strong man for fourteen years had been Carl David af Wirsén. He was to continue in that office until his death in 1912. Wirsén was reactionary by any standards. The Swedish Encyclopedia *Svensk Uppslagsbok* (1938) describes his activities as poet and critic as follows: "The fundamental principle of his work may be defined most simply as a consistently pursued, extremely rigid conservatism in political, religious, moral, philosophical questions." As secretary of the Academy says the Encyclopedia, he managed to "isolate this institution from living literature." For many years he had a safe majority behind him and thereby prevented the election of outstanding writers to fill vacancies. No realists of the Eighties, and not even the romantics of the Nineties were appointed during the decades in which he maintained control. Thus August Strindberg, Sweden's greatest playwright, and Gustav Fröding, certainly Sweden's greatest poet, were never elected to membership.

It would be wrong to describe the Academy at any time as a solid reactionary block. Among its members there have always been, and still are, men of great talent, with a devotion to and an impressive acquaintance with the body of world literature. Nevertheless, today, and in the time of Fröding and Strindberg, some of the most outstanding creative writers and critics of Sweden have been left outside the Academy. A further limitation is that the knowledge of foreign languages of the active members has been usually restricted to English, German, French, Spanish, and, of course, the Scandinavian languages. This has determined the narrow sphere of selections for the Nobel award. Only in a few instances—Sienkiewicz (Poland), Tagore (India), Remont (Poland), and Bunin (Russian emigré)—have the choices hitherto gone outside the West and South European language areas.

OUTWARDLY, the Academy has the appearance of unanimity and reserve of a secret order. According to its rules, a member may be expelled if he reveals anything concerning its deliberations on the election of a new member or the choice of a Nobel prizewinner. The minutes of the meetings are very brief and, according to the present secretary, Anders Osterling, in his chapter on the prize for literature in the memorial publication, *Nobel, the Man and His Prizes* (Swedish and English editions, Stockholm, 1950), they do not even reveal the pe-

centage of votes cast on any question. However, some information has leaked out from time to time on the internal struggle at the beginning of the century and even on the dissensions of recent years.

Within the Swedish Academy there is a special Nobel Committee which was originally composed of five members but at present seems to have only three. They are Anders Osterling, Sigrid Siwertz, and Hjalmar Gullberg. Osterling, born in 1884, is a poet and literary critic. His poetry is idyllic, disregarding mundane wars and other struggles. The influence of Wordsworth is marked. Since 1923, he has edited a monumental collection of foreign literary productions, translated and prefaced by himself. Siwertz, born in 1882, is a novelist, poet and playwright, who has also played a role in introducing foreign literature to Sweden. Gullberg, born in 1898, is a translator of the Greek classics, French drama, and modern Spanish poetry. He has been described as among the more sober, intellectual and disillusioned of contemporary Swedish poets. The three committee members are noted for the elegance of their style, and regarded as conservatives in politics, though Gullberg's conservatism, at least, is not the simple frozen stance of the Neanderthal epoch.

It is rumored that the three guardians of literary *bon ton* have not always been unanimous in their choices. In his articles in the *Stockholm Tidningen* Osterling has expressed his enthusiasm for work of Camus and Pasternak, so it may be taken for granted that he supported their candidacy. But report has it that the three-man committee was not in agreement on them.

Not everyone is privileged to nominate candidates for the Nobel prize for literature. According to the prize statutes the right to nominate shall be open to:

"Members of the Swedish Academy and of other academies, institutions and societies, which are similar to it in constitution and purpose; by professors of literature and of philosophy at universities and colleges; by Nobel prize laureates of literature, and by presidents of those societies of authors which are representative of the literary production of their respective countries."

Nominations of candidates must be entered before the first of February each year. Arthur Almhult, author of *The Swedish Academy and the Nobel Prize in Literature* (Swedish ed., Stockholm, 1954; abbreviated English ed., Stockholm, 1955) discloses that about thirty nominations are received annually, many of them proposing the same candi-

date. The Academy does not consider nominations received after February 1st, or those entered a previous year but not repeated. After the nominations have been received, they are considered by the Academy's permanent or specially appointed experts (among those consulted are experts in the languages the members of the Academy do not know) and by those members who belong to the Nobel Committee within the Academy. The Committee presents its report in the Fall, and about the first of November the Academy makes its decision. (Almhult relates that on occasion the majority of the Academy has ignored the verdict of the Nobel Committee and chosen an altogether different prize winner. Twelve members must be present, or have sent in their ballots; if no one receives more than half the votes no award is made that year. No public statement is ever issued either on internal discussions or the exact number of votes each candidate received.

HOW then was Boris Pasternak chosen to be the Nobel prizewinner for 1958? Perhaps no absolutely authentic information on this award, and the Academy's role in it, will be available for ten or twenty years. Still, it may be said that the press version that the decision was unanimous and that Dag Hammarskjöld, the Academy's most prominent international figure, wrote the justification for the award, is nonsensical. It is known for certain that the Academy was sharply divided over Pasternak's nomination.

There is, however, ground for assuming that last year's decision was as hurried as that of 1904, though the cases are different. In that year the Academy's Nobel Committee had enthusiastically recommended the Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral. Shortly before the prize was awarded one of the members published so poor a translation of Mistral's lyrical epic, *Mirèio*, that the others became panicked and divided the prize between Mistral and the Spanish dramatist, mathematician and statesman, José Echegaray y Eizaguirre. This retrospective glimpse confirms the common belief that it is often a little group within the Academy which makes decisions and that at least several of the eighteen voters have not read much if anything of the work of the candidates.

Prolonged internal discussion has often preceded a favorable vote for a popular writer. This was the case in 1909 when the prize was awarded to Selma Lagerlöf. Almhult relates that:

Wirsén . . . read the writings of the candidates and wrote long painstaking reports. The clause in the will about works "of ideal ten-

dency" was advanced as a reason against several candidates, particularly against Ibsen whom Wirsén hated. . . . An increasingly strong opinion, both in Sweden and abroad, was in favor of Selma Lagerlof, but Wirsén disliked her work and succeeded in preventing or delaying the awarding of the prize to her until 1909; by that time Wirsén's power in the Academy had been broken.*

It is said that Pasternak was proposed—from an English source—as far back as 1947, but his candidacy was not taken seriously in the Swedish Academy until after the completion of *Dr. Zhivago*. The fact that his name was then considered was probably due less to his actual merits than because the Academy had for many years been severely criticized for not awarding the Nobel prize to Mikhail Sholokhov. An almost universal Swedish opinion considered Sholokhov the outstanding Russian candidate. Thus the Academy was faced with its usual dilemma: either award a politically undesirable candidate the prize, or find a toothless or politically conservative Russian as an alternative. When, in the early Thirties, it was put on the spot for having passed up Maxim Gorky year after year, it chose Ivan Bunin. When it became more and more difficult for the majority to reject Martin Anderson Nexö, it chose Johannes V. Jensen, the Danish poet and novelist. Sartre has been discussed and probably proposed for years; consequently, Camus got the prize in 1957. (It is rumored that the majority for the latter was the smallest permissible, according to the rules.) So it was hoped the troublesome question of Sholokhov would be solved with Pasternak.

IT WOULD be naive to think that financial considerations as well play no part in the prize selections. The large publishing houses in the Scandinavian countries, and also in the United States, England and France and some other countries, apparently have been fairly well informed, sometimes as much as six months in advance, on the likely candidates. For the sake of timely business organization and publicity, convenient windows seem to have been opened into the sacrosanct deliberations of the Academy. Also, since so many individuals and organizations have the right to propose candidates, it would be astonishing if the big publishing houses did not make use of some of them to advance their own candidates through these channels.

When it became known, as early as February 1958, that Bonniers,

* In the English version of Almhult's book, the account of this affair is watered down and Wirsén's role is deleted.

Sweden's largest publishing house, was in the market for a quick translation to get *Dr. Zhivago* out to the book shops in time for the Swedish Academy Nobel prize meeting on the 23rd of October (a date the publishers missed by less than a week), Swedish literary circles could draw the conclusion that the Nobel prize would probably go to Pasternak.

What did the Academy know about Boris Pasternak? How many of the members had read his poetry? How many had read *Dr. Zhivago*? How many voted for Pasternak in his role of "pure poet"? And how many were conscious that *Dr. Zhivago* was a political novel? One thing is quite certain: some members of the Academy enthusiastically exploited this opportunity, quite conscious of what the novel was, and conscious too that the repercussions to the choice were bound to be political.

Pasternak's candidacy must have been put forward before February 1st, according to the rules. At that time there was only one edition of *Dr. Zhivago*, the Italian one, which was published November 22, 1957. The secretary of the Academy, Anders Osterling, had read this version before February 1st, for his review of the novel was published in *Stockholms-Tidningen* on January 17. But when had the others, who do not, with one or two exceptions, read Italian, an opportunity to study the book? The Academy made its official decision to award the Nobel prize to Pasternak on October 23rd. The Swedish edition of the novel appeared a few days later. The members who could exercise critical discrimination with respect to a tome of 600 pages which they must have had to read in printer's galleys, could hardly have comprised the majority in the Swedish Academy. It is equally unlikely that they could base their judgment on the English edition which was published in September, and is no model of translation, or the French edition which came out in August. More probably they were satisfied with the prospectus which the Academy's Nobel Committee edits and sends to the members and which is said to contain a *selection* from the works of the proposed top candidates. Presumably then, the selection in Pasternak's case consisted of the poems which were, at that time, translated into Swedish, English and French, and the first chapters of *Dr. Zhivago* in which the author describes events of pre-revolutionary Russia.

It is also probable that the compendium included critical articles, among others Professor Ernest J. Simmons' article, "The Independence of Pasternak," which was published in the American weekly, *The Nation*, on March 15, 1958. Simmons is chairman of the Department of Slavic

Literature at Columbia University. This compendium in all likelihood contained the little editorial in the same number of *The Nation*, which presented Pasternak as "not a particularly political man," very suitable for the Nobel prize: "He is, almost without question, the greatest poet living today who has not been honored with the Nobel prize."

In a later issue dated November 1, *The Nation* comments upon the choice of Pasternak, and modestly points out that the editorial of March 15th had been broadcast "in its entirety by the United States Information Agency and elicited world-wide comment."

An interesting point is that Professor Simmons stressed in his article that he had not himself read *Dr. Zhivago*! The earlier editorial writer referred to Professor Simmons' opinion, and had clearly not read the novel either. Only the Italian edition existed then. If a long-established journal with a good reputation among Swedish intellectuals can recommend an author for the Nobel prize without having read his major work, why should not the Swedish Academy, standing on the same firm ground, choose to award the prize to the author? Stranger things have happened before.

CARL MARZANI'S POLITICAL NOVEL

CHARLES HUMBOLDT

WHEN Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* appeared in 1948 it aroused great and legitimate expectations of the author and of the future of American fiction. It is rare for a writer's first full-length novel to go so far beyond the recording of a succession of combat incidents in order to assess the character and meaning of war as a social phenomenon. Its powerful human and symbolic imagery—the ascent of Mt. Anaka—embodied an awareness of what is still the most urgent of our social concerns: to find and arouse in the American people the forces which would defeat the onslaught of reaction.

The expectations were not fulfilled, and for reasons which were latent in the book itself. In reviewing it at the time, I wrote that Mailer looked for help to the lowest common denominator of human resistance assigning to fear, inertia, and herd instinct the status of democratic principles. He showed little interest, or perhaps had no faith, in the revolutionary role of ideas, and so his narrative ended as a hymn to the capricious resilience of man. It was as if he saw the human soul as a balky mattress for the possession of which any two antagonists might exhaust themselves in struggle. Was that by chance his secret hope?

If one wants to trace the progression of this incipient death-wish he need only read Mailer's two subsequent novels and the speculative essay, "The White Negro." In the latter, Mailer suggests that the Hipster as "philosophical psychopath" may be the most dependable revolutionary after all, since—by a dialectical passage, the historical stages of which are unclear—when every social restraint is removed "man would then prove to be more creative than murderous." Prometheus no longer steals fire from heaven. He plays with a box of wet matches and pretends they will dry out.

In this parody of the myth is reflected the familiar unwillingness of most contemporary American writers to come to grips with what their senses and part of their minds perceive so vividly. It's as if they have pledged themselves to be stupid only when they think. The reservation has larger consequences today than it might have in a less crucial time. It is exasperating to watch one rebel after another, clad in his anti-philistine armor, speed down the road in the name, or to the rescue, of some life force, energy, orgasm, Nirvana, God—sacred or secular; while the lords of bourgeois society smile behind hedges bristling with bombs. If the writer is fascinated always by effects and never interested in causes; if he deludes himself that he can convert his enforced solitude into a voluntary, mystically-shared isolation and thus create a new form of spiritual solidarity; then he will contribute absolutely nothing to human liberation. He will merely have foisted his private liberties, his intimate tastes and desires, onto all mankind to create not a real but a fantastic freedom. Fantastic in the sense that his own imagination is the lever, and the sole fulcrum is himself.

* * *

MAILER'S search and his answer—or the lack of a good one—were at least honest, if futile. But other paths lead off from the direction he took, and shrewder heroes than his lie in wait for us on them. They are the pseudo-democrats of the mass media, from the retired sheriff who represents virtue in abeyance, drawing his gun, reluctantly, in defense of a community cowed by authoritarian bandits, to the ordinary guy whose very lack of principle becomes his virtue because it enables him to outlast men of sterner stuff. They may break under a too-often assumed pressure, while he stumbles into heroism against his flabby inclination. This constructed fellow is the screen counterpart of monopoly's pretense that it is just good old laissez-faire, and imperialism's bid to pose as the guardian angel of freedom. He is Shears, new-minted as an American in the film version of *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The "civilian at heart," as he calls himself, is fetchingly unpunctual, makes Martinis with alcohol reserved for wounded men, and reproaches the British commandos for carrying the stench of death with them, because they want to fulfill their mission while he is obsessed with saving his skin. He will teach them how to live. When he is killed, he dies as a man should, in a moment as intense as sexual consummation. Cradled in this engaging figure is the imperialist's

dream: the soldier of the unreal future, the man of no conviction at all who will sow death without risking it (he thinks).

* * *

IN HIS poem, "Howl," Allen Ginsberg elegizes "the best minds of my generation," those "who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism." So in nihilism and know-nothingism the new literature of protest was born—and by them pretty well castrated. And since there are few veterans or, for the moment, descendants of the tradition of social responsibility, it seems to most critics that the ghost of the Thirties has been exorcised and the political novel smiled out of court. Not quite, friends. With Carl Marzani's *The Survivor** the specter returns bearing the question that Mailer asked twelve years ago, and does not despair of an answer. This is not to say that Marzani is the novelist that Mailer was, but he is a lot closer to the realities that the latter has since made a parody of probing.

These realities are not buried in the breast of the individual. Nor do they lie on the surface of contemporary life, to be had for the picking up. The special problems of the political novel arise from the fact that while the characters, like all human beings, have illusions about their private motives, their important conflicts grow out of their illusions about society and their function in it; as well as their attempts to plead their usefulness to it. Irony is of the essence in such fiction because, even when the antagonists confront one another to defend their interests, these are still reflections of relationships which are in no sense personal, though they call forth the fullest resources of will and intelligence to preserve or change them. The characters of *The Survivor*—are—most of them—nothing if not intelligent. Yet all but a few are deceived. They imagine themselves to be masters of situations which are actually determined by forces they are far from controlling; or, as in the case of Marc Ferranti, they will admit every truth but the one most relevant to his quandary: that of the class struggle.

When Marc faces his trial, a security hearing in the State Department one week before the issuance of Truman's Executive Loyalty Order, he is worse prepared for it than he thinks. Though he feels himself on top of the world (a sensation conveyed in part by a superfluous interior monologue and a conventional scene of sexual intercourse), even his wife does not believe that his decision to fight for his job is as principled as he

* THE SURVIVOR by Carl Marzani. Cameron Associates. \$5.95. Liberty Book Club. \$3.95.

would like to make it seem. Proud, if not vain, of his intellect, he is resolved to rise eventually to an ambassadorship and to throw his weight around in international affairs. He cannot confess his ambition to Karina, but she has already sensed it, and fears that his very strength of will may drive him to ugly expedients if he should find his aspirations balked. In the course of the hearing we watch his irrepressible but uprooted mind maneuver to avoid dismissal on the one hand and moral disgrace on the other. When the book ends, the practical issue has been decided in his favor; the ethical outcome is dubious and suspended.

AS THE hearing opens, chaired by the retired Senator Richard Aldrich Bassett, an "enlightened" conservative from Virginia, Marc has some serious strikes against him. Not only did he fight in Spain (by chance in an Anarchist brigade), but his sister is a Communist organizer and his younger brother Dino had inadvertently revealed that Marc had attended a few Party meetings at her invitation. His older brother Gus, Congressman and "political" Catholic, has already indicated a readiness to cook his goose. Less significant, but incriminating enough in the eyes of the State Department security officer Hayes, an ex-FBI man, is Marc's working class background and his father's class loyalty. Since there is nothing to be gained by denying the facts, Marc must make them work in his favor. He therefore sets about to prove that every disability is an asset, and what appears as most compromising in his past has actually best prepared him for his job and service to his country. As for Gus, he will fish for an understanding with him.

The author's handling of Marc's self-defense is flexible and subtle. The rationalizations of which it is composed are shown to proceed equally from emotional drives and from political conviction. That is, conviction of a sort; it is always a little suspect because of its proximity to the hidden springs of Marc's conduct. Marc is certain that his anti-fascist record makes him the best kind of American, an immeasurably more adequate champion of democracy than the hopeless McCarthyites of the stamp of Hayes. He is of course opposed to the Cold War diplomacy, which he considers stupid and damaging to the prestige and interests of the United States. His arguments with Hayes, in which he justifies the working agreements made with Communist and resistance forces during the war, and his vindication of the realistic China policy advocated by Lattimore and others, provide valuable insights into the thinking of the progressive New Dealers. But the obverse side of Marc's realism is expediency. If his success in life "showed the reality of American democracy," would it

not also prove the beneficence of American capitalism? This pleasant prospect leads Marc to dilute his anti-fascist fervor with spoonfuls of liberalism and enables him to make daring proposals to achieve various ends. He attacks Forrestal and the Truman Doctrine, then urges support for the Socialists and Social-Democrats of the world in the fight against Communism. His stand is that of the left wing of the ADA, of the non-, in reality anti-Communist left, which flatters itself that it is smarter than the reactionaries. In this area, his self-confidence is justified. He has the backing of men like his immediate superior in the State Department, Col. Angus McVeigh, on furlough from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. Somewhere well along in the book, McVeigh states his feeling about Marc to the Senator. The latter has asked him whether he thinks Marc is important to the government and the future of the country. McVeigh answers: "I do. First-rate minds are rare. Even more difficult to find are people of independent judgment. There's so much conformity——" Bassett agrees, characterizing Marc as a responsible radical. It is a perfect touch. The non-conformist's job is to safeguard the status quo, which is imperilled by the conformists who also want to preserve it but lack the imagination needed in an era of the bourgeois welfare state on one hand and atomic weapons on the other. The ambiguity of Marc's position is such that he would hardly know whether to be pleased or blush if he overheard this exchange.

BY THIS time Senator Bassett has decided to throw his weight behind Marc. At first his backing was touch and go, for he would surely have thrown Marc to the dogs if keeping him meant compromising his friend, the Secretary of State, George Marshall. The wooing of Bassett is accomplished by a device which carries risks for both Marc and the author. The Senator's conversation has revealed his somewhat paradoxical admiration for Thomas Jefferson, Eugene Debs, and the most tragically contradictory figure, the Populist Tom Watson of Georgia. This evocation of the democratic and radical tradition of American life rouses in Marc memories of his own proletarian childhood: the pride and humiliation of his father, his mother's uninhibited affection, his brother Gus' filial disloyalty, the mines, the strikes and lockouts of the early Twenties. It occurs to him that perhaps he can reach the Senator with these reminiscences as he might not in any other fashion. He will persuade him to read passages selected from notes for a novel of his early years. In this way the Senator and the reader get

know Marc's former "stuffing," the boy whose spirit he believes has never changed.

The success of Marc's plan depends, of course, on the strength of the Senator's self-deception, since the latter's principles are three quarters nostalgia; and on Bassett's belief that Marc's early loyalties have been transferred, in force undiminished, to his present occupation. If the scheme works, "He, Marc Ferranti, would have his cake and eat it too." This complacent reflection of Marc's is its own judgment of him. On a deeper level, it symbolizes the persistent illusion which has allowed us to squander the material resources of our country and strain the good will of the world to the breaking point, as though these treasures could never be used up.

The passages of Marc's notes which the Senator reads, and the flashbacks are perhaps the finest things in the novel. Yet I wish they had been saved for another book to which they plainly belong, and I cannot help feeling that they suffer in the context of Marc's opportunist employment of them. Here they stand as too sharp a reproach to him. Since the transition from the boy they portray so beautifully to the man he has become is missing or inadequately conceived, their very vividness forms more of a blocking contrast than a clue to the present. This is, of course, not entirely true, for one can always find in the child's experience the indignities he will later do anything to avoid. But the effect on the reader is that of a reasonable assumption. His emotions are not won over.

Bassett's decision does not quite hinge upon his opinion of Marc's character, of which he is in any case to form a somewhat lower estimate. Marc must produce what evidence he can muster to prove that he is not a Communist. He must also make his peace with his Congressman brother, toward whom he exhibits a priggish, self-righteous contempt. The scenes between Marc, Gus Ferranti, and the astute churchman Monsignor Feeney are very intriguing, as the reader will easily see for himself. Feeney offers Marc a deal: that, in return for a letter of clearance from Gus, he should accept "information" supplied by the Church for the files of the State Department, or turn over "research" materials from the same source to a scholar from a nearby Catholic university. It is not hard for Marc to see the trap, particularly when his conversation with Feeney and an apparent slip of Gus' tongue reveal to him that the Church as well as the China Lobby is out for Marshall's scalp.

NEVERTHELESS, it is only when Marc learns of Bassett's intention to fight for him that we know he will not use Gus' letter, and we

cannot accept his self-assurance that he never meant to. At a certain point during the second day of the hearing, he seems to lose his bearings altogether. Although he had told Feeney categorically that the Communists would not win in China (Chiang Kai-shek was driven off the mainland the following year), listening to Hayes' furious refusal to face the facts of the situation there, he comments to himself: "The classic position of a class on the brink of oblivion." From what standpoint is he making the observation? Isn't he pledged to persevere that class and its system? Hasn't he glibly preached its viability? Hasn't he admired Bassett as the best kind of conservative? A moment later, while arguing with Hayes, he involuntarily betrays the existence of private notes and reports whose disclosure would endanger the remaining liberals in the State Department. Only Hayes' inattention, and McVeigh's and Bassett's presence of mind avert the fiasco; but Marc has forfeited part of the Senator's respect, and he should never be certain that he was not unconsciously offering his services to Feeney to save his job.

Much earlier in the book, Marc had asked the Senator whether he believed American society to be better, and human rights more secure today than in 1890, the year of Watson's election to Congress. He had decided that Bassett's behavior in his case would be part of the reply to what for Marc was still an open question. Now, though he helped Marc by an arbitrary show of power against Hayes, it is Bassett who no longer regards the question as open. His answer is no. Sophisticated though he is, the hearing has taught even him something. And Marc, the young hope, the new liberal face, so brilliant, so likeable, yet so mercurial in his allegiances? He, too, has entered into the Senator's gloomy estimate.

BUT Bassett does not escape the ironies that envelop Marc. They have pecked at him throughout his life in little revealing incidents, piercing the ceremonial hypocrisy that spares a man groomed for elder statesmanship. His charming wife, now dead, had to teach him how complex are the ramifications of sexual equality; she had also exposed the violence of his racial prejudice—and he a man who had always prided himself that he was free of it. He has never realized quite what a *grand seigneur* he has been, and how much condescension has entered into his democratic friendliness.

The Senator is a political amalgam. He contains elements of Hubert Stimson, Tydings, the late Sen. Joseph France of Maryland, and Justice Hugo Black, perhaps of Roosevelt, too. Marzani clearly intends him to

present some kind of loose conservative-to-liberal coalition opposed proto-fascist reaction in the United States. He accounts for the libertarian streak in the Senator's personality by a device similar to that used by Marc. The role played by the latter's immigrant and working class background is paralleled by the Senator's fond recollections of the populist movement and his friendship with Tom Watson.

We soon suspect that Bassett is attracted to the radical tradition mainly because he can point to it as a check-and-balance to the unpleasant phenomena of monopoly capitalism. He admires those who fought in causes for which he would not have stuck out his neck; a people which Jefferson has no need of socialism! For all his worldliness, his philosophy of history boils down to a schoolboy's version of American history. He reveals the fragility of his liberal principles the moment the discussion touches on a critical issue. When Marc's friend and lawyer, David Satenstern, asks him whether he doesn't think the Spanish-American war was an imperialist conflict,

"I don't think so," said the Senator. "Since when is national defense imperialism? We didn't take Cuba and the Philippines to get rich; we took them to protect our sea approaches, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The British in India, the French in Africa, that's imperialism. Imperialism is taxation without representation, the levying of tribute by armed force."

"But," Marc protested, "what about economic imperialism?"

The Senator spoke coldly.

"America has always paid her way. We don't take produce from nations. We buy it. Never forget that, sir; we pay for what we get. Whether it's pulp paper in Canada, rubber in Malaya, or oil in Arabia, we *always* have paid."

It is the Communist legislative representative Joe Zanger who, though may not be concerned with the mental process by which the Senator arrives at his comforting self-portrait, understands what he really represents. He is talking to Marc about Bassett.

"It's clear you admire him, take him as an example of American democracy. Well, he's an example, all right, but not the way you mean. You see him as a grand old man of America. I see him as a shrewd member of the ruling class."

Marc was nettled.

"I don't want to be offensive, but here you are talking about someone you don't even know. It's a typical Communist attitude, and that's what I resent. Damn it, I know the Senator and you don't."

"Only partly true," said Zanger unabashed. "I don't know him personally, but I know something of his record."

And Zanger proceeds to a disconcerting recital of Bassett's legislative activity on behalf of the corporate interests. For the first time Marc impressed enough to keep quiet and listen.

The moment is both amusing and crucial. It fixes Marc's resemblance to the Senator, showing that they have in common a great talent for apologetics. The method of one is to let his childhood speak for him, of the other to summon up a revolutionary tradition in defense of the present state of affairs. While Bassett has appropriated his old friend and political opponent, Tom Watson, to prove the existence and tenacity of popular institutions, Marc ropes in his youth to tell himself that he is such an institution incarnate.

I AM not sure that the introduction of Watson is entirely successful. For one thing, too much dependence has been placed on the Woodward biography of him, so that he seems lifted from it rather than relived in the Senator's mind. More disturbing to me is a suspicion that the friendship is bogus. Considering Watson's boundless hatred of renegades, it is improbable that he would have tolerated Bassett after the latter had deserted him to ally himself with the Northern capitalists. To take care of this difficulty Marzani has created the quarrel scene at the picnic in Washington's Rock Creek Park. But this is supposed to have taken place in 1922, years after Bassett's political retreat. Watson was never so forgiving. He would not have let Bassett get away with his happy view of their relationship.

During that remembered quarrel Bassett upbraided Watson for the criminal white chauvinism of which he had become a champion. Since one cannot criticize characters for their inconsistent arguments, it would be fatuous to point out that if racism is one side of the coin of privilege, profit is the other. Yet one may note the peculiar detachment of Bassett's reproach which was supposedly delivered with great passion. The words seem to have been placed in his mouth more to take care of an aspect of Watson, which cannot be omitted in even a partial estimate of him, than to register Bassett's genuine anger. In fact, one of the troubles with Bassett is a deficiency of feeling in his makeup. His worldly wisdom has been acquired without much effort or suffering; his intellectual character has little warmth. Perhaps those traits, combined with his Tidewater aristocrat heritage, led him to his early break with Watson, causing t

latter to accuse him of what is in his own eyes the worst defect of character—a lack of honor and integrity.

Was the author disturbed by this incompleteness in Bassett? The comedy of mutual seduction—a flashback near the close of the book—may have been intended to reveal the Senator's discomfiture and so "humanize" him. But it is told too late and cannot change anything. It is more like a practical joke played on someone who thinks himself in charge of all contingencies. Or does the Senator conjure up that episode because, embarrassing as it then was to him, it did break through the barrier to marital happiness? Surely he, the survivor from the past, needs the consolations of memory, because in the end he knows that his kind and cause are passing away.

BUT how should he know that? What—apart from his loss of faith in Marc—could have shaken him? Strangely, it is the Communist Tessie, Marc's sister, who says of her brother to the Senator: "I don't think he knows where he belongs." And a moment later: "But I think he's going your way." To which the Senator replies: "Too late," and is amazed at his own words. Their ambiguity is a triumph of condensation. It illuminates the Senator's sudden awareness of Marc's objective function as a fellow-apologist and his realization of its ultimate futility. In his flash of involuntary insight we see also just how much he learned as the hearing went on.

In the same fashion Tessie unhinges Marc, on whose behalf she and Dino have come from New York to testify. Why else should he feel such self-loathing afterward? How else could he realize that he "had spun fine theories about the Senator, and all he was doing was brown-nosing. Brown-nosing in the class struggle."

Even giving the Senator the novel to read, what was he saying by that action? Wasn't he saying, look, read about me, see all the provocations I had to be like Zanger, see, but I'm not—I'm charming, and balanced and upper-class and tolerant and well-dressed, and I went to Oxford, and I am trustworthy, utterly, utterly trustworthy. I'll be just like you, Senator, and isn't that just what you want?

Except for Tessie, Marzani has not put himself out to make his Communists especially attractive or outstandingly talented. To begin with, they are minor figures in the novel. Some are brusque or quick to bristle. Graciousness is no one's forte. Their political reports are often repetitious and wooden in style—in this they suffer from a kind of occupational

syndrome. It is hard for them to admit that they have been wrong—that they resemble a few other human beings. Yet in cutting them down to size, Marzani has been better able to isolate the catalytic agent which has earned them the proud name: agitators. That element is cognition, more particularly, knowledge of society, their seeing it not as a spectacle but in terms of the laws that govern its structure and its changes. Underneath the shifting milieus and values, the glittering personalities, the splendor and misery, they recognize each class for what it is; here they are never deceived. Secure in this understanding and with the will to act upon it, Zanger can refute Marc who has had his fun running in a circle or two around him. Their argument covers a wide ground and is marvelously informative and suggestive. But when it is over Marc has been reminded that nothing was ever granted the people, white or black, that they did not fight for; and that in this country and century the Communists fought hardest along with, and often leading them.

Urbanity is a pleasing trait, and Zanger is not urbane. When he asks Marc to remember that every good thing in his life, every advantage of his scholarships, is the fruit of the labor and exploitation of other men, Marc protests:

"Well, hell, in that light you can't even eat in peace."

"That's right," said Zanger, "you can't."

Worse yet, when Marc, warned that he is turning into a mask of reaction, shouts; "God damn it. I'm not a bastard, you know. I went to Spain——," Zanger advises him: "Don't trade on it." It is the cruellest cut of all, since Marc has right along been trading on his childhood, which he can claim even less credit, Spain having been at least his own choice.

AND Tessie? She has a loving nature; she is readier to like some one for the good qualities he possesses than to dislike him for lack of them. She is critical of her brother; but it would not occur to her to desert him in his need. Since she is not self-righteous, her frankness is more than refreshing, it is attractive. Only the humorless Hayes can bear her ill will; but then she had asked him: "Didn't you know?" when he inquired rhetorically whether she thought him a fascist.

But in matters of truth, of principle, she does not back down from the amenities. When the Senator tries to shake her faith in socialism by telling her that "Russia" is no paradise, she answers him in the

say she can think of to reach him: "I don't care," she says fiercely. "I don't have to be right; I only know that you are wrong. You've made a world I don't want. I don't want it for me. I don't want it for my child." And then corrects herself in a way that will haunt him later: "Not only my child, I don't want your world for *any* child." A strange end to the Senator's search for the incorruptible man who will restore the sick system to health. He finds his hero, not in Marc who is ready to accept the assignment, but in his sister who rejects the old society and is prepared to build a new one. And it occurs to him that "The men and women his era had shunned and ridiculed might well turn out to be the recursors of a new life, a new country, perhaps a new civilization."

THERE is one other character in whom the Senator might have found what he was looking for. Marc's younger brother Dino is the man missing from Mailer's platoon. The hornets helped to defeat Sergeant Croft, but Dino would not have needed them. The soldiers of the patrol ran when they were stung. Dino is angry because he is beginning to *now*. He is not satisfied to have Marc tell him that Hiroshima was a political bombing and that the Russians want peace, and then go on to chatter about Asiatic despotisms and man's fundamentally evil nature. He will not have Marc call his brother a wop or pretend that his father and grandfather were "civil servants" in Italy when they were mail carriers. When he says: "I'm finding things out about my government," we are sure that he intends to find out much more. I think that Marzani wants us to see Dino as the alert American.

Right Face

Be It Ever So Humble

A man with a highly developed sense of social responsibility, Mr. [John Hay] Whitney is a man who is always associated with his millions partly because of the style in which he lives. He owns several homes including a town house in Manhattan, a 15,000-acre plantation in Georgia, a beach house on Fishers Island, a 125-acre racing farm at Saratoga and the Greentree estate at Manhasset, L. I. He has his own plane and a yacht.

When Mr. Whitney married the former Betsey Cushing, the former wife of James Roosevelt, they moved to the Whitney home on Long Island with her two daughters. The children were embarrassed to invite their friends to such grandeur.

"Nonsense," the new Mrs. Whitney told them. "After all, this is our home and there is no reason to feel apologetic about it."—*The New York Times*.

Conspicuous Abstinence

The armed forces told a House subcommittee that the Government owned nearly \$1,500,000,000 worth of industrial plants that were producing nothing . . . the fifty-nine unused plants had originally cost the Government \$1,409,381,221, but that they would cost much more to replace now. In addition, the reports said, the Government is spending some \$31,000,000 a year to maintain the plants.—*The New York Times*.

Perfidious Albion

The British Ambassador protested formally to John Foster Dulles over the Army Corps of Engineers' rejection of a British company's bid on a contract for two hydraulic turbines. The contract was awarded to Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton Company of Philadelphia on the grounds that to do otherwise would jeopardize national security. . . . The General Electric Company submitted a bid that was \$300,000 lower.—*The New York Times*.

Success Story

The Generalissimo, now 70 years old, is confident that he will return to China's mainland. If he succeeds, it will not be the first time that his political calculations and dogged determination have triumphed over seemingly overwhelming odds.—*The New York Times*.

Yankee Know-How

This New Year's Day will be remembered in Pisa as the day they tried to straighten the Leaning Tower. It all happened early in the morning after a night of revelry. A group of foreign tourists (some said they were Americans) ran a long steel cable around the tower's base and fastened it to the rear bumper of an automobile. With a roar, the automobile moved forward. With a crash the rear bumper came ripping off the car. . . . —*The New York Times*.

Never Out of Sight

"The Government will offer competent evidence establishing that during the Korean War the United States had a capability to wage both chemical and biological warfare and the biological warfare capability was based on resources available and retained only within the continental United States," a sworn statement said.—*The New York Times*.

The Almighty Dollar, Pancho!

Praising his own regime, General Franco stated: "Over the course of twenty-two years . . . nothing has been freely vouchsafed us excepting the aid and assistance of the Almighty."

United States officials here have found this passage hard to reconcile with statistics showing that General Franco's government has received since 1953 from United States public funds \$350,000,000 in modern arms for the Spanish armed forces and \$894,000,000 in varying types of economic aid, including \$351,000,000 in commodities and 100,000,000 in foodstuffs distributed through American Roman Catholic charities.—*The New York Times*.

books in review

Problems of Co-existence

THE COMMUNIST WORLD AND OURS, by Walter Lippman. Atlantic-Little Brown. \$2.

MR. Walter Lippmann has written another book. It is small, only 56 pages, but it is nevertheless very comprehensive. It undertakes to indicate both the causes and the cure of the cold war, and how to put an end to the present tense world situation. The immediate occasion for the book was an interview Mr. Lippmann had with Premier Khrushchev of the USSR, during Lippman's visit to Moscow last fall, which he reports from memory and notes. The book's title is *The Communist World and Ours*. (Mr. Lippman does not follow the Marxian differentiation between Socialism and Communism; it's all Communism to him.)

There are many good points in Mr. Lippman's book, which should be emphasized. He does not engage in the shameful warmongering that is so common in employer, government, and trade union official circles. Correctly, he says that there is no danger of a war from the East. He also expresses direct antagonism to military pacts and alliances directed against the socialist countries (which is obviously the very mainstream of present government policy.) Likewise, he does not support the brutality of economic blockades against

the socialist countries. Besides, his book is notably free from the disgraceful redbaiting and sabre-rattling that precludes serious thinking from the bulk of the books by bourgeois commentators. Mr. Lippmann undoubtedly believes in peaceful coexistence, and the working out of contradictions between the Socialist world and the capitalist world without having recourse to the supreme idiocy and brutality of nuclear war. All this makes his book a notable contribution.

Lippman's book is, of course, very much out of line with the policies of the Eisenhower-Dulles Government which are based on warmongering, redbaiting, economic blockades, military pacts against the socialist countries, etc., which he either does not engage in or specifically condemns. In this respect Lippmann is far more representative of the growing public thinking in the United States than the government and other official leaders. Such a spreading gap between the views of the leading government officials and those of the people is unmistakable. Undoubtedly a basic reason why the Republicans suffered such a sharp defeat in the recent November elections, was because of the administration's warlike attitude in the Formosa Straits situation, an attitude which collided directly with the more peaceful views of the broad masses of the people. This difference in thinking was made unmistakably clear by the

recent visit of Anastas I. Mikoyan.

Mr. Lippman's book, let me repeat, is very valuable because of the sane way in which he discusses world questions, and his general absence of red-baiting. However, he makes many characteristic bourgeois errors, when he tries to find the causes of the present world tension and the specific remedies for it. For example, he is in error when he assumes that Premier Khrushchev is opposed to war on the grounds that it could not be won by either side, but would end in mutual destruction. As a matter of fact, the Communist position, undoubtedly expressed by Mr. Khrushchev, (although the detailed text of his speech is not at hand), is that although the devastation would be very great on both sides, a third world war would mark the end of the capitalist system.

This opinion was clearly expressed recently by Andrei Gromyko, at the 21st Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow, when he pointed out, "There can be only one result of a new war. The result would be the defeat of the aggressors and moreover, such a defeat as has not been known before in history." And the war aggressors could only be the imperialists. It would be unthinkable for the Communists to look for the accomplishment of their program by such dreadful means as war, especially when it is quite possible to win Socialism by peaceful means. Indeed, it is the basic task in the present world situation, in which the world is being transformed from capitalist to socialist, to prevent the outbreak of war while at the same time advancing the building of Socialism.

Mr. Lippman's basic thinking is made

clear when he attempts to justify the bourgeois conception of political status quo, against Khrushchev's revolutionary conception of it, as Lippmann summarizes it from memory. The substance of the two positions, as stated, is that while Khrushchev recognizes that there is a revolution going on in the world, and proposed to accept and deal with it as such, Lippmann does not. World reality overwhelmingly justifies Khrushchev, with the tremendous growth and unification of the Socialist countries since the end of World War II, the staggering breakdown of the world colonial system that is under way in all the colonial areas of the world, as well as the enormous growth of democratic mass organizations that have sprung up in the capitalist world and are increasingly challenging the power of monopoly capital in their respective countries. All this means that the capitalist system is in deepening general crisis, and that the world is in the process of being rapidly changed from capitalism to Socialism. Mr. Lippmann takes the basic capitalist position; with the world in the constant turmoil of change, he speaks vaguely of the "status quo of the moment," which does not exist. He thinks this "status quo" can be preserved, which is doubly impossible.

Although Mr. Lippmann questions many of the capitalist illusions about war and excessive armaments, he nevertheless shares many of them. Indeed, he would not be a bourgeois journalist if he did not do this. It has been one of the most striking features of the world revolutionary situation since the appearance of Socialism as an organized social system at the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917, that there has

been a great variety of ideas and beliefs set afloat and cherished by the capitalists to the effect that the new Socialist system would not work, and was only temporary in character. In fact, so foolish were many of these illusions that it is clear the hard-pressed capitalists simply wanted to believe them. They did not dare to disbelieve them. The alternative to capitalism, a successful socialist system, was just too awful for them to contemplate.

Among the many such anti-socialist illusions that may be noted, are: that the Russian Bolsheviks were a lot of impossible dreamers who would not hold the state power they had "grabbed"; that they could not withstand the economic and political blockades with which capitalism had surrounded them; that the workers in the new social order lacked individual initiative, and would not keep it in operation; that religion in Russia would inevitably defeat Socialism; that the Communists could not build modern industries, nor could they operate them if they did hire somebody else to construct them; etc. etc. People's China, in its turn, has been met with a shower of similar objections, presumably based upon the Chinese situation: that China is a great sprawling country that never was and never could be united under one political head; that Socialism could not prevail over the incurable individualism of the Chinese peasants; that China was sure to collide with the USSR because of their supposedly contradictory territorial and other interests; that Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communists were only revolutionary fighters, who might win the revolution, but could not possibly make it work; etc. Practically all these illusions have been com-

pletely repudiated by life.

Mr. Lippman has freed himself from many of these absurd myths that are widely circulated in defense of capitalism, as is evidenced by his book; but he still clings to some of them.

One of the illusions that Mr. Lippman puts forward with the usual air of finality is the nonsense that the capitalist countries of the West are essentially immune to the growth of Socialism or eventually of Communism. The argument is made that Socialism has grown with comparative ease in Russia, China, and other Eastern countries, where its opposition was weak; but that it cannot possibly grow in the more advanced capitalist countries of the West. The fact is that Communism, the antithesis to capitalism, can and does grow in all countries. Moreover, its fight in the Eastern countries has been anything but easy. In Russia, for example, Socialism literally had to fight with unparalleled heroism for 40 years to gain the victory. It has literally accomplished miracles, and obviously its struggles in this respect are not yet over. The U.S., for example, is bending every effort to build up a powerful military machine against it and to throw every thinkable obstacle into its path of development.

By the same token, People's China fighting against Japanese imperialism and Chinese war-lords and capitalists supported by American imperialism, has to carry on 25 years of military war before the workers broke the rule of the erst-while masters, and the people could win the political power necessary to begin to build Socialism. Besides, the decade since the Chinese Revolution came to power, the people have had

face an endless opposition supported and financed by the United States. This powerful counter-revolutionary opposition has used military war, economic and political blockades, and every other device that the desperate imperialists and landlords could think of. The other socialist regimes in Europe and Asia have had similarly to break the power of the ruling classes, who were always actively supported by the world imperialists. But the Socialist movement has nevertheless advanced irresistibly in all these countries despite bitter opposition.

Socialism has of course first broken the weaker links of capitalism, but the stronger nations of the capitalist West will also duly follow the Eastern countries and advance to Socialism. Indeed, these older capitalist nations are already on the way, but Mr. Lippmann cannot recognize that. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, France, Italy, Germany, and other countries in the West would have developed People's Front Government (like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the several other Eastern European countries), and thus gradually made their way peacefully to Socialism. But these countries were reserved for capitalism essentially by the Western armies, especially the American army, against the will of their respective peoples. Thus capitalism in Western Europe secured a breathing spell, but only a temporary one. Undoubtedly all the countries in Western Europe (and in the Americas too, for that matter) are suffering severely from the general crisis that afflicts the capitalist system as a whole. Their capitalist systems are being basically weakened by the growth of the Socialist countries,

by the breakdown of the colonial system, and by the growth of democratic forces in the capitalist countries. The change in the relationship of world forces in favor of the Socialist forces, is graphically illustrated by the conviction among the socialist-minded workers that they have now become so strong, and the capitalists relatively so weak, that it is possible to bring about Socialism in many lands peacefully. There is no part of the capitalist world, including the United States, that is immune to the advance of Socialism. Mr. Lippmann should reexamine his data more closely on this question, instead of relying on threadbare capitalist illusions to the effect that their system can turn back the wheels of progress and prevent the growth of Socialism in this or that area of the world.

Mr. Lippmann says that Communism (i.e., Socialism) can grow only in the East, particularly in Asia; but actually, he is not willing to concede even this limited territory to Socialism. This he shows by his advancing of the stale capitalist illusion that if the United States Government will furnish the necessary funds the industrialization of India can be so speeded up as to overtake People's China. Thus, argues Mr. Lippmann, the Communist "menace" could be overcome in the Far East, and an example set for that area and the whole world. India has had an anti-colonial revolution, and has undoubtedly released a number of forces which will enable her to make considerable progress at industrialization; but "according to official figures for 1951 (little has changed since), foreign capital controls 97% of India's oil industry, 93%

of rubber, 62% of coal, 73% of mining, 90% of match manufacturing, 89% of jute, 86% of tea growing, etc. To camouflage its real role, foreign monopoly capital maintains numerous mixed companies, in which Indians are represented only in name, or are elected to sit on the boards of directors." (Academician Yudin, *World Marxist Review*, p. 49, December, 1958.) With such a powerful imperialist grip on it, India cannot possibly catch up to, or keep abreast of, revolutionary China, much less surpass it. It cannot raise enough funds of its own, nor can it get sufficient capital from the United States, which with all its wealth and its long head-start, is unable to keep ahead of the USSR.

The superiority of China over India in building its industries is a matter that has been demonstrated for a decade at least. Ten years ago, the two countries industrially were essentially upon an equal basis with India having somewhat the better of it. The Chinese revolution took place less than ten years ago, and that of India two years earlier. Since then both countries have been trying hard to industrialize; China with its revolutionary set-up, and India under the heavy handicap of British and American domination. Now, after this decade of test, the progress they have made respectively is indicated by the figures on their steel production. Before the liberation, India produced about 1.3 million tons of steel, and China about 0.9 million tons. India now has some 2 million tons of steel, or about double what it had ten years ago; while Chinese production is now running at a rate of 11 million tons a

year, or about ten times as much as had a decade ago. The tremendous industrial progress being made by China, which has vastly outdistanced India, is indicated by the fact that China is planning this year to catch up with Britain in the production of coal and machine tools, and she plans to outrun Britain altogether in general production in about a dozen years. What is happening in the relation between Chinese and Indian production is only one aspect of the outdistancing of capitalist production by socialism of capitalist production all over the world. M. Lippmann does well in opposing the warmongers, but his figures and prophecies regarding the growth of socialism are sadly askew.

WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

Without Cliches

Short Stories of Russia Today, edited by Yvonne Kapp, Houghton, Mifflin Co., \$3.50.

ALL the stories in this excellent collection were first published in Soviet magazines, journals and books. They are generally fine, carrying out Soviet critics' own high regard for the development of their short stories, though they remain more than qualified with regard to their novels and plays. I think that what the publishers feel is "new" in these stories is that most of them are quite subtle studies in character and human behavior and do not stress the overt forms of public and private political life as much as presumably stories did in the past (though several of the

stories, too, were written in the Thirties). A cliché is a cliché, though like that blue that is ever as blue as the sky, some will endure forever. Interestingly enough, one of the stories shows us a writer confronted with just such choices among done-to-death literary themes—"Shall I tell about a couple of lovers and how it turned out that he was the newly appointed director of the factory where he was an unsatisfactory worker? We've had that ten times. . . ."—and ends by telling the story of a hopeless and even shameful unrequited love about which "there is nothing that one can do. . . ."

But if one does not get "propaganda" in the same form, there is small solace to be found here for seekers-after-negative-signs: for what was yesterday still new and still to be fought for is today taken for granted, has moved ostentatiously into the background, and has become a normal part of the mental and physical landscape. After all, in these stories one mentions "Communism" and "working class" in passing, not as terms charged with tension or fear or sensationalism, but as facts of ordinary life. *There* is what is "new" if one is looking for signs. And there is no comfort in such signs for the stalwarts of Project XI!

The first story, "Loaf Sugar," for instance, by Konstantin Paustovsky, is a charming tale, which shows a militiaman (policeman) coming to the aid of a wandering folk-tale collector, an old man who, when questioned by an obdurate bureaucrat about what he did for his living, answers simply: "I sing songs. . . . I go among the people and sing." The militiaman sends the officious one on his way, and the narrator

sits down to drink tea with the old man whose comment on this and every bureaucrat will ever be green: "Ah, the pity of it. There's nothing worse than for a man to have an arid soul. Those kind of people make life wither as grass withers from the autumn dew."

Equally touching and equally "humanistic" is the story by Vera Inber called "Nor-Bibi's Crime." It tells how Nor-Bibi, sold in her childhood to a rich merchant in Samarkand into what was concubinage-slavery before the Revolution, struggled to her freedom, and yet not boldly enough, and for this she was compassionately "sentenced" by the other women of the town in a tender trial:

In the old days our women had five masters. Isn't that too many? Yet it was so. The first master was God. The second master was the emir. The third master was the one who gave work, in whose will and power were the land and the water. The fourth master was the mullah. The fifth master was the husband. Sisters, we are here to judge the woman Nor-Bibi because she has freed herself from four masters but has kept the fifth. Before the Revolution they used to sell us for money, for rice, exchanged us against all kinds of goods. As children we were married to old men (why are you crying, Nor-Bibi?), to old men who, besides us had other wives. They stole our childhood from us, but we were silent. Nor-Bibi, you are guilty of having kept silent too long!

An ordinary, not to say almost undistinguished doctor, whose one fling toward adventure brings him to the Arctic, where he is reconciled to living out his days almost unnoticed among routine tasks, supervises the birth of a baby by radio—giving the distraught husband whose wife, on an inaccessible

ice-bound island, is in labor, the necessary directions over a two-way radio set-up. The child, to add to the difficulty, is delivered by a breach birth. In its own way it an act of heroism and the doctor wakes to find himself not just a hero in the eyes of his friends but as a person in his own eyes, re-born. That was the real miracle: in giving birth to the baby he found his own rebirth as a man, and the whole world was henceforth vital and different. "Could it be he who only yesterday was indulging in visions of a quiet old age, a small house—how did it go, my good fellow: with nasturtiums and orchis under the window?"

"The Mother" is an extremely fine story of mother-and-son love, told without self-consciousness and "psychology," and therefore with quite deep understanding of that hallowed and abused relationship. It is merely the tale of a mother who returns to her son, now a wounded and despairing soldier, isolated in a hospital and cut off from life and love, and nurses him back to his manhood—but "nurses" is the wrong word. She forces out of him, by her unsentimental and uncompromising motherhood, his obligation to be a man, to win back a maturity he had let momentarily slip. There is iron in her love, greatness, and wisdom.

Subtle, too, is the study of an egoist in a tale by Yury Nagibin called, "The Night Guest." It is the story of a selfish man, one might say of "selfishness," but not of the obvious kind: this is the deep-seated parasitism of a "charming" man who sucks dry the lives of everyone with whom he comes into contact, sometimes so neatly as not to be detected at the time. The victims

only know later that something vital has been lost, something ruined. He is a natural spoiler wherever he goes, and for a long time manages even to leave the impression only of his false charm. In this case he brings hatred into the soul of a little child whom ostensibly he was only trying to protect from punishment. And when he leaves the household which had extended its hospitality to him, he returns everything he had borrowed, boots, fishing rod, a coat, everything that would have made him a thief if he had taken it. But the child's trust and innocence that he had stolen—for that there was no legal recompense.

There are many other stories, so not as profound, but almost all of them interesting and rewarding. There is, for instance, the story by Simonov of a commissar on the military front whose obstinate theory was that, other things being equal, a brave man was more likely to survive in battle than a coward; and so certain was he that he refused to believe that his aide-de-camp, found bayoneted in the back behind the lines, was actually running away, and indeed events prove him right.

There are stories here of courage and of love and of satire—of an tug-boat captain who goes down with his ship as he supervises the escape in what is ironically called, "The Swimming Event" of the bombed survivors whom he skillfully directs swimmers helping non-swimmers—to get to shore and safety. There is a satirical episode showing how the judges of an art exhibit completely lose their wits when a visiting critic stands in front of their unanimous choice and merely murmurs, "M—yes!" There

rale of a woman whose husband is an inveterate thief, and her struggle to reform him.

But it is the story by Nikolai Tihonov, "The Cavalcade" that is most evocative of an atmosphere—an exotic one. The narrator tells of riding to a village of the Lezgian people in the Caucasus, of Safar, the young and hot-blooded, of the group of Russian geologists stranded in the village, among them Natasha, the beautiful and tantalizing wife of the drunken accountant, of drinking and eating in the hut in a ceremony centuries old, the eerie look of the village right up against the glacier—and finally, as in a dream, the vision of Safar's horse waiting outside the house where Natasha lived, and all this watched by Safar's fiance, jealously alone in the darkness. All this is sheer romance, almost vision, as though encountered at the bottom of some moonlit green sea. It is the stuff of mythical opera and the matter of tales told at night long after the line between reality and dream had blurred, and where one ended and the other began the hearer would never know.

All this, you can see, is the mainstream of a literature that has not flowed off into dead little backwater ponds, there to stagnate, and like a dead eye, reflect only one dismal sky over and over. The story of daring deeds still survives. The romantic tale is still alive—along with the penetrating glance into obscure corners of the human heart. One has the unmistakable feeling in each writer that he is speaking from life to life, and that is why they all sound so natural. These stories are not bright nervous leaps from dark to dark—brilliant ellipses leaving the dark-

ness even darker than before.

They speak remarkably well for themselves, and that being the case, it is extremely ungracious of the publishers to imply on their dust cover that these writers are sneaking over a version of life otherwise concealed behind the "facade of Communist propaganda." After all, even their own biographical notes reveal that these are all Soviet citizens, and like Tihonov, who is a member of the Supreme Soviet, leaders of public opinion as well.

PHILLIP BONOSKY

Matthiessen's Eliot

The Achievement of T. S. Eliot, An Essay on the Nature of Poetry, by F. O. Matthiessen with additional chapters by C. L. Barber. Oxford University Press. \$4.50.

THE Oxford University Press has just re-issued F. O. Matthiessen's first major critical work, which they had published in 1935 and reprinted, with two additional chapters in 1947.

The present volume also includes a brief, introductory biography of Eliot, and a final chapter discussing his poetry and plays since 1947, by Professor C. L. Barber of Amherst College. Professor Barber was a student and close friend of Matthiessen's, and he has added to the expanded book a brief introductory appreciation of Matthiessen's work and life.

Barber's forty page final chapter on Eliot's more recent work—the speech accepting the Nobel Award in 1947,

several subsequent books of criticism, and the two plays, *The Confidential Clerk* and *Cocktail Party*—is intelligent, informative, and tactfully subordinate to Matthiessen's discussion. He is very respectful, but not adulatory, in his attitude to Eliot, and explicit in regretting the lack of intellectual excitement in the later criticism as well as the lack of intensity and "realized natural life" in both plays.

Although Barber nowhere judges it so, his specific analyses certainly indicate a sharp loss of power and value in Eliot's later work, despite its "shift in emphasis towards wider tolerance and equilibrium." Since there is, of course, no speculation on any fundamental cause for the decline the general diminishing leaves the reader feeling that the greater importance of the earlier subject-matter doubly justifies his concentration on the re-published rather than the new material.

This re-publication is not surprising. A "collective portrait" of Matthiessen, collaborated in by many associates immediately after his tragic suicide in 1950, achieved an unusually wide distribution; a selected volume of his fugitive essays and book reviews, *The Responsibility of the Critic*, enjoyed an exceptional sale on its appearance in 1952; and his long study of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman, *The American Renaissance*, has been generally accepted as the best literary criticism of that important period. His other two full length works, *Henry James: The Major Phase* and *Theodore Dreiser*, a critical biography, are also among the most valuable studies of their kind.

What is surprising is that so large,

varied and useful a body of criticism has remained almost undiscussed and unevaluated, except in the context of the two more or less memorial volumes mentioned above, and the somewhat similarly personal criticism prefacing the present work.

Perhaps the reason that Matthiessen is left unclaimed, and therefore little referred to, by either "formalist" or "social" literary critics, although both groups could learn much from him, is indicated by a statement in his preface to the 1947 edition of the present work, reprinted in toto here. He said there speaking of Eliot:

My growing divergence from his view of life is that I believe that it is possible to accept the 'radical imperfection' of man, and yet to be a political radical as well, to be aware that no human society can be perfect, and yet to hold that the proposition that 'all men are created equal' demands dynamic adherence from a Christian no less than from a democrat. But the scope of my book remains what it was before. I have not written about Eliot's politics or religion except as they are expressed through his poetry.

The careful ensuing examination of that expression in the poetry is, I think, both the best introduction to it for the dubious or antagonistic readers, and one of the most satisfactory summations of this side idolatry, for admirers. It is also an extraordinarily good object lesson in how to approach new and difficult poetic material without either ignoring its social context or attempting to establish an over-simplified one-to-one correspondence between the meaning of a poet's achievement and his own political understanding.

Since this is "An Essay on the Na-

ure of Poetry" as well as a study of an individual poet there are several enlightening general discussions of central problems facing the contemporary artist, where Eliot serves essentially as example rather than subject. One of these, which may seem very topical to many readers of *Mainstream* today, is the question of breadth of audience—of the necessary limits apparently self-imposed by poets who use the complex and concentrated idiom characteristic of "modern poetry" and whose public sometimes seems to decrease in direct proportion to their success.

Matthiessen somewhat wryly quotes Eliot's own statement that "the poet naturally prefers to write for as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible" and continues:

He knew that poems like *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*, richly significant as they may be on all the higher levels, virtually ignore the level of the pit. But the fact remains that the sincere artist writes not the way he would, but the way he must. And the most important value of the artist to society, and the one element that lends his work enduring significance, is to give expression to the most pervading qual-

ities of life as he has actually known it. . . . If, in severest analysis, the kind of poetry Eliot writes gives evidence of social disintegration, he has expressed that fact as the poet should, not by rhetorical proclamation, but by the very feeling of contemporary life which he has presented to the sensitive reader of his lines. And he has presented this not merely as something which the reader is to know through his mind, but is to know primarily as an actual physical experience, as a part of his whole being, through the humming pulsating evidence of his senses.

Anyone seriously concerned with the nature of poetry or, in fact of any art in our time will find this book rewarding as well as demanding reading, whether or not he finally agrees with Matthiessen's whole evaluation of Eliot. Other readers would perhaps be better advised to turn to his *Theodore Dreiser*. Those who read both will be even more impressed by the catholic taste and discrimination of a critic who has written perhaps the best and most understanding study of each of two such dissimilar figures.

ANNETTE T. RUBINSTEIN

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