Mainstream

A FRESH LOOK AT SOCIALIST REALISM

LOUIS ARAGON

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A FRESH LOOK AT SOCIALIST REALISM

LOUIS ARAGON

In the following article, one of the leading poets and novelists of our time discusses many of the questions which have agitated literary circles in both socialist and capitalist countries. His remarks speak for themselves, and we invite comment and argument on any of the issues dealt with by him. It will perhaps be helpful to the reader to know that *La Semaine Sainte* (*Holy Week*), referred to at some length, is Aragon's most recent novel. It is an historical work, its action taking place mainly during the week of March 19-26, 1815. It was then that Napoleon, marching on Paris after his return from Elba, entered the capital while Louis XVIII fled to the north.

To date, there are no plans to publish a translation of this novel in the United States, though it has been hailed in France as a masterpiece, and was so reviewed by Claude Mauriac in his Paris Literary Letter in the *New York Times* Book Review Section of March 8. We hope that the translation of this essay may stimulate some publisher to make a bid for the book.—*The Editors.*

THERE are writers who write as if they were never wrong. There are differences among them, to be sure: some write as if God, the Father, was made manifest in their words; others have no doubt they were chosen by fate to be literary geniuses; while still others write about communism, for example, as if they knew not only what it had been but what it is and what it will become. For the writers who don't share their point of view, they have nothing but contempt, condescension. Not that they actually read those others—they don't have to; they know exactly what other writers think just by riffling through the pages.

I disavow such attitudes. I have an endless interest in the multiplicity of paths that men pursue in their journey toward the light and the nature of their footsteps from the most timid to the most self-assured. I am, furthermore, convinced that any insight I acquired would be worthless if I alone possessed it. Far from being proud of being the

only one with vision among the blind, I hold that the faculty of sight is of little value when it is not shared.

I listen eagerly to new voices; everything that happens in literature—my *métier*—is of intense concern to me. I sincerely believe that every man possesses some part of the truth and that I may not possess that particular part. Each man moves toward the truth at his own gait, and if I notice his stumbling, I remember the false steps I myself have made—and those of which I am still capable.

It it seems senseless to me to be interested in only one's own thoughts, it seems even crazier to believe that another's thought can possibly wholly coincide with one's own. My concept of the world is rooted in contradictions. It is a world of men and women, often at odds with one another, who cannot even find out what they themselves are except in opposition to others. There is no light without shadow, and a book without light and shade is sheer nonsense. It hardly deserves to be opened. Nothing is so dangerous as mere prettified pictures with which one tries to seduce the spirit of man. If you like to be fed reassuring words—words that raise no problems in your mind and with which you agree in advance—I am not your man. Literature that eliminates the hazards and problems of life in several hundred pages can be dubbed Utopian literature. Nothing is so deceptive as Utopianism; it puts people to sleep, and when they are awakened to reality, they are like somnambulists at the edge of a roof from which they are surely doomed to fall.

For about the last 25 years, I have prided myself on a certain concept gard to society—that is, to my belief in socialism. But socialist realism ception of realist art corresponding to my general orientation with re as it is called, is not a conception of art fixed once and for all. If you want a final, immutable answer, just memorize the formulae. The term socialist realism is interpreted in a wide variety of ways; frequently what is produced under its name is rather a vulgar realism—or not realism at all. It may be a photographic arrangement, a form of naturalism it may be a vulgarized popular art onto which the writer tacks a so-called communist morality for the edification of the "honest worker." In recent article Pierre Daix aptly describes such books as "paternalistic

THESE forms of socialist realism are not for me. I am concerned with men whose fate is not predetermined, with minds not committed in advance to what they think is political necessity. It is in books that never pretended to be grounded in socialist realism that I have most often discerned the elements which, examined in the light of this very realism

permitted me to learn and grow. Such books directed my critical faculties toward the socialist realism that my convictions have led me to consider the final goal of all art. The writer who thus unwittingly helps me to find the road I am seeking may be far from sharing my views; indeed, his ideas may wound me, may be inimical to me.

I pity those who cannot endure ideas in books that are not their own or who cannot find in opposing ideas something that may further their own. There are those who create a soft little world where nothing ever contradicts them: a Utopia to read about in their easy chairs, as they lay aside all the books with which they disagree. This approach endangers not only literature but the thought process itself. If literature had to begin at the point where there was unquestioned agreement, if literature had to be dogmatic, it would be written by authors for their own prototypes alone. Under the highly debatable excuse of class interest, the national character of literature would be lost, its universal reference null and void.

This is not to imply that the class viewpoint must not exist in literature. There is always a class viewpoint in books; it is only a question of knowing which class. The class viewpoint of the author must give rise to values which will be recognized beyond his class limits. Bourgeois literature has indeed produced countless books which are valuable as inspirational sources for men and women who are not of the bourgeoisie. There is no reason why this situation should not also obtain in reverse. But, in one case as in the other, the criterion of value must be the national character of the work. A valid work must be set in a national context; that is to say, it is not the isolated product of one great man independent of his contemporaries. A good book is born out of the matrix of the literature of its own time and the literary heritage of its nation. If a writer is dull-witted enough to permit a rupture between his work and that national origin, he isn't acting against the interests of other writers but against his own. If he deprives himself of the conditions under which a work of art can live and breathe, then he is floundering on the beach like a fish out of water.

There is a basic difference between the development of socialist realism and that of past literary schools. These latter could only remain alive by condemning everything that was unlike them; they were exclusive groups, engaging in polemic against all but the insiders. Socialist realism is something else again—it can only function in relation to the outside world; it can interpret and even incorporate elements that are opposed to it, because its goal is not to bring about the triumph of any

one style but to create a conception of the world. I know that not everyone boasting of his socialist realism will agree with me—but there's not much I can do about that.

It seems to me frivolous to think of socialist realism as an entrenched art method which has entered a race with its rivals. My approach to it isn't dogmatic; I believe that the author who prides himself on possessing this method should enrich his art by it—not as if he were on a private preserve, but rather on the public preserve wherever he can find good pasture—and always with critical reservations.

Socialist realism is the advance wing of literature, but do not suppose that this wing exists apart from the rest of the army. If you divide up literature between yourself and the "others," you are simply mutilating the body of the whole organism, and the wing you boast of becomes nothing but a dead, amputated limb. Since there would no longer be a link between the main body and the advance wing, you would not be likely to see writers joining it who have written from a different point of view or who haven't been aware of the elements which socialist literature shares with their own art. It is not literature that would go down in this process but socialist realism. This, moreover, is what, in varying *tones of voice,* the *others* are trying to persuade us of: that socialist realism will disappear, that those who have practiced it will give it up. Myself, for instance.

THE reverberations which arose recently after the publication of my novel, *La Semaine Sainte,* provide an example of what I am trying to say. Some critics, whose political convictions are not in the least like mine, were honest enough to recognize that the book was the work of a man who remained what he had been politically—that this was a novel by a Communist. This was the case with Emile Henriot of *Le Monde* and Gabriel d'Aubarède in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires.* A certain number of critics, however, chose to draw a contrary conclusion, i.e., that the author had abandoned all his previous ideas and particularly socialist realism.

I am not referring to those who tried—and there were a few—to perform an over-simple political operation on me by stating I had changed sides. They were not at all put out of countenance by the fact that the book had been applauded by the Central Committee of the French Communist Party and given a warm reception by the Soviet press, as, for example, in the article that appeared in the theoretical organ of the Soviet Party, the *Kommunist.* True, there are some critics who wrote in good faith. The book is set in a period around 1815, and

they had made up their minds that socialist realism is applicable only to purely contemporary works. They hadn't noticed, for instance, that in the Soviet Union *Peter The Great* by Alexei Tolstoi is considered an achievement of socialist realism.

But I don't think this is the place to discuss at length errors of so primitive a character. Nor do I agree with a writer in the West German daily (the *Spiegel* of Hamburg), who wrote that *La Semaine Sainte* would not have had the acclaim of the bourgeois and clerical critics if they hadn't believed that they detected in it certain signs that the author had, for the first time in 30 years, established a distance between himself and his party. I told Gabriel d'Aubarède (and he repeated it faithfully) that if I weren't a Communist, I should not have been able to write the book. This is not a random statement nor a carefully prepared defense. The critics who have singled out this or that detail of the book as startling for a Communist have in every case chosen the details of the book which arose precisely from my Communist principles and are definitely not in contradiction to them. What *is* surprising is the critics' own erroneous conception of Communism.

But I haven't the slightest intention of defending myself or my book —neither its success nor its quality—I only want to comment on what goes beyond the book itself, what it conveys about socialist realism—whose deterioration and abandonment is always being proclaimed. This state of affairs is said to be signalized by *La Semaine Sainte.* Quite the contrary. The book does not constitute an abandonment of socialist realism but its affirmation and development. In this connection, I'd like to discuss the opposition that exists in many minds between this book and my previous novel, *Les Communistes.*

When *La Semaine Sainte* came out, there was an attempt made by certain critics to set *Les Communistes* against not only this novel but against the preceding novels, particularly *Aurélien,* as though *Les Communistes* had been written in an altogether different manner. Actually, *Les Communistes* was the culminating point of the four novels which had preceded it. The difference between it and the others—if any—was due to the experience I had acquired in writing the others.

In the first of the novels of *Le Monde Réel* series*—*Les Cloches De Bâle*—inexperience is evident; the construction of the book is rather artificial; nonetheless it is this novel which marks my first attempt to adapt modern realism to my cherished ideology. It is also in the final

**Le Monde Réel* (*The Real World*) is the general title of the series of four novels mentioned in the above paragraph, the English titles of which are respectively *The Bells of Basel, Residential Quarter, The Century Was Young* (published in England under the title *Passengers of Destiny*), and *Aurélien.* No part of *Les Communistes* has appeared in English.

pages of *Les Cloches de Bâle,* as I will show a little later, that I announced the project which was to culminate in *Les Communistes.* If *Les Beaux Quartiers* seems to be an answer to *Les Cloches de Bâle,* so far as its construction is concerned, it is almost as if I had wanted to give a cue to my critics by pointing out conclusions I had myself drawn by then. Before I began the book announced in the final pages of *Les Cloches de Bâle,* I had to make further experiments, particularly in the field of construction. *Les Voyageurs de L'Impériale* is the result of a quarter of a century of effort during which I disciplined myself to make construction less apparent. With *Aurélien* I deliberately set out to make the novel revolve around the development of one or two characters—in contradistinction to my method in preceding novels.

FURTHERMORE, I needed to write these novels in order to prepare to develop characters for a novel of greater scope, in which I wanted to be able to touch only lightly on their past. No outline of this most recent novel, nor of those that led me to it, was clearly formed in my mind, but from the outset I had decided to give the novels a certain line so that they might lead to the book I had planned to write as long ago as *Les Cloches de Bâle,* that is, since 1934. The common soil from which the characters sprang had to become an even more important consideration after *Aurélien,* in which certain persons reappear—as, for instance, Diane de Nettencourt from *Les Cloches de Bâle,* Edmond Barbentane from *Les Beaux Quartiers,* and Uncle Blaise from *Les Voyageurs de L'Impériale.* In this respect, *Aurélien,* to use the painter's terminology, prepared the canvas for *Les Communistes* and was a most significant element in its preparation. It is precisely this careful readying of the canvas to which the critics have taken exception.

Let's take a look at *Aurélien. Les Voyageurs* was finished at the outbreak of the war in 1939, but *Aurélien* was written entirely during the Occupation. I wanted to portray, as sensitively as I could, a man of my own generation, that is, a man whose moral and intellectual development came out of World War I, so as to contrast this man with one of the younger generation, who was only 20, say, during World War II: Jean de Moncey in *Les Communistes.* I intended a parallel between the old soldiers who had returned to civilian life in the wake of victory and the 40-year-olds who had returned in the atmosphere of defeat. I myself was under the influence of this defeat, as I searched for characters of national significance born out of one or the other war.

Aurélien, written between 1940 and 1943, was for me, above all (as the first chapter shows), the picture of a man thrown back into civilian

fe in a world that had gone on changing without him—bearing a cer-ıin resemblance in the beginning to Colette's hero in *La Fin de Chérie,* novel for which I have always had a profound admiration, precisely ecause the author reveals in it her sharp awareness of the disparity etween the changes in men who have been fighting and those in the ʏomen they have left behind—women whose life has gone on more or ess normally while their men were at war. Of course, *Aurélien* tells a uite different story. It is another sort of description of the post-war eriod of its time. In Colette's realism there is no whisper of socialism—ou can be sure of that. It is, nevertheless, a good example of the direc-ion taken by romanticism in our century. The road that leads from *La in de Chérie* to *Les Communistes,* passing through *Aurélien* on the way, ıay not be apparent to everyone; nevertheless it exists, and it is from ıat road that my own romantic thinking starts out.

THE pivot about which *Aurélien* revolves—both the book and its protagonist—is the scene in the restaurant near Sacré Coeur, where ıe officers of Aurélien's regiment are having a reunion. The love story f Aurélien and Bérénice is projected against the background of the poch by means of the scene of the reunion of the veterans—with all ıeir regrets and disappointments. The book actually ends on page 478—ʏithout the epilogue. That is to say, it ends in 1923, with the sentence, At the beginning of February, he (Aurélien) wrote to his brother-in-ıw that after having thoroughly considered everything, he was going to ʏork in the plant." In other words, at the point when Aurélien decides ɔ rejoin his social class, such as it is, and be a bourgeois like anyone lse. I thought of this ending as a sort of parallel to the ending of *es Beaux Quartiers*—and in contrast with it—where Armand Barben-ıne actually leaves his class and goes over to the proletariat. Only, when was writing *Aurélien,* I had already begun to write another book ʏhose setting was to be World War II, just as *Aurélien's* was World ʏar I. I wanted to record my memories instantly—particularly those of ıe military events which I had witnessed. I made notes—certain sec-ons of which took on the aspect of chapters of the novel—on the phony war," particularly as it manifested itself in a worker's regiment –the material which subsequently became the beginning of the second olume of *Les Communistes.* I also made notes on the exodus from aris, some of which I set aside and hardly used, but I did utilize at nce those which helped me to set forth the life of Aurélien and the eath of Bérénice. In the course of events from the end of 1940 to 1943, specially under the conditions of illegal existence, the desire became too

strong for me—the temptation to bring *Aurélien,* a book out of my past, into my present—from the epilogue which shows Aurélien arriving, with his regiment in retreat, to R., the town in the southwest where for almost twenty years Bérénice had lived separated from him.

Les Communistes is the novel I took longest to write, by far. I wrote the pages referred to above, now the second volume of the novel, in 1941. It appeared in October 1949, the second volume having already been published just before summer vacation. I carried around with me (under the existing illegal conditions) both my notes and some sparse chapters. Sometimes when German raids threatened, I was obliged to bury the tin box in which I carried them. However, aside from a section drafted in 1945 when I was condemned to a prolonged rest in the Basses Pyrénées, it was not until 1948 that I undertook the systematic writing of *Les Communistes.* It took a little less than three years, about the same length of time as did *La Semaine Sainte.*

Les Communistes brought together the various threads of the destinies of the characters of my previous novels, both the principal and the minor ones. The new characters are primarily those of the new generation, those who reached the romantic age only on the eve of the war, in 1939. It must be understood that Jean de Moncey is developed as a contrasting character to Aurélien, and Cecile Wisner in contrast to Bérénice. Their lives, in the very different conditions of 1920 and 1940, unfold quite differently one from the other. Defeat reveals the stupidity of the prejudices that had driven Bérénice away from Aurelien, and at the same time it brings Cécile and Jean together. The continuity of *Le Monde Réel* is here maintained by Armand Barbentane, the man whose development takes place—in contrast to that of Aurélien—in the light of his political consciousness, which leads him to reject the conditions of the class he came from, rather than to accept them as does Aurélien.

I WAS thus able to show for each character a line that carried over from the preceding novels of *Les Communistes,* and the shadowy recto that one character or another assumes is set off against the clear face of another. Indeed, the strict interdependence of *Les Communistes* and the four preceding novels is established. Here I want only to sketch the movement. It seems to me that up to now the critics have not seen the strong link, the circulation of blood under the surface of the novels, the osmosis occuring between one book and the next.

But it is true that *Les Communistes* has characteristics of its own since it was written after the other four novels and profited from the experience I had acquired in writing them. My critics are always astor

ished that I do not write again what I have already written—things which were sharply enough criticized when they appeared, but which, in the light of distance, awaken belated regrets. When *Les Communistes* appeared, I was criticized for not crowding my canvas with characters, as I had previously done, and for having effaced myself in the writing of it. Please note that I never realized how dear I was to certain critics that they should bemoan my self-effacement, which, after all, goes back to the old Balzacian tradition. No one seemed to be aware of the fact that while my previous novels dealt with epochs 20 or 30 or more years in the past, *Les Communistes* was contemporary. The author naturally had to efface himself somewhat more than in previous books, since this one is strongly autobiographical, in spite of certain transpositions and the transfer to other characters of episodes relating to my own military life in 1939-40.

Another characteristic peculiar to *Les Communistes*—and this owes its significance to the psychological reactions of the critics—is that in this book I approached the description of the war of 1940 in its entirety (in the fifth and sixth volumes), and in a fashion of which future historians of the period will have to take account. Here, too, the development of realism, which gives *Les Communistes* a differently conditioned historical character from that of *La Semaine Sainte,* seems to have escaped the critics altogether. To my knowledge, there has been only one serious article on the subject, in a review in the Ardennes section by a non-professional critic, who patiently reconstructed the route I followed when I was in his region and rediscovered, one after another, the men and women of whom I had written. This critic is the only one who has studied scientifically what there was of science in the method I used in writing *Les Communistes.*

If one compares the last two volumes of *Les Communistes* with *La Semaine Sainte* (strange that no critic has thought of doing this), it is obvious that I could never have described as I did the movements of the Maison du Roi in all their diversity if I had not previously had the experience of describing the war of 1940 in *Les Communistes.* If one examines the texts of both books, it will be seen that the documentary method, the method of expression, the style of writing, are extraordinarily close, indeed that there is between one book and the other almost a relationship of cause and effect.

SOME of you may recall that ten years ago I remarked that the title *Les Communistes* was originally intended to be understood in a

feminine sense—that it really should have been called *Les Femmes Communistes*. This is not just an idle jest. In *Les Communistes,* women played a primary role at a time when the mobilization and imprisonment of men left the field free for the initiative of women—particularly those women who were responsible for reconstituting the Communist Party under illegal conditions. In the novel, as it happens (despite its title), the central role is given to Cécile Wisner, who is not a Communist and by whom the right path of action was chosen even though it was not illuminated by conviction.

As a matter of fact, this was natural in a book written at a time when the prisoners and exiles were returning to liberated France, expressing their universal amazement at the transformation that had occurred among women. "I don't recognize my wife," was the most frequent expression that one heard about this social fact of such primary importance, which resulted in gaining for French women the political rights so long denied them. This came about almost without question, without debate—like the recognition of a fact of life.

So far as I am concerned, this aspect of *Les Communistes* carries out my original plan for the book—the promise made in the last pages of *Les Cloches de Bâle.*

With this book the novel of chivalry ends and a new kind of romantic novel is born. Here, for the first time in history, genuine love finds a place—unsullied by male supremacy and the obsession with sex, untouched by the money domination of man over woman or woman over man. Modern woman comes on the scene and it is she whom I celebrate; it is she whom I will continue to celebrate.

Should it not be clear from this how the cycle of *Le Monde Réel* unfolds from *Les Cloches,* built on the fate of three women, Diane, Catherine, Clara; and how Colette's thinking about the women in *La Fin de Chéri* (women who learned to get along without men in conducting their money matters) wound up in my portrayal of women who had taken in hand the political tasks of absent men and reconstituted the Communist Party?

In this sense, *Les Communistes* completes the curve of the *Monde Réel.* The book strengthens the position I have repeatedly maintained, one which found its expression in the preface to *Les Yeux d'Elsa,* where I challenged the point of view of Henri de Montherlant and his contempt for what he called "the morality of the midinette." This sort of misogyny carries with it a kind of fascist conception of a "virile brotherhood," relegating women to the kitchen. Under the conditions of the Vichy

regime, at the precise time when the role of women in the rebirth of their country was decisive, I was forced to take a detour in order to fight against this contempt of women, and I therefore decided to set against the despicable concept of the "morality of the midinette" a tradition profoundly rooted in France—the morality of chivalry—the reason-for-being of women in the middle ages and a powerful current in the poetry of that time, particularly in the Oc country whose people were among the most progressive in France. Actually, this was in line with my present concern, which found expression in *Les Communistes* and has not ceased to pervade everything I have written, from *Les Yeux d'Elsa,* seventeen years ago, to the poem called *Elsa,* which I wrote this year. It is a reaffirmation of the role of women in modern life and the new significance of the life of the couple, not symbolically but as a reality of flesh and blood, which for me can have only one name.

AT the end of the war, in 1945, at the time the exiles were returning, I wanted to crystallize my thoughts about the medieval tradition. It had colored the poetry I wrote during the Occupation and was again expressed in a book issued under the title *Les Poissons Noirs*—the preface to the poem *Le Musée Grévin* in the legal edition (after the Liberation) of a clandestine poem of 1943.

I wanted to write, and indeed I began to write, a historical novel which started out with a day in Whitsuntide, in the middle of the 12th century, at Pont-de-l'Arche, where the King of France was giving a sumptuous banquet to his vassals. My purpose was to extend the method of modern realism into this paradoxical framework, to demonstrate the scientific method just where one would not expect it. This was doing things the hard way, risking the misunderstandings which were sure to confront me, even among my friends.

I failed in that enterprise, but it was not wholly useless, because, on the one hand, it made me aware of my limitations; and, on the other, it taught me the demanding character of the realistic method. The distance between the world around me and the world I tried to reconstruct was, in truth, too great. The method necessary was similar to that which the scientist uses to reconstruct a dinosaur from its jaw bone. From the first step, I realized my ignorance and the impossibility of overcoming it—the task of reconstructing a society utterly different from our own. Confronted with this, my very language commenced to crumble, because every spontaneous image ran the risk of imprinting the most naively anachronistic detail on a distant reality.

The number of verbs, for example, which I attempted to do without because these verbs appeared in French centuries after Philippe-Auguste, thanks to a minor development in technology, a modification in agricultural tools—all of which we have forgotten. It is as difficult to write a novel of a period so primitive in its tools and products as it is to write fiction based on the future. In any case, not knowing how clothes were fastened, not having an exact reproduction of a 12th century button, not knowing the type of textiles available so as to give some picture of the clothes of the time, not knowing the condition of the roads and how they were built—all this proved a sufficient checkmate to my realism. I gave it up.

I wrote *Les Communistes* with the constant sense of what was impossible for me because of the limitations of my vision but with the kind of intoxication that the thought of controlling contemporary reality gives me. In *this* sense, it might be said that the author is here completely involved; he does not efface himself at all. Even if he never says "I," he is speaking only of what he sees, has seen, or could have seen —or that which he has verified, touched or controlled with his own hand. He is the St. Thomas of our time; he has to put his hand on the very wound in the side of Christ.

THE critics of *La Semaine Sainte* seemed to be astonished by what they called by objectivity. I wrote about men I should have hated (according to them) and should have represented as monsters or as caricatures. In other words, I was realistic, not polemical. But the truth is that the polemics of the realistic novel consist not in the distortion of specific characters but in the general interpretation of the period. To understand and create a character who is my social enemy (if my beliefs are correct) is far more convincing to readers than to put a carnival mask on a living, breathing person.

I happen to be the author of a poem—*La Rose et le Réséda*—upon which a reverend Father commented favorably during a Lenten holiday, from the heights of the pulpit at Nôtre Dame. So, what is there extraordinary in the fact that I should also have placed on the same level "He who believed in heaven/and he who didn't believe at all"? What seems to be most curious is that people set *La Semaine Sainte* against *Les Communistes* with respect to *objectivity*. I can only explain this by assuming that these critics have read nothing of *Les Communistes* except its title—certainly not its six volumes.

Should I call to their attention the fact that Jean de Moncey (the character in whom French youth of 1940 is symbolized and on whom

the sympathy of author and reader is centered) takes as his ideal Michel Vieuchange of Smara, a South Moroccan traveller who gave his life trying to discover a lost city in the desert? Should I also recall Colonel Avoine and the *objectivity* of the author vis-à-vis this officer, whose son was a religious recluse and who was himself a practicing Catholic? Should I ask the critics to remember the portrait of the priest l'Abbé Blomet, who reared Jean de Moncey; or the tragedy of the generals in Flanders in the month of May, in which the author's sympathy was clearly shown for Generals Dame, Molinie, Langlois, Prioux, La Laurencie, Billotte, Blanchard and others? Was this sympathy any less, whatever their conduct may have been, than that which the author of *La Semaine Sainte* showed toward the marshals of the Empire? Or should I recall my treatment of the characters de Monzie or M. Paul Reynaud—in no sense caricatures? This evoked surprise and reproaches ten years ago from some comrades who had become accustomed to hearing these men spoken of in somewhat different terms in *L'Humanité.* But it is entirely possible that those who express such views on my novel have not read the pages on the heroic death of Lieutenant de Versigny and his men in their tanks—Versigny, the Royalist, who had in his pocket at the moment of death the photograph of S.A.R., la comtesse de Paris. Nor can they have read the description of the battle of La Horgne, the epic of the Spahis and of their chief, Colonel Marc, whose thinking, I can assure you, was not in the least like my own.

They have understood nothing of what an old fighter of 1940 like myself has in common with these soldiers who wished to die for France in the time of lilies and roses—so much in common, indeed, that I weep when I reread these passages. What difference is there, aside from political convictions, between *La Semaine Sainte* and *Les Communistes?* Let me put it this way: *La Semaine Sainte* is a book wherein I write of men who were not difficult for me to love with all my heart and in tranquillity, while *Les Communistes* describes the rending apart of France, of my countrymen whose perils and griefs I shared, and here the objectivity demanded was in a different way great and terrible, direct and human. Forgive me if I become emotional, but I have just reread *Les Communistes* to see if I weren't deluding myself—and laugh at me if you will—when I came to the May days, my throat filled up with all that the passages brought back to me of what I had seen, of my one-time companions—whether they were socialists or monarchists —and of all the monstrous waste of human possibilities—and of our wonderful country all dismembered.

How then can anyone be astonished when I speak of Maréchal Berthier in a certain tone? Where the devil could I have learned to do this if not in the French Army, on the battlefields of Flanders and Artois, where the action of *Les Communistes* takes place? I swear that it was the writing of *Les Communistes* that taught me to write *La Semaine Sainte*—if this is not obvious by now.

For the realist extracts his art from reality, and I never would have understood the soldiers of Napoleon or of Louis XVIII if I hadn't served in the Army of Foch, as Aurélien did, or in that of the pitiable Gamelin, as Barbentane and Jean de Moncey did.

Yes, I am a realist. I pride myself on realism in the novel as I do in poetry. Perhaps neither *La Semaine Sainte* nor *Elsa* appear to the critics who praise them as being typically realist. But this may be perhaps because we do not understand each other, they and I, any more on the meaning of realism than we do on the meaning of Communism.

I WILL now speak of realism.

In 1883, the great English novelist Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in his *Notes on Realism in Literature,* "The great change in the literature of today from that of the last century has been brought about by the introduction of detail." To grasp the full sense of this statement, it must, of course, be read in context. But Stevenson's meaning can be seen by understanding the way in which he uses the word *detail*. Observation has always existed in art. There are numerous examples of this in the paintings of the Middle Ages, for example; and there is no novel in the 18th century (or for that matter in any century) that does not possess a certain degree of realistic observation.

But *detail* is another matter: it characterizes a certain kind of romanticism, in contradistinction to the abstractions of classicism; and Stevenson who uses, naturally, the terminology of his age and is himself a great realist, takes issue with the cult of detail because of the overabundance of photographic particulars in naturalism (which he confuses with realism and which he considers a sort of degeneration of romanticism).

I must explain, if only parenthetically, how I understand the word *detail* as used in Stevenson's comment. In the non-realistic art of the past, detail was the tip of reality's nose from which the artist could not escape. You see it in the arches and chapels of Vezelay; in the descriptions of heaven and hell at that time; in the forms of sculpture; in the

moral and political allusions. It is also to be found in the phantasmagoric scenes of Breughel, which are realistic in detail. But classicism, especially French classicism, in the process of reducing description to an old-fashioned device while exalting the *idea* (the thesis, one might say, behind the observation of detail), opposed romanticism which had brought about a rebirth of detail, whether gothic or contemporary, Scott or Balzac. The end point of this evolution is Zola. Detail with him, at least originally, takes on a critical and political aspect, in opposition to the spirit of the Second Empire.

But in the reactionary outlook that had originally given rise to naturalism, there was a dash of sanity, because now detail, instead of lending weight to the entire work of art, here tended to be an end in itself—and the trees, so to speak, obscured the forest. In the 20th century, no more than in preceding periods, has it been possible to create any art that can get along without detail, without observation, without reality. Even in those works quite remote from realism, the reality of detail still plays a preponderant part; indeed it is in these works that detail may dominate the entire scene. I am not making this point against the Symbolists or the Surrealists; nor against Proust or Joyce. I am saying only that articles of faith against realism are always accompanied by art that cannot get long without reality and that pits itself against realism only by refusing to bring some kind of order into reality—that is the triumph of detail, independent of its broad significance.

THE battle in art has never been concerned with pure invention (which, in any case is non-existent) against observation (without which the artist cannot function), but with the real significance of a work of art as against its trivia. Freedom in art has always consisted in giving meaning to the works produced; enslavement has always arisen from the external forces which have tried to limit the field of observation as much as possible and to control the kind of meaning an artist embodies in his work.

Art has at all times waged a great battle for liberty. And *detail,* for those who have had an interest in stifling this liberty, has at times seemed dangerous, in the sense that it may expose things these gentry would prefer to have passed over in silence. As usual, however, when they have grasped the thought that detailed observation could also engross the artist to the point of making him forget the struggle, that one could focus his attention on detail and then put blinders on him

on the pretext of better enabling him to see the detail, these enemies of freedom in art have then adopted detail for their own. Such people always borrow from the stock-in-trade of creative inventors in order to put hobbles on creation.

This is the history of naturalism, the "slice of life," and the use that is made of it when one ceases to struggle against ideas at first thought of as "revolutionary," and succeeds in imposing on the creative spirit limitations of description void of general meaning. Here one finds one's self joining up again with the old reactionary concept of art for art's sake—an interpretation aimed at restricting the artist to the fashioning of a kind of family album, which makes us laugh because of the outmoded costumes or because of an accidentally true re-creation of this family, that is to say, as it really was, against the background of the society in which it really existed. The God of Israel once forbade the reproduction of the human figure but has since, for better or for worse, lost the power to sustain this interdiction. The bourgeoisie collects family pictures and would like to restrict its artists to this pursuit as well.

THE freedom of the artist is newly affected every time the sanctions imposed upon art change character, seemingly to adapt themselves to new developments, but actually with the purpose of continuing to restrict the artist. Once there was a great literary invention: that of making animals talk and say things that would not have been tolerated if a human being said them; but suppose writers were doomed to repeating endlessly the inventions of the *Roman de Renart?* In doing this, would they not actually be accepting the restrictions the device had been intended to circumvent? This happens at every stage in the history of literature and art—as much in the realm of form as in the realm of content.

To cite another example. Since the 12th century, we have enjoyed a significant change, that is, the introduction of French meters into poetry, so that it might have meaning for the popular ear. The old Latin rhythms were incomprehensible, at least to the unlettered . The memory device of rhyme, joined to that of counted lines with an equal number of syllables in each, made it possible for certain ineradicable associations of words to enter the consciousness and the memory of the hearer. (This at a time when books did not yet exist and when the great majority of people could not, in any case, read.) The art of song in poetry took on

such importance that it outlasted by many centuries the conditions under which it had been created. Long after man had invented books and methods of multiplying them, and after words and phrases could be fixed in memory by other means, the song device retained its magic.

Little by little, however, and to the degree that this invention ceased to be a means and became an end in itself, it fell into insignificance. The poet's freedom was put into question again, and when poets abandons the traditional forms of song for what they called *vers libre* (verse freed of "ancient" restraints), it is certain that they were moved by more than esthetic considerations. This formal liberty more and more, in the 20th century, has become a qualified liberty for the poet. The negation of the old song form became in itself a form of art for art's sake in poetry and the ban on the writing of regular or rhythmic verse took on the character of a veritable tyranny. It is thirty years now since the problem first presented itself to me: how to convey the content, the true meaning to a poem. Should I use the help supplied by the song form when I wanted to make sure that people who were not scholars would hear me? I admit that public opinion exerts a powerful influence and that critics and scholars have the means for creating this opinion. My declaration of independence, then, consisted in defying the style of my time, a style as firmly established as that of the 18th century Cupids with their bows and arrows. I just went on writing verses that sang, to people who might enjoy them without preliminary scholarship—in short, I wrote verses in the tradition of French poetry, in *vers non libre.*

I have, however, never ceased to write in other styles as well, and recently it has been cited as an example of my "contradictions" that in my recent poems the proportion of regular to unmetered verse is not the same as it was in 1943. At that time I wrote *Brocéliande,* a poem equally partaking of verse of both types. My independence resides precisely in that I am not obliged to render an account in these matters —I am not in bondage to one form any more than to another. In any case, I don't consider form as an end but merely as a means, and what is important to me is to find the vehicle for what I have to say, while taking into account the variations in the education of those whom I am addressing. What matters is to catch their attention and their memory, to create by one medium or another those unforgettable linkages of words designed to make thoughts enter men's minds and change them —just as science is changing their ways of work; just as society goes on changing without regard to the rules set up for works of art.

IN POETRY, indeed, certain contradictions appear which are no less singular than those in novels. "Detail" here comes into the picture by way of writers who are far from calling themselves realists. Shall I go all the way back to Hugo who said, *"au long fruit d'or/Va, tu n'es qu'une poire!"* ("to the long fruit of gold, you are only a pear!"? After all it was a poet in the symbolist tradition, Guillaume Apollinaire, who introduced into poetic language the greatest number of hitherto "mysteriously forbidden words," as Paul Eluard was to call them later —words considered non-poetic. Thus, he gave birth to modern detail in the contemporary poem—detail which had not up to now entered into poetry . By this means, he opened up the sluices of life, made possible the passage from spoken to written language, and permitted the unfiltered realities of the world to pass into what had seemed the fixed realm of the poem.

And this matter of detail, lyric detail, which came out of a passionate love of creation, of invention, had nothing in common with the detail of which Stevenson spoke, i.e., photographic detail, naturalism, the slice of life. Rather it is a vehicle for the conscience of men; not photographic recording, but a record of the changing reality of life itself.

That is why modern realism has multiple sources, some of them apparently contradictory, and the art of this century is not dominated by detail but utilizes and controls detail, having learned from the multiple experiences of the past. One can claim to be a naturalistic observer, on condition that observation remains a means and not an end, and an idealist (in the literary sense of the word), to the degree that experiment in language is not an end in itself but a means of expressing ideas.

Periodically, this has arisen as a subject of discussion—that is, are we dealing with a new romanticism or a new classicism? As for me I refuse to be fenced in by this artificial dilemma. From romanticism just as from classicism, the man of tomorrow will take just what he needs. He will not repeat what yesterday's man has already done; but it would be childish of him to deny the validity of experience on the pretext that it is romantic or classic, naturalist or symbolist. New art resides in the new critical principle that it brings to anterior experience, in the interpretation it gives of reality. The new art is of necessity also new realism, which shows at one and the same time both the tree and the forest and knows why it shows them. It is an active realism as far as possible alien to art for art's sake, realism which aims to help man, to light him on his way; which takes into account the true direction

of his march forward; and which retains a vanguard position in this march.

This assumes an understanding on the artist's part of the nature of man's progression; the nature of what lags behind in this march, and of what one might call the new stage of human evolution. I know I will surprise no one if I say that this stage for me and for a great number of others is called socialism and that the new realism can hardly help calling itself socialist realism. Socialism is the key word.

IT is a fact that this verbal designation of the new art was invented in the USSR and that all we are doing is adopting that name for our own realism. But isn't it true, too, that romanticism was adopted as a term and as a definition from German philosophy and literature? In any given period, the movement of minds gathers its treasures where it can. Socialist realism was developed in the USSR under quite different conditions from those which could have been created in France. Above all, since socialism is the doctrine of the state, socialist realism in the Soviet Union from the beginning was based on an agreement between the artist and the leaders of society, whereas, in France, under present social conditions, socialist realism can only be an art in opposition.

From this fact stem the differences between socialist realism in the USSR and in France—it would be absurd to deny them—and these account for the contradictions in the conceptions of socialist realism here and there. But this should not lead us to ignore the Soviet experience, characterized as it is by the creation of an immense new public, without precedent in the history of literature and art—an essential fact with which the writer and the artist must deal, insofar as he is concerned with the impact of his own work and with its survival.

However, no more in the Soviet Union than anywhere else, can I accept as an unanswerable argument the idea that in the domain of socialist realism this or that thesis must be considered *proven.* Here, Lenin's observation that one cannot put matters of art to a vote has more validity than any argument about authority based on universal consent. Similarly, a concept like socialist realism can and should cross frontiers, should never be frozen into the mold of an untouchable definition. International experience of realism demands the continual confrontation of production with its principles. Even more, I believe it is necessary to re-examine socialist realism not only in the light of its principles and its results but in the light of experiences that

are exterior, even contradictory, to it. In this may lies its greatness: that it has the power to interpret these experiences and to illuminate them; to assimilate them and to extract from them all that is in line with human progress. In other words, socialist realism is not given to us ready made; it is what we make of it for ourselves. It has its roots deep in the immense heritage of our past. Any conception that tends to cut these roots will wither the branches, too. Socialist realism, in other words, presupposes a critique that preserves the heritage of the past, illuminating it and permitting those who follow to continue drawing on this stream of thought. Socialist realism cannot thrive on formulae. In order for it to grow, criticism and literature must grow and expand along with it. This new criticism will be to the old criticism what Victor Hugo, at the end of his *William Shakespeare,* said of history:

"History should be made over—that is evident; it has always up to now been written from the miserable point of view of fact; it is time to write it from the point of view of principle."

ONE need not balk at this idea! Of course, the truth is that history doesn't exist outside of facts, of deeds; and it never entered Hugo's mind to deny this. Here this genius of a man simply states the truth that the accumulation of mere facts is only a sort of naturalism in history and that the facts must be thought over, organized and illuminated from the point of view of principle. Here, I'm not talking of history but of literature, and Hugo's phrase has value for me as a kind of parallel. The facts of literature for the critic are the books themselves, and sometimes it is necessary to oppose the people who would deny the facts in the name of principle—as, for example, in the name of socialism. At the same time, when it comes to facts—the works themselves—a critic who believes in socialist principles must judge them in that framework, too. Socialism includes, as part of its program, the progress of the writer, his passage from individual discovery to collaboration in the battle of the majority of mankind. The socialist critic himself bears a great responsibility here, and each one of us is a critic when he reads—whether with enthusiasm or rejection.

I say this because even more than those critics who speak of books without having read them, I distrust those whose demands are such that no one in the world could satisfy them. These we will always have with us, and when they judge from the reactionary standpoint, I am not too much concerned. But I am concerned when the vanguard critic, the critic who is one of us, calls for constantly raising

the sights: the bride is never beautiful enough, the poem or novel is never realistic enough, socialist enough. Socialist realism is not unreachable fruit on the topmost branch; it is here among us. For us to know it and recognize it, is the point.

Further, my conception of socialist realism is a broad one. I believe it should avoid any rupture between the vanguard and the mass; that it should safeguard the continuity of national literature, remaining hospitable to other forms of expression. If it does not assume this function, it will hardly be able to advance on the road to scientific realism, on the road to socialism. It will remain a sectarian, scholastic art incapable of rising above polemics to the creation of literature, of an art that will serve as a ladder to the future.

I see how what I have said here could be interpreted as a break with the communist conception of struggle—the class struggle, which one isn't permitted to bypass. Permit me to refer to a passage in an article, too little known (and so important in many ways), which Laurent Casanova published in the *Cahiers du Communisme* of February, 1958, and which has been reproduced in part in *Pravda.*

> . . . The Party knows that it cannot without danger, in a country like France, reduce or seem to reduce the progressive current of thought to a single Marxist composite, or isolate the creative activity of Communist intellectuals from this current and deprive them as well of the kind of stimulating interchange they need. Some comrades are perfectly willing to have a political alliance with others but apparently refuse ideological interchange in the framework of this alliance. They artificially separate politics from ideology, as opportunists do for other ends. The Party understood belatedly that the fault had consisted in doing at times what Marx had recommended should never be done: presenting ourselves to the world in the guise of doctrinaires clamoring, "This is the truth. Fall on your knees."

What I am saying here is not very different from Casanova's thought. It is the very slogan, indeed, of the struggle in which I have never ceased to take part.* I will even go further than Casanova and return

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* Aragon's remarks constitute a pertinent commentary on the effort of certain critics to see in him a man only recently liberated from the toils of communist intellectual tyranny. For example, Mauriac in his Paris Literary Letter, speaking of *La Semaine Sainte,* writes, "This book marks the return of Aragon to the literary fold. Not that he has repudiated communism, but his political belief no longer prevents him from keeping his distance from the Party which for thirty years deprived one of the greatest French writers of his freedom of thought." Mauriac, so concerned for Aragon's former condition of servitude, is quite unaware of the humor of a subsequent passage in his article: "All the leading French critics have written long and admiring reviews, thus breaking the dense silence in which this writer has been shrouded, in spite of his importance. Who, for instance, spoke of that book of poems, *Le Roman Inachevé* (*The Unfinished Novel*), considered by some as a work of genius?" Perhaps it was their freedom which forced the critics into that dense silence.

to my concept of romanticism, the diversity of origin and style that characterizes and differentiates the romantics, in order to utilize it in the socialist realism of the France of our day. Defining socialist realism in our country cannot consist in drawing up a list of those who have the right to claim they possess it; it isn't a union, you don't join it. You must also not fall victim to the false idea that socialist realism is possible only in a socialist country. And there are writers who don't lay claim to this label, who even decry it, and who, nevertheless, in their works touch upon what is essential in socialist realism, even though it is mixed with other, contradictory conceptions.

PUT it this way: we are writers in the period of socialism; this is what we are, whether we recognize it or not. There is a choice open to us as to method of writing, as to the style of our work. But if the Leninist theory of the reflection of life in art is true—and I am profoundly persuaded that it is—we reflect, of necessity, our own epoch; we reflect in our writings the march of humanity toward socialism, whether we wish it or not, and in ways that may be twisted, even fantastic. Socialist realism is the organizing conception of the facts in literature, of the *details* in art, interpreting these details, giving them meaning and impact, integrating them with the movement of humanity beyond the individual existence of the writer. Art in the 20th century, like science, has ceased to be a collection of discoveries. We cannot be indifferent to what others invent, we must give meaning to that, too. *To organize the continuity of literature and of art* and to organize it in common, conforming to the historic evolution of humanity—here, in reality, is the task of the realists who boast of a realism which has an internal logic, which is scientific. And if, for myself, by my books and the attention I pay to the books of others, I can make a small contribution, I will have made good use of my life, of my talents; I will have helped, in my own field, by proceeding from the point where chance brought me into being to where I know mankind is going. I took my unchangeable decision, when I was half my present age, to go along as far as my strength would carry me.

Translated by Lillian Lowenfels.

SPILIN' JIPSONS

LAWRENCE GELLERT

The theme of "Spilin' Jipsons" which appears in each of the following dialogues was pursued by Mr. Gellert in the course of more than thirty years' travelling and song-chasing throughout the South, from the Virginia Tidelands to the Texas Panhandle. One can readily see what a crucial role it has played in the daily life of the Negro people and how intricate are the ways of every struggle for freedom.

1

Let that little fellow alone.

We ain't aimin' to hurt 'im none.

Then get off. Let him get up. Now give him his coat and shirt and hatever else you took from him.

We weren't gwine to keep it, white folks.

That's right Boss. They ain't wantin' to do me no harm nohow. 'e's just playin'.

Playing! Sitting all over you and taking your clothes and cleaning out ur pockets. You call that playing?

That so. We calls it Spilin' Jipsons.

What kind of mumbo jumbo is that? What does it mean?

Don't know if it mean nothin'. It just game, that's all.

Did you make up the game?

No sir.

Who did?

Don't know sir.

Do white kids also play it?

Can't say if they does or not. Ain't never see 'em do it.

Where did you learn the game?

Reckon us know it all the time.

My granny say she hear tell 'bout Spilin' Jipsons from folks what lived 'way back in slavery.

2

Can you sing other songs besides church hymns?

What kind songs you talkin' 'bout, white folks?

Work reels, fiddle sings, dance tunes—any songs but spirituals—already have enough of those.

Reckon I knowed heap of 'em. One time could sing 'em all week and Sunday and never come backin' round to same song twice.

How about singing a few of them for me?

Oh, no sir.

Why not?

They's devil's own and sinful and I ain't study nothin' 'bout like that no more. I'm mostly ninety year old and time fer leavin' all them wordly and devilish things behind and start travellin' Bible way.

Alright then—I won't ask you to sing any sinful songs. Just repeat words of a few of them—so I can jot them down on paper.

No sir.

But why?

I'd just as soon eat the devil hisself as drink his broth.

Well, just so my trip 'way out here isn't altogether wasted—tell me something: What was Spilin' Jipsons back in slavery time? I see you're smiling already. You do know something about the game.

'Twere no game, I tell you.

What was it then?

I ain't study 'bout that no more neither.

Old Satan is a busy old man
He rolls stones night and day
Master Jesus is my bosom friend
And he roll 'em from my way
Hallelujah. . . .

3

Why do all you old folks try to shoo me off fast when I so much as mention Spilin' Jipsons? Surely it couldn't be anything that bad.

Well, some folks'd a think on it thataway. Leastwise if they knowed 'bout it—which they ain't.

You mean white people?

Ain't talkin' 'bout nobody else. They near chokin' 'em with smoke for the longest time, but can't catch 'em nobody settin' no fires. My folks way back in slavery done do theirself mighty proud—ain't none of 'em lettin' Big House white folks know.

They sticks together
Like mustard plaster
The more they's pulled apart
They sticks the faster.

They was same like Israelites way down in Egyptland. And they do like they done in Bible days, yessir.

Oh, I see now. Despoiling Egyptians!

That so, white folks. You sure hit it right.

Tell me, how did it work?

Well sir, when farmin' tools and such like wore out with neither use nor wear—or dulled up so bad cuttin' edge no account and beyond mending. When field hand get cripplin' hisself up so bad he can't work and must lay up for the longest time in infirmy, when master's cow and chicken wander 'way and leave no track—When Big House silver and good things from white folks larder can't be found and heap more things like that, maybe accident maybe not—Big House white folks can't hardly tell which—my people done calls it Spilin' Jipsons and when Spiler he come back in quarters where no white folks' eye gwine foller 'em, the women folks get kissin' and huggin' 'em like he were some kind hero man come back from war and menfolk shake his hand and pound his back and open bottle master's bestest brandy maybe and everyone take drink on it and celebratin' like white folks do Fourth of July. So now you know 'bout Spilin' Jipsons.

Is it still going on today—the same way?

Go 'long with you, white folks. And don't ask me no more nothin' 'bout it. I done spend time more'n 'nough multiplyin' words with you already.

4

That nigra wench she worked for me not quite a month. On Saturday when I'm expecting sixteen guests for a dinner party, a very important one, she asks me for a loan of twenty dollars because her husband is sick

and needs a doctor and medicine. Finally she succeeds in coaxing the money out of me. Says she'll be back right soon after she tends to her husband's wants. That was the last I saw of her as my cook. Left me in a fix with my dinner party, and all.

Next news I heard she's working over on the other side of town. I had her promptly arrested for swindling me out of twenty dollars. But she's a smart one alright, convinced the Judge she was innocent—the twenty dollars was almost to a penny the amount of back-wages she had coming to her from me.

But she should be taught a lesson. Only reason Judge didn't send her up was because she's such a good cook and working for some friends of the Judge—or so I'm told.

But why couldn't she have been straightforward and come out with it, if she wanted to quit? That's what a white domestic would do. But these nigra wenches are different. Afraid to look you in the eye and talk up. Say, I just thought of something! Do you suppose she would dare do it deliberately, just to leave me in the lurch?

5

Heap of colored folks has 'em pictures hangin' the reason to keep wind from wall crack whistlin' through, or just decoration maybe. They's black angels and black saints, besides some big colored folks like Frederick Douglass and Jackie Robinson and Booker Washington and that peanut growin' fellow name George Washington Carver.

They got 'em black doll for gals to play with an' boys has 'em sheriff and robbers uniform set but they can hardly get 'em no colored boy for takin' white sheriff part, no sir!

And pets! Land sake, that so. You see 'em most everywhere. No colored family without 'em—or seem like thataway—cat, skunk, weasel, rabbit, chicken, possum, baby alligator too, yessir. 'Course I ain't mention no nothin' 'bout no dogs. The reason why, he ain't no pet exactly. He workin' member of family mostly. Hound dog and mix' both. They hunt and fish and fetchin' vittels for whole family sometime beside they's ownself. Do I think colored favor white dogs more'n than some other color? Maybe so. Maybe so. I can't say I see 'em take account one color more'n another. Howsomever brown or blackcoat don't make dog no never mind like it do with white folks, no matter what. And if some colored man do has 'em dog what got white coat, they ain't mistreatin' 'em for it neither. Excusin' maybe they holler at 'em and cuss 'em out when dog fault him some, say him that what he catch 'em for bein' white

dog. Now if he were white man instead, he maybe cussin' out nigger. But I reckon they just makin' sport with dog and ain't mean nothin' or nobody no harm.

6

When that there big white folks ain't grow 'em yet to half the size he reachin' for, he start makin' 'em mean and hateful talk 'gainst my people. He say they's nothin' 'cept ignorant, low country superstitioned trash of the world, hardly human and ruinin' this here land and oughter had 'em shipped back to Africa before they even come here in the first place. And right then dead on time he get him started with them letters 'bout how come he talk him thataway 'bout folks what ain't never done him nothin' but good, leastwise they ain't never done him no kind of harm and less'n he stop talkin' thataway out loud he gwine has conjure put on him till that there evil jawbone of his just drop off, sure 'nough.

Of course he ain't stop his mean and hateful talk and the reason he go on like he do, the more he talkin' thataway the more higher he hist hisself Governor, or more higher, Senator, maybe, I can't tell which. And the higher he get climbin' white folks world and the more he strewin' mean and hateful talk about my people the more them letters come, from one place one time, 'nother place 'nother time—from every state in this wide land seem-like, first to last. It always got same backin' hand on envelope and this Big White Folks get knowin' bye and bye from just lookin' at envelope when it come, what's inside, even without openin' it. And he scream like stucked pig maybe. And he so mad he weigh 'bout ton and nobody come nigh 'em for many hours after.

Now I know us is all got to die one time or 'nother. Don't make no difference if you is white folks. But you want to know something? This big white folks before he die, has him his mean and hateful talkin' jawbone just drop off like pig jowls on butcher cuttin' block maybe, same way 'zactly like them letters cussin' his jaws for all them years say 'bout.

You think one thing got to do with 'nother maybe?

He were mighty big folks in Mississippi, I tells you. I reckon you musta hear 'bout him even 'way up North where you come from. Man called Bilbo.

7

Weren't you supposed to come at 9:30?

Dat so.

It's eleven o'clock now. Too late to drive me to my appointment.

I'll do it tomorrow.

I don't know if I can make it tomorrow. Besides you disappointed me today. How do I know you wouldn't do the same thing tomorrow?

No sir. I come tomorrow for sure, dead on time.

But why couldn't you come on time today?

I just weren't able.

Why? I couldn't trust you to come to morrow unless I know whether you had a sufficiently good reason for not coming today.

If I tells you reason, you ain't goin' get you no mad-on, white folks?

How can I tell, unless I know what your reason is?

Can't tell you white folks—not 'less'n you promisin' you ain't goin' make me no trouble or cuss me out four days and Sunday, maybe.

Well, what's all the mystery about?

Promise like I ask you to.

Oh alright, I'm that curious to know.

I ain't never tell this to no white folks. Leastwise beter not tell no cracker. I been wantin' to tell this to some white folks for the greatest while, 'cause it give me no satisfaction 'less I do. So reason is, white folks always expect nigger be lazy, shiftless, no-account, thief, late no matter where 'scusin' breakfast and dinner table. I been hearing thataway all my born days and I just reckon long time ago I ain' never gwine disappoints white folks for the world. Now you treat me alright, don't take you no advantage my color and pay me what you sayin' all the time. But it's mighty hard to get changin' my long-time ways. Howsomever like I say, if you give me 'nother chance, and want me comin' tomorrow, I try doin' better this time for sure.

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I hear white folks, leastwise some of them sayin' all the time 'bout how colored people ain't wantin' 'em none of this here integration Supreme Law sayin' 'bout. And the reason how they know is 'cause they ask their cook or chauffeur maybe. And no two ways 'bout it they hears 'em with their own two ears sayin' they ain't got 'em no use for no such foolish doin', nohow.

Well sir, no colored goin' tell no white folks here 'bouts no nothing 'cept what white folks wantin' them to hear. And it more'n 'specially thataway when it come to things like integratin' and rights for colored which is same like flash lightin' in guano bat's face in middle of night. No sir! He better not say so less'n he don't want to get hisself shot, or get his landlord to put a sign on his door sayin' he got to move from there. Or lose his job maybe. No matter if he got his own business and trade

him only with colored he got to have him no brain bigger'n peanut shell fitten' him for hat to go tellin' no white folks how he wantin' Negro equality, Negro freedom, Negro children schoolin' same's white folks children—'cause if he do, he goin' find him empty shelvin' in his store, and them delivery truck just forgot 'bout his name and stoppin' place.

Maybe you hear story of Mister Dog and Brer Rabbit before sometime. They's 'bout the same way like white folks and colored 'bout this here integration question you askin' me about.

Well sir, one time Mister Dog got him left ear itchin' mighty bad and he know by that somebody goin' 'round scandalizin' his name. So Mister Dog says to hisself says he, must be that long time enemy of mine Brer Rabbit doin' it sure 'nough and that's a fact. So he study 'bout it, and scratch and study 'bout it and scratch some more and right there he figure 'way how he goin' stop Brer Rabbit makin' him itchin' left ear for good.

Next thing all the creatures in woods know, Mister Dog found in middle of road like dead. And when they get strewin' the good news here there an everywhere, them creatures go 'bout their business makin' coffin and shroud and all the fixin' for big funeral and celebration. And Brer Rabbit elected to make 'em funeral oration just same like Mister Dog figure he would on account he most powerful talker among all them creatures sure 'nough.

Time come for Mister Dog's funeral and them creatures is there in their Sunday best and Brer Rabbit standin' on stump frontin' Mister Dog all rolled up in shroud and layed out in his coffin. Now Brer Rabbit he know dog ways of deceased and he thinkin' to hisself, dad rot my carrots if I believes he dead after all. So when he get clearin' his throat and creatures all stop their singin' and celebratin' and congratulatin' one 'nother, he say: Now before I begins an oration honorin' Mister Dog, the deceased, I wants to point out that everything is fine and fittin' and in order and ready to give this here distinguished deceased a good send-off like he deserve and it sure good lookin' corpse excusin' one thing I got to fault it with. And that is his hands they ain't crossed like they oughter be. And it ain't no deceased no matter how dead goin' make 'em A-number one corpse sure 'nough 'less'n his hands are crossed. And just 'bout that time quick as flash Mister Dog slide one paw across the other and look innocent as pig on ice. Well, Brer Rabbit ain't miss that none no matter how fast he do it, 'cause that were very thing Brer Rabbit watchin' for all the time and expectin' to see. And he make up his mind right there and then as to what was what 'zactly. And so, 'stead of cussin' out Mister Dog's itchy left ear four ways and Sunday and make 'em rejoicin' and celebratin' speech sayin' 'bout how happy creatures is

'bout Mister Dog dyin' like a dog and goin' to Hell and heap more things like that, he start praisin' Mister Dog and build up funeral 'ration so Mister Dog get believin' he were God hisself only spell' backwards. Brer Rabbit build him up and build him up, and he lay it on and lay it on, and Mister Dog gettin' mighty pleased with hisself and begin swellin' proud-ful and swellin' some more till pretty soon he find coffin too crowded with hisself and he just clear forgot 'bout bein' corpse at all and get standin' straight up in his shroud and bowin' left and right to all the gathered folks, same like white politician what won election.

And just 'bout that time all them creatures flew from there—over the fence and through the pasture—they run like Devil but Brer Rabbit fly faster—yessir, 'headin' the procession.

But Mister Dog he ain't chase nobody that day. He shake hisself loose from that there windin' shroud and he go dancin' right out of the coffin. His left ear itchin' like blazes same like before. Only more so. But he say to hisself, says he, The damachrist, can't be true about my left ear itchin'. After that there funeral 'ration Brer Rabbit makin' must be right ear itchin' 'stead. And when right ear itchin' you may know by that somebody ain't talkin' 'bout you nothin' 'cept praise. Of course in that case right ear got to be on other side from where it itchin' like blazes for sure. So Mister Dog just turn hisself 'bout and around. And he scratch itchin' ear with paw from other side goin' all the way round back side of his head. And then he go lopin' down the road satisfied and real happy and singin' loud and free as you please. . . .

9

Don't get goin' no more nearer, white folks, 'cause if high sheriff get seein' you all he got to do is touch you on shoulder and you is deputize for helpin' fight that there fire. And me he just goin' chase down yonder to help with that bucket line.

So what's wrong with that? Don't you want to help put the fire out?

Won't do no good. We just wastin' good night sleep for nothin'.

Why?

'Cause that stockade goner for sure. Ain't nothin' save it now for sure.

What are you talkin' 'bout? There's hardly any flame to be seen—and with all these people fighting the fire it's a cinch to put out.

Want to bet somethin' on it, white folks?

Like what?

How 'bout them sportin' boots you is wearing?

Against what?

That old Cherokee stone pipe I dig up one time—you was likin' over my house last week.

Alright. It's a bet. But I can't figure why you think the stockade is in danger—now that it looks completely under control.

How many white folks you see fightin' that fire?

I can count six.

Make it' bout eight on 'count they's two of 'em bossin' pail fillin' place down creek. All the other white folks from stockade off Saturday night spreein'. And there 'bout eighty pairs hands, all black. And good thing they got 'em hair nappy and all curl' up in knot else they bound to fly off for sure, they's rushin' 'em 'round so dad bob fast. But look sharp and you see 'em spillin' water most ev'ry place 'ceptin' fire. Ain't 'nough them white folks to keep eyes everwhere, so they can't tell what all them black hands is doin'. Tomorrow maybe they figure something wrong and the whole black crew catch 'em hallelulah. But tonight—they's going to see that stockade burnin' to the ground.

But why would they want to be burned out of a place to live? Maybe it means their jobs too.

That just work camp there. They's treatin' them colored same 'way 'zactly like it were chain gang, sure 'nough and that's a fact. Work 'em from can't see to can't see and got 'em guards with guns to keep 'em from runnin' off before job is done. And that big white folks who got contract they workin' on, he got 'em graveyard all his own for colored workers, yessir.

Now that wind startin' puff 'em up some more. Them white folks better put 'em no 'pendence on good Lord nor them black hands neither for puttin' 'em out no fire tonight—leastwise not 'less'n they cravin' to collect 'em fire insurance mighty bad.

And something more, white folks. This ain' none of your business. If word get strewed 'round how you get tryin' to help put down that fire, you can't never cotch you no nigger songs in these parts for next hundred years 'bout. When you aim to turn loose my boots you is wearin', white folks?

10

I started as a dentist. But Negroes here in the deep Delta area of Louisiana, seldom have money to yank teeth, let alone replace any. With a wife and two children to support, I soon found it difficult, if not altogether impossible to get along. At the age of thirty-one I was forced to fall back for another hurdle—and so, here I am, an M.D. also. At that I was fortunate. In all my forty years of practice here my wife never

had to take in washing. Some school-teachers' wives here must do so or slowly starve to death as an alternative.

But you do alright now?

Between two degrees—medical and dental—and a partitioned office, half dentist chair, half medical examination table, I manage to earn perhaps a third the income of a local white dentist or physician. And since in this part of the State our people comprise two-thirds the population and have less than a fourth the number of dentists and physicians—I must work twice the white practitioner's average working schedule. I could do lots better elsewhere, no doubt. But so could our school-teachers with their laundress wives. But this is where we are needed and this is where we stay.

Now you ask about Despoiling Egyptians—or Spilin' Jipsons as you heard it expressed. I think for generations and generations it's been a household expression in millions of Negro hovels throughout the Black Belt—a generic term, you know, like many from the Bible you folks up North use constantly such as Raising Cain, Get thee behind me Satan, Out-Heroding Herod—the list is endless. Amongst our Negroes most anywhere I believe Despoiling Egyptians would be understood whether they had ever heard it before or not. The Bible Chronicle of the Egyptian bondage of the Israelites paralleled practically everything the Negro knew and felt throughout the centuries of his servitude in America. Go Down Moses, the most powerful of the freedom songs generally called a "spiritual," is an excellent case in point. Also, the text was always a favorite one for Sunday sermons by Negro preachers and still is throughout the Black Belt, and the term Despoiling Egyptians naturally suggests itself to the individual Negro who identifies himself with the ancient Hebrews. The expression must have been heard by millions of Southern whites, each of whom was a self-appointed guardian of white supremacy rule, first to last. But with individual members of the race using the term in its corrupted form of Spilin' Jipsons the whites can be forgiven for not having understood it. They attached no more significance to it than other "gibberish" and "nigger talk" with no particular meaning. But in the Negro quarters it had become a rallying slogan.

In modern parlance the term used would of course be "sabotage"—a sort of underground warfare such as was waged in all the occupied countries against the Nazi armies, during World War II.

And now you want me to give you a clinical analysis of Spilin' Jipsons, based on my long practice with the Delta mass of Negro folk? You're asking a lot of answers, sir, with one question. So just let's break it down into pieces we can handle.

When slavery was first introduced here, the owners tried desperately to keep the Negro on the level of a brute, without learning, without desires and longings beyond that of other livestock on the plantation. Had they succeeded in their purpose, and had the spirit of resistance been eradicated permanently from the slave's mind, he would soon have resigned himself without hope of deliverance and forever surrendered his claim or right to manhood.

Well, we do know the masters did not succeed in this their most worthy ambition. The records are replete with insurrections against the oligarchy. And how were these insurrections effected? Well, sir, humiliation and resentment follow each other like night and day. And both are cumulative. And some kind of daily struggle and fight-back against the oppressor was most essential for the slave's self-respect, moral, physical and mental health. I can tell you that not only as a medical man, but as a human being. I too have suffered humiliation and frustration. But I don't want to digress. With the slave, just cussin' the master out of his hearing offered some small release for his burning resentment. But knowing well that the quickest way to the master's heart was through his pocket book, the slave concentrated all the damage he could inflict in that direction. Sometimes it took one form, sometimes another. Thus he kept alive the individual fighting spirit and the moral element which could be nurtured, welded with other individuals' resentments to be built into a fighting unit for those "spontaneous" outbreaks that were so carefully and well organized—now led by a Nat Turner, now by a Denmark Vesey and others less well known, under the very noses of their oppressors and tormentors, who held their slaves in utter contempt for their apparent docileness until the day they came face to face with determined revolutionaries with gun and pike gripped in their black hands, ready to die in the field like men, rather than continue to live as beasts of burden.

And today—how does it work out today?

Well, today things are somewhat different, in my opinion, at least. In a more complex economy such as we currently find in America the Negro wage earner cannot probe for the heart through the pocket of the Big White folks, as he did back in slavery. The target is no longer just one heart and pocket. The wage earner drifts from job to job—each poorly paid—one no whit better than another. The Mississippi convict explains his unwilling presence on the chain gang, "An empty sack cannot stand up—nor a hungry man remain honest." But it must, too, have something to do with his resentment against the exploitation, oppression, denial of his manhood, and humiliation at every turn—since we well know that by far the larger percentage of poor Negroes do not turn to crime.

The individual Spiler today must be more circumspect because he finds fewer and fewer opportunities to let off steam and channelize his individual resentment. But he is alert to every opportunity and manages to keep alive his moral and fighting spirit which, when time is opportune, welds group solidarity culminating in "spontaneous" group action, such as for example took place some years back in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, bus boycott.

You don't mean Montgomery, Ala.?

No sir. I'm talking about the one successfully fought in Baton Rouge not far from here. The Montgomery action came later and was actually based on our experience in Baton Rouge. The reason you've heard nothing about this first boycott was, the press generally managed to keep a lid on it, since it was over so quickly with gains made by our group. Whereas the boycott in Montgomery dragged through most of a year—1954, I believe. And the NAACP and allied organizations had time to rally and swing forces into action with resultant publicity widespread.

How does the whole of the integration picture look to you?

Brightening, I'd say. It's a different world today. It looks in at the Black Belt, not judging us this time, but rather judging our judges, much to their embarrassment. Daily we balance accounts. There are failures—there are successes. In days of great political unrest and brightening Negro hopes and social advancement they unearth the old lies about a race of rapists. And the charge is purposefully multiplied in the daily newspaper presses by the millions. And innocent victims are lynched. But we also glean reports of successes—children going peacefully to integrated schools in some places in North Carolina, Virginia and the border states. But these battles, won or lost, are but tokens, however necessary they are to keep pressing the war since they raise the moral self-respect and racial pride of every member and augur well for the bigger battlefields ahead. To me the fight for suffrage is the main chance. If a people do not have political power—and the universal ballot—they just petition and plead, plead and petition, like beggars at the back doors of life. With political power come all things—including the Negro's share of his invested labor in America withheld from him until now—and if we do not achieve this suffrage via an improvement in present day society, we most certainly will in the society which then must ultimately replace it.

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I hear tell 'bout Spilin' Jipsons when I were little shaver down Marietta, Gee Ay, heap more years back'n I can remember seem-like. Don't

know what name it call today, but sure God it goin' right on same—like song sayin' 'bout

Weevil in the cotton
Cutworm in the corn
Devil in the white man
And this war just goin' on

This war just goin' on boys
This war just goin' on
Till weevil and the cutworm
And Devil Bossman they's all gone

'Course I know they has 'em white folks war and all and many thousan' die fightin' and when it all over they make 'em big funeral and heap big talkin' 'bout Devil Slavery and how it all gone forever and ain't never goin' return no more and white folks before fighting one 'gainst the other now shakin' hands and become friend all over again. But they ain't never layed 'em that there body of Devil Slavery into the ground like they say, no sir. 'Cause it goin' right on same's before. 'Course they ain't got the Old Devil friskin' his'n tail, and wigglin' his'n horn and pointin' his'n pitchfork, like they used to. No sir. They's too smart for doin' thataway. They do him 'zactly same like Old Lazarus who rob commissary wagon when High Sheriff after him with mighty big loader. They give 'em new clothes. They give 'em new name. They get cuttin' his'n whiskers so you can't tell hardly who he is. Yessir. But they ain't foolin' nobody none. Leastwise not us. 'Cause it the same old Devil Slavery no matter what.

Now put yourself in nigger's place. We can't get us no justice nohow. We can't get us our due hardly. We's worse'n dirt underneath white folks' feet and when we want get complainin' about one thing or 'nother to somebody ain't nobody listen and we talkin' to ourself and nobody else. So when we gettin' tired, mighty tired, moanin', pleadin', worryin' and talkin' to ourself, great God Almighty, what we goin' to do? Why 'zactly same way my people do 'way back in slavery time—'cause it ain't no different today. And you can't make it no different just callin' it by 'nother name. And we certainly bound to go Spilin' Jipsons evey chance we gets—yessir natural same like water backin' up out of a ditch when it got no place else to go.

What you think, white folks, you would do else, if you was us?

INTELLECTUALS IN AMERICA

BARROWS DUNHAM

A former professor at Temple University, author of several books and contributor to *Mainstream,* Barrows Dunham visited the Soviet Union earlier this year The following remarks, addressed to the Soviet people, provide an interesting perspective on the American social and cultural scene.—*The Editors.*

WHEN one writes of American intellectuals, it is easier to point out deficiencies than merits, and difficulties than achievements. There is, however, nothing peculiarly American about this; it is the common lot of intellectuals in the capitalist world.

Intellectuals are ordinarily recruited from the middle class, and if there are any workers or farmers among them, it is on condition that they renounce their origin. To be sure, when the proletariat is in motion, such origins are acknowledged and defended. But, sad to say, given any pause in the movement, renunciation again sets in. Then the press teems with agonized recantations, books appear in atonement for past "mistakes," reviewers welcome home repentant prodigals, and in due course publishers sell at half price the confessional volumes, which, as it turns out, nobody wanted to read.

Moreover, intellectuals, though they may well have duties, have no historical mission. It is not the case with them, as it is with proletarians, that they benefit society whenever they benefit themselves. Nor have they any class position which invites them towards solidarity. On the contrary, they compete for such privileges as they possess; they must attach themselves to some other class which will feed them, and on that class they must ever after depend.

Obviously, under capitalism, that class will be the bourgeoisie, which, having itself no great taste for thinking, tends to regard intellectuals as a swarm of fretful, if obedient, gnats.

Yet, as I say, though there is no mission here, there are nevertheless duties. In the general division of labor, intellectuals do have a function of their own. That function is to describe as accurately as possible the world which we inhabit, and to formulate as skillfully as possible techniques for controlling it. If any intellectuals are also

philosophers, they have the further task of elucidating our choices and preferences so as to establish these upon rational grounds.

I would wish all these tasks to be understood in a very broad sense, inclusive of the work of artists, musicians, and men of letters. Such men also describe and elucidate. They tell us, very winningly, what it feels like to be human in the midst of things, and they thus add a dimension to the work of scientists, who describe what the world is and what we ourselves are.

So great are these tasks, and so splendid any achievement in them, that it seems absurd to speak of them as duties. They are, rather, privileges which a man may rejoice to exercise. If a man can clarify notions ever so slightly, or move knowledge a little forward, or refine modestly an old technique, he has much reward in the accomplishment itself. For what can be more joyful than to meet reality face to face, to understand it, and to master it?

But, alas, under capitalism there are not joys but duties—and duties more honored in the breach than in the observance. Within every intellectual there develops a struggle between his search after reality and his dependence on the bourgeoisie, whose immediate interests limit his probing into nature and whose whole class interest thwarts his probing into history. Ever in the back of his mind there lurks the hideous, decisive question: Shall he tell the truth and shame the devil or alter the truth and save his job?

I am sorry to say that, as a general rule, this question doesn't do much more than lurk. There are a thousand ways to keep it below the level of consciousness, and your Western intellectual has learned them all. His mother's frown, his teacher's reprimand, his boss's threat have all taught him that there are limits to enquiry, that there are things one had better not say and even not know.

Accordingly, he chooses, if he can, some area within these limits; or, if he cannot, then he thinks it scholarly to prefer moderate conclusions.

"Avoid extremes," said an American professor recently, "but examine the evidence; then take a middle course."

If an intellectual has pretentions to science, he calls this "objectivity." He would have you think, and he may very well himself believe, that he is committed to no class in society, not even the one which pays him.

Do not suppose that I write this condescendingly, as one untouched and pure. On the contrary, I have experienced it all. I know every lure

by its whisper and every threat by its growl. It merely happened that when the lurking question at last confronted me, its form was so gross as to forbid compromise.

Probably you do not know how this kind of thing was caused to happen. Let me, then, describe the method by which some hundreds of American intellectuals lost their jobs.

The Congress of the United States delegates to various committees of its members the task of preparing legislation. In executing this task, the committees call before them persons who are expert in the subjects to be legislated upon. For example, a committee on taxation will want to hear the views of tax experts. It is all very reasonable, since Congressmen cannot be expected to know everything, and we usually rejoice if they know anything. And ordinarily it would be an honor to be so called.

Now, these committees can legally compel a witness to appear; they have what is called "subpoena power." About thirty years ago, it occurred to some bright lawyer that if there were a committee which claimed to be preparing legislation against "un-American activities," such a committee could summon as witnesses any radicals it wished or any members of the labor movement. These would then appear as in a public pillory. They could be reviled in the press, they could be made to name their associates, they could be induced to recant and seek some sort of pardon. I may add that the committee members have what is called "congressional immunity." They cannot be sued in the courts for anything slanderous they may say in the performance of their "duties."

The witnesses faced three or six or even twelve questioners at a time—questioners who were in fact accusers and who would make of every question an insult, a threat, or a smear.

A witness who maintained his dignity and his principles through such proceedings ("balky" the newspapers would call him) would then be pronounced a liability to his employer, and the employer would more often than not dismiss him. But a witness who collapsed under the attack, who grovelled and asked pardon and named names, would be pronounced an excellent citizen and would probably keep his job. In America, job-keeping has long been the chief means for conformity, and it has been so effective as to render political penalties largely unnecessary.

It was elementary ethics not to compromise people who were in fact among the noblest spirits in the community, and it was a public duty

to give no aid of any sort to the inquisitors. Consequently, silence under questioning became the usual habit of witnesses, and was found to have legal protection in the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

Those of us who acted in this way know that we did a good deal to defeat McCarthyism, and are accordingly content. It is, however, regrettable that we had so little help from our fellow-intellectuals and almost none at all from the labor movement.

HAVING set down these rather somber remarks, I may approach my subject from a brighter side, namely, the liveliness and the rational good health which many American intellectuals display. For example, there is D. W. E. B. Du Bois, who would be an ornament to any intelligentsia, and who is so especially to ours. This remarkable man, at 91, has a keener understanding of events than the rest of us have, or are likely to have, at any age.

I do not know how a pupil of William James (for such, I believe, he was) managed to avoid the master's teachings about expediency, but nothing could be less pragmatic and careerist than Dr. Du Bois' steady following of truth through difficult years. I express here my personal debt to him, and I assert him as a sign of basic health in the American character.

He does not stand alone. There are very many intellectuals, of left-wing or liberal or even conservative views, who have devotedly worked for peace and freedom during the years of cold war. Among them the most notable is Professor Linus Pauling, the scientist with a conscience, who has done more than anyone else to warn the country of the dangers of nuclear tests. He has obviously patterned himself upon the noblest scientist of them all, Albert Einstein, who gave much help to victims of inquisition during the McCarthy time.

You will find these courageous spirits in all the arts, sciences and professions, in which indeed they are quite usually the most distinguished practitioners. Their sufferings in the recent struggle have steeled and sharpened them. They now know a good deal about political conflict, and they have had the satisfaction of seeing many of their fellow-citizens rally to their side.

Such ties with the American people are in fact quite new, and it will be useful for us to explore the nature of them.

Ordinarily, an American intellectual does not have direct contact with the large mass of his fellow-citizens. If, as is rare, he also happens to be a "celebrity," his contacts will be much wider, but he will

be in rather strange company. For then he will be among the stars of screen, stage, radio, television, whose faces are seen, whose voices are heard, by millions of people every week, and whose marriages, parenthood, divorces, and amours are vicariously enjoyed.

But this, as I say, is rare. Usually an intellectual's relations with his people are filtered through a sieve of editors, publishers, agents, lecture bureaus, professional societies. Indeed, American life has grown amazingly institutionalized.

It hardly ever happens that one man speaks to many men directly out of his own heart. What you ordinarily have is some organized group of men addressing the general public—and addressing it with defensive self-praise.

Even the manner of speech is different. In my youth, one of the functions of a magazine was to display the essayist's individuality in thought and style, but now every magazine (*Time,* for example) has its own corporate thought and style, imposed by the editor, in which the actual writers are submerged. I sometimes think, in fits of extreme vanity, that I am perhaps the last American writer to have a style of his own.

Round about these smaller corporate styles, and engulfing them, is what may be called official or government prose—a hideous glue of flavorless abstractions, persuasive of nothing but insincerity. There is scarcely a public figure in America who writes his own speeches, or indeed who would be able to write them if he tried. Speeches are in fact composed by what we call "ghost writers." The official style is their style and it is plainly one which you would be willing to impute to other people while remaining anonymous yourself.

Communication, thus institutionalized, loses every trace of what is personal, and becomes as mechanical as the instruments of communication themselves. And so it has come to pass that, in the very home and seat of individualism, the individual person finds it hard, as we say, "to get a word in edgewise." What the public hears is a man's voice muffled by institutions—not just in the content of what is said but also in the style in the very sound.

Well, now, when in the recent struggles various progressives were driven out of the movies, the radio and telvision, the educational system the purpose no doubt was to cut them off from communication with their fellow-citizens on a mass scale. They had previously spoken through the usual muffler, which had made their progressivism sound very faint indeed. Now it was different. You might say that, along with the muffler

they also lost the microphone and with it the mass audience. But at least they lost the muffler. They can now speak with their true, undistorted voices. Can they be heard?

There are some things which lead me to believe that they can. For example, you must understand that there are some virtues in the empiricist, pragmatic tradition in which Americans are reared. The tradition inculcates scepticism concerning all that is abstract and general, and concentration upon all that is individual and concrete. This is no doubt erroneous philosophically, but it has the effect of weakening the power of labels ("Communist," for example) and of inducing people to judge a man on his own merits.

Now, there is nothing an American more hopes for in another person, or more delights to find, than sincerity—the correspondence of acts with professions, of deeds with words. And sincerity cannot be more vividly displayed than when a man makes sacrifices on behalf of principle. This virtue is precisely what American progressives have displayed, and it has set them before their fellow-citizens as men worth listening to, as men who will not deceive. They thus have an advantage which even their rulers do not for the most part possess.

Moreover, having now become respected public figures, these men may now and then regain access to the media of communication. They are "newsworthy," and newspapers will occasionally print what they say. Some of the Hollywood writers are employed again. Editors and publishers are of course members of the bourgeoisie and have allowed themselves to be committed to the cold war, but they are not so corrupt as automatically to refuse a good manuscript when they see one. They will balance risks against merits, and possibly publish after all.

WHAT I mean to say is that American intellectuals are not confronted with "one black reactionary mass," but with various opportunities strewn among many difficulties.

Indeed, descriptions of American affairs may err from a too ready acceptance of the nazi parallel. No doubt the American bourgeoisie has exerted upon its people enormous pressure for conformity. It is rich and can be prodigal of inducements; it is powerful and can compel. But the ability to do these things is not identical with getting them done. The rulers of the United States have to deal with a basically intractable people, a proud and an ingenious people, who do not submit so tamely to government as many intellectuals do. When one path seems blocked, they try another, until the course of time the strength of the people reasserts itself and moves society forward.

And so, if you were to visit us now, I think you would be as much aware of original activity as of the limits within which the activity is momentarily compressed.

We have many excellent composers, poets, and painters. I can think, indeed, of two or three geniuses; doubtless there are others, and many more who believe themselves to be so. We have admirable performers in the dance, the theatre, the concert hall. I can't say much for our literary critics: these unfortunate people, whose subject is necessarily other men's work, are a kind of nuisance anywhere. But we have a number of able philosophers, who clarify thought and advance it as much as non-Marxists can.

Side by side with these are, of course, the paid hacks, the careerist professionals, the timid men whose chief wish is to remain obscure. This shapeless mass, passive towards exerted power but writhing inwardly with competition, will, I suppose, remain a weight upon our society. I doubt that even a revived labor movement would have much effect on it. The ultimate union of intellectuals and society appears to be an achievement reserved for the socialist epoch.

So saying, I come to the greatest single defect to be found in the American scene, the absence of a militant movement for socialism, based on the working class. Such a movement existed in the 1930's, and its collapse defines the difference between that time and now. Without it, reforms are still possible, but even they become more difficult. With it, a great deal could be done.

In the light of this, perhaps you will appreciate how remarkable it is that Americans do as well as they do. They have thus far repulsed fascism at home, with very few people to explain to them the class origins of fascism and with very many people to conceal those origins under attractive covering. They have, throughout the past decade, maintained a silent, steady pressure for peace, despite all incitements and propaganda. The fact is that they want to be friends with the world, and their rulers know it.

I point, you see, to what is good in us, and I only wish the quantity of good were larger. As for the general balance of light and dark, I must tell you this: I have, during twelve years, often worried and sometimes despaired. Yet whenever these fits came over me, something always happened, the work of my fellow-Americans, which removed the ground of anxiety. I have come to have faith and hope in my countrymen, and I would be contradicting my own experience if I did not urge you to do likewise.

TWO POEMS

ALVARO CARDONA-HINE

SALUTE TO CUBA

I

the wave
        beak of the abyss
pecks in loud hunger on white sand
                and melts
but the wind comes on
        driving its almond clouds between rainbows
butting against the female hip of the palm trees
assaulting the mushroom
        imbibing the fern of the first hill
                through pores of salt
rousing sugar to a frenzy in the gaping throat of the fields
knifing the heat of noon in the tall grass
heaving eddies of moisture into the nostrils of bulls
and wasting
        diminishing until it curls around the whiskers of rabbits
                asleep with foliage and paternity
stopping dead
        and once again free-blowing with new breath
Caribbean wind
        emerald culprit of skirts
with your one-way ticket of dance
        and a sword in each leaf of the rustling harvest
where are your *guajiros*
                the squint-eyed peasants
what have you done with the round bellies of their children

where have you taken the laughter and smoke of their villages
how have you dried the inland seas of sorrow
the little girl's tears
the hidden tears
the old folks' few remaining tears
where have you sent them
what have you suggested
what are your voices calling to
where do these winds blow?

II

black years had hung limp in the mildewed air
the threads of flags had woven a carpet of servility
a moth had sunk its teeth into the loin-cloth of the land
an impotent medicine had implied defeat
and though the language of the thoroughfare seethed with dynamic syntax
its temper was held in check by many wounds
suppurating in pocketbooks and blinding within diamonds
so that the toes of the plows had dug beyond dust
beyond loam
beyond hope
until suddenly the horns of the bulls grew longer
sharper than expected
until suddenly this one year
and then thereafter
the hooves of the horses made their imprint without iron
the roads widened and contained multitudes
the fire of each meal leaped out of the oven
and abroad into the qualm and spasm of the night
the gullet of birds anchored the yellow worm of lightning
and a song emerged with the intention of bells and demolition
when all as one the degraded were transformed and transported into
heroic persons
possessing attributes and titles of virginity
the downtrodden became judges of unimaginable burdens
beggars no longer challenged the rain
downpour of their season
but the purposes of blood
discovering another blood

that in their land had seldom taken the course of rivers
and using it on the maps of standard armies
its sherry curdling in the waiting room of embassies
and unfortunately spoiling the silk and satin of tradition
while children
the children of the island
whose smiles the tourists gather by the armful to take home
and whose little feet had been hovering in mid-air for generations
these children left childhood to their elders
and unwittingly began to live the climate of horizons.

III

Cuba
may the mornings go now
between fish and fisherman and line
land and landless and enough
sweat and laughter and good dreams
voice and music and delight

Cuba
may the mornings go now
between breakfast
noon and night
weddings
candles and surfeit
may the termite dwindle
may the terminals of bullets be the hollow darkness
while the example of mahogany sinks root
and the firmness of your flesh is asking for directions.

PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico Will Enchant You

You are at the Casa De Espana in old San Juan. The ballroom is open to the stars. The cotillion is about to begin.
Puerto Rican debutantes are lovely to look at, delightful to know—and extraordinarily interesting to talk to.
They speak Spanish and English. They can quote from Cervantes and Whitman. They can discuss Velasquez and they read the New York Times. Not many years from now, they'll be teaching their children the finer aspects of both cultures.
Can you think of a lovelier atmosphere in which to start a new enter-

prise? Puerto Rico now offers new industry freedom from taxes—*and so much more.* You learn to know a second language, a gentle people and the joy of an open-air life.

Why not take a long week-end for a quick reconnaissance? Puerto Rico is a lunch-to-dinner trip from New York. Take your family with you. They will fall in love with this whole enchanted island.

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico advertisement in *The Atlantic* magazine

The Saxon
he touches the ransom
of my inheritance

but the corruption
the jewel
and complexion
of the whore
—and so much more
is native
be it so
to one man
two lips
three families
or the few towns
who sell
the culture pills
and their own daughters' ills
for a slippery core of cash
under dimples
and pretenses
under tresses
and redresses
confess
you kept sea-weed
why you use
the mascara of Cervantes
the deodorant of Whitman
the rouge of Velasquez
for effects
the street girls
whose flesh
they themselves

disown
get from their bones
with a clean tear

is it not because
third parties pay
and those urchins
that you gag
and sneak into the grave
grow back
and feed
the very Yankees
that you woo?

there is more profit hid
in the petals of your hothouse
than in the cartridge of a gutter
drunk with rain.

HANDS OFF THE IMAGINATION!

A Communication

JOHN CONDELL

I HAVE just read Michael Gold's remarks (in the *Worker* for August 16th) concerning the poem "Morning Departures" by Hershel Horn which appeared in the July issue of *Mainstream.* I say "remarks" because Gold has certainly not taken the trouble to write criticism of this poem. Instead he has hurled at it a lavish supply of brickbats, perfectly sound no doubt in some other application but so misdirected in this case that they become nothing but a barrage of reactionary, infantile leftisms. Gold writes, ". . . There is free speech in America, yes, just as there are mink coats and Cadillacs, but who can afford it? Only the rich, the monopolists of free speech, the Luces, Hearsts, or Chandlers. Should a Marxist paupers magazine devote some of its precious space to spreading this 'new' abstract poetry, this unintelligible, irrational, deathly stuff, the metaphysics of an expiring class that no longer knows how to face reality?"

I can say immediately that there is a great deal of reality in Hershel Horn's poetry and not one scrap of reality in the way Michael Gold attempts to apply his rag bag of remarks. I then want to say that I do not think "Morning Departure" is a good poem,—there are some statements that are unintelligible I think in themselves and not because of my own limitations, there are some rhythmical crudities, a few words are used in such a way that they cast a blur about them rather than light,—but there are many successful and beautiful things in the poem and a great deal of feeling is communicated—and this feeling comes from its basic statement which has nothing whatsoever to do with mink coats and Cadillacs. When a man and woman are very much in love are not the clocks of morning a great tyranny?

Gold would no doubt say that a poem on this theme which *he* could understand completely might be permitted to appear in the pages of *Mainstream.* But he gets lost in the present poem so he tosses the poet onto the scrap heap of an "expiring class" and tries to cross out the poem with the big loud words "abstract, irrational, metaphysical." Does Gold know something about Hershel Horn that I do not know? Is Mr. Horn a notorious anti-Semite? Is he down in Little Rock talking up race hatred among the white children? Is he a wild-eyed emigré in Paris who has committed himself to a secret movement to restore the Romanov dynasty? Some very reactionary people have written good

poems—but why would they submit them to *Mainstream?* I will gamble that the following is the truth: Hershel Horn is a young man who is trying to find his own particular style as a poet—he likes the general policy of *Mainstream*—and so that's where he sent his poems.

What are you trying to do, Michael Gold? There is a genuine talent for poetic excitement in the writing of Mr. Horn. How often do you find such talent? And how often, even when it exists, is it submitted to *Mainstream* for publication? Don't most of the talented young people submit their poems to the non-Marxist, fly-by-night "little" magazines or to the well-established quarterlies? But here is a talented poet who *chooses* to appear in *Mainstream,* and, bango!, just like that, you get out your big orthodox club and beat him over the head. "Get out of here!" you shout at poor Horn. "Get out of these sacred proletarian precincts! Get out of MY movement! Go back to Henry and Clare Luce, to the Hearsts, to the Chandlers. That's where you belong!" Etc. Not that I expect Mr. Horn to follow these instructions. In the first place, that is surely not where he came from; and in the second place, I doubt very much if he is going to abandon his position just because an illustrious Old-Timer has tried to knock him out.

Gold might at least have quoted the poem correctly! He quotes two of the stanzas of the poem as if the second followed immediately upon the first. Actually, there is another stanza altogether which comes in between the two reprinted by Gold. (Cf. *Mainstream* for July.) It just happens that this stanza which Gold omits is surely completely intelligible —and quite beautiful:

> Cold in the dawn with water lilies trembling
> the morning light waits admittance in your room.
> Frozen rhododendrons break with color as
> the warm sun warms and warns that all time is near.

And now there is a question to ask of Michael Gold. "Morning Departure" is printed on page eleven of the July *Mainstream.* Did Gold turn the page? On page twelve is another poem by Mr. Horn entitled "Poem in the Desert over a Dead Lizard." This is, from my point of view, a good poem almost from first to last. (Good poems from first to last are most rare. And I think Michael Gold knows that.) In fact there are some very beautiful and touching things in this poem. How about this statement?:

> With your long tongue you were
> the city's janitor; you ate your leaves
> from a pool of locked green stone, and the gifts you gave me
> were songs without end: . . .

Has Michael Gold lost so much interest in literature that he do not appreciate the wonderfully poetic suggestiveness of "a pool of lock green stone"? Does he think that a poem to a dead lizard can only b conceived in the metaphysical brain of the expiring class? Or does h rather like this poem about the lizard but wanted to make an easy, lou orthodox case against the "'new' abstract" poetry and so picked on th obscurities of the first poem? Or, even though he may have liked th poem somewhat, does he say that *Mainstream* has no room for anythin but the political, class-struggle poem? On the other hand, isn't a goo poem, whether political or not, important evidence of man's humanity And isn't socialism primarily concerned with man's humanity and ho to increase it? The great lyric poet Catullus developed an intense hatre for his father's old friend, Julius Caesar, once the latter had become th Dictator and he wrote some violently satirical poems against him. A about the same time, he also wrote a marvelously beautiful poem o the death of his mistress's pet sparrow. If this poem were submitted t *Mainstream* does Michael Gold say that it should not be printed?

Poetry may be described as the meticulous arrangement of deepl felt words caught by surprise. The meticulous arrangement has to d with all the sweat and hard work,—with the technical problems. But n matter how much meticulous arrangement there is, the poem will b worthless if the words are not deeply felt and caught by surprise. Poet must be a process of discovery—of illumination,—and on a deep level intense feeling. The really great poets make startling discoveries for in every line; in fact the very texture of their poems, the whole sty itself, is a discovery that creates a new and constant climate throughou the work (e.g., *The Divine Comedy,* Shakespeare's sonnets). And the discoveries, these illuminations, whether of the great poets or those le than great, are not achieved by a thought-out, rational process. Thoug and reason must guide and stimulate and reject and accept—but first the must be the irrational confrontation—the miraculous verbal surprise. Th is the precious sign of the imagination—of human feeling breaking o into the mind and illuminating the whole landscape.

Why is Michael Gold so enraged and scornful and destructive wh a poet in *Mainstream* shows evidence of some freedom of the imagi tion? Is it because there is really no room for the freedom of t imagination in the socialist view of the world? Or is it that Gold h abandoned whatever critical acumen he may once have had and is conte now to maintain a position for himself by using the tactics of the Lo High Executioner,—lunging out with a death sentence for anything th may stand in the way of his comprehension? I think it is the latter.

Down through the years, there has been an effort to organize

tastes of the left toward a poetry that is off the top of the head—toward the immediately intelligible, romantically proletarian, utterly optimistic mass commodity,—and the result has been a terrible crop of "leftwing" poems, written at a very low level of energy, deadly dull and frightfully shoddy. Ironically, the taste of the vast audience for television drama has been organized by the networks and the capitalist sponsors in exactly the same direction—with the emphasis of course on middleclass rather than proletarian romance,—and the result has been essentially the same—a crop of listless, dull, shoddy TV plays. It would seem that the priceless, indispensable element of the imagination cannot be trusted either by the right or the left.

And the left should know better. The left is supposed to know that there is a necessity operating in the changes taking place in society—and is supposed really to believe that when a poet commits himself to this necessity that his feelings and thinking will be greatly intensified and enriched. But there is no broad, straight, super-highway for the imagination. The expression of the imagination is infinitely diverse, explorative, unpredictable. And it is these characteristics which give the imagination its essential humanity. By its very nature it cannot be dominated by the dictates of a hardened and regularized control. The dialectical paradox is that there can be a free play of the imagination growing up and flowering out of the necessities of its origin. *And after having committed ourselves to the necessities of the origin, we must have faith in the free play!* Otherwise all those people are correct who say that socialism must inevitably bring with it a policing of the arts. But I do not believe that they need be correct—I do not believe that the necessities of change must necessarily inhibit the imagination and then suppress it and then drive it underground.

And so I say *hands off the imagination!* To Michael Gold who has opened up with all his big guns as if this poem were moving menacingly against him and not perhaps actually *with* him against a common enemy, to him I say he had better commence making sure what the hell he is shooting at. His reckless attack on this poem will be applauded only by those people who have given up a living relationship with literature for a set of sanctified attitudes that absolve one from the effort and responsibility (and excitement!) of a fresh reaction. I, for one, could not possibly applaud the brutal, uncritical, self-righteous treatment administered by Michael Gold to the innocent and attractive poetry of Hershel Horn.

Mr. Condell is the author of the article "Likeness in the Theatre" which appeared in the October, 1957 issue of *Mainstream*.

Two further views on this subject appear in our letter column.

RiGhT FaCe

The Sacredest Profession

There is more conscious dedication to high moral and spiritual end in life insurance than in any other phase of business life in the nation.—The Rev. John Sutherland Bonnell, minister of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, addressing the Equitable Life Assurance Society.

Use CLOROX

The Rev. Dr. Daniel A. Poling, editor of The Christian Herald, supported the Post Office ban on "Lady Chatterly's Lover," a romantic novel by D. H. Lawrence.

The churchman said he had read the book with humility and "objectively sans all inherited or acquired Puritanical prejudices."

Nevertheless, he added, the novel "dirtied my mind."

"The author has seduced and prostituted the English language," Dr. Poling asserted. "In this book is page after page of sex—sex in the sun and rain, in the hut and forest, at all times and places, sex with what should be unprintable conversation, sex with nasty words that appear in public only on the walls of ill-kept outhouses. The principal character is promiscuous."—The *New York Times.*

Humanitarian Afterthought

As illustration that the Soviet Union is moving into the inviting vacuum in health programs all over the world, Mr. Conner [head of Merck and Co.] cited the case of India. He said his company had set up a penicillin plant for the Indian Government, but had hesitated when asked later to set up a streptomycin plant because of doubts of the wisdom of increased Government involvement in drug production.

"But when we got word that a Soviet team was coming to put it all in the public sector with Soviet financing, whatever doubts we had were speedily resolved," he told the Senate Labor and Welfare Committee.

"We quickly concluded arrangements for the streptomycin plant."—The *New York Times.*

Writhemetic

The Navy today downgraded officially the results of a Polaris missile test at Cape Canaveral, described originally as "fully successful."

The Navy acted after being asked about reports that the missile had flown only about 60 miles toward its 800-mile goal. Last week the Air Force's Atlas missile suffered a somewhat similar fate.—UPI dispatch.

Tired of It All?

When George Washburn of 7 Gracie Square told his wife he had bought an island, she asked: "Now why did you do that?"

Mr. Washburn, who was revealed as the bidder who paid the United States Government $18,000 for North Dumpling Island off the Connecticut coast, conceded that he did not quite know what to tell his wife.

"You see, I had no reason," Mr. Washburn said. "It was like walking past a store. You see a good buy, and you go in and buy it." . . .

Mr. Washburn said he was intrigued by the island's isolation and might convert the house into a retreat from East Hampton which is a retreat from 7 Gracie Square.—The *New York Times.*

Post Mortem Hagiology

Roman Catholic ecclesiastics and laymen here (Rome) have formed a commitee to promote the beatification of the late Pope Pius XII. . . .

The committee proposes to collect evidence of the Pontiff's saintliness, including testimony from persons who say they have obtained grace and benefits through the heavenly intercession of Pius since his death last Oct. 9.—The *New York Times.*

$64,000,000 Answer

In your pointed and appropriate editorial of Aug. 11 "Russia at the Coliseum" you close with a question, "what, we must wonder, is the Soviet Government afraid of?"

May I venture the suggestion that chiefly among many worries, the Soviet Government is afraid of itself?—(Rev.) Cecil Plumb, writing to the *New York Times.*

books in review

American Negro Fiction

THE NEGRO NOVEL IN AMERICA, by Robert A. Bone. Yale University Press. $5.00.

THIS is, fundamentally, a valuable book I say, fundamentally, because there is all too frequently a certain ungraciousness, a tone of smug superiority, and a humorless academic patronage which go far, at first reading, to obscure its substantial contribution. There is also an almost obsessive need to attack the Communist Party in and out of season, although this may, in part, serve rather as a calculated defense against the author's himself being red-baited. For despite his characterization of each such contribution of the Party's as "inadvertent," "accidental," "involuntary" or deviously motivated, he does realize and record far more fully than any other recent literary historian the Communist Party's work on the national question in the Thirties, and its part in the development of a conscious Negro literature. He also comes closer to a Marxist interpretation of the problems of the Negro writer, in terms of nationalism and assimilationism, than does any similar work.

The general outline of the book approximates, without explicitly restating the thesis of Hugh Gloster's *Negro Voice in American Fiction* (1948). Gloster saw Negro fiction as following, often a some years' distance, trends developed in other American literature. Thus he spoke of the rather stilted, formal, and heavily moralistic writing of the early Negro novelists (1890-1920) not only in terms of their special purposes and problems but also of the still powerful after-effects of the genteel tradition. Similarly Gloster related the "Negro Renaissance" not only to the impact of the new Negro capital—Harlem—but also to the general development of early 20th century literature here from pre-war Bohemianism to the deepening revolt of the post-war lost generation. The interdependence of socially conscious Negro and white novels in the Thirties is, as he said, even more evident. Finally Gloster pointed out that in the fiction published during and just after World War II Negro and white writers are virtually indistinguishable. Bone's four chronological divisions of the Negro novel in the United States, and his discussion of each in relation to the other fiction of its period is, as we shall see, a parallel one.

His volume is organized in these four substantial sections with a brief an

umentative epilogue. On the whole it cceeds unusually well in combining luminating, if necessarily over-simplied, summaries of relevant sociological aterial with significant, often controersial, literary criticism of many repreentative contemporary novels.

The central theme of the first two ections is well indicated by their titles: 1) The Novel of the Rising Middle lass 1890-1920; and (2) The Discovry of the Folk, which includes such subtles as The Great Migration, Rise of n Intelligentsia, The New Negro Movement, Cultural Collaboration in the Jazz ge, and The Essence of the Negro enaissance.

The third section, The Search for a radition 1930-1940, offers a stimulatg discussion of the changing relationips between race consciousness and ass consciousness during the depreson. That catastrophe Bone here says, paradoxically gave the Lost Generation mething to believe in." After a brief t telling analysis of the fact that "Neo intellectuals were even more reonsive to the social crisis of the 1930's an were the whites, in direct proporon to the greater suffering of the Neo masses," Bone discusses the militancy such writers which "in contrast to at of earlier periods, was social rather an racial in emphasis . . based on the ievances of the Negro masses rather an on those of the rising middle class." e then speaks specifically of the Comunist Party's work in this field, recogzing a number of important contribuons, but imputing ulterior motives for ch. He concludes this discussion with e statement (italics mine):

> The Communist Party did not invent egro nationalism, but it did its best to encourage it for political reasons. . . . By thus enjoining the Negro author to explore his own tradition, the Party *inadvertently* advanced the legitimate development of Negro art.

The first half of the third section ends with a good restatement of the way in which the depression both "linked the Negro novelist to a broader tradition of social protest" and "encouraged a continuing interest in his Negro heritage as such." The second half is then devoted to a comparatively full study of individual works by Arna Bontemps, George Wylie Henderson, Zora Neale Hurston. William Attaway and, at some length, Richard Wright. These analyses are all illuminating and show a serious respect for subject matter and social insight as well as formal values. Even one who is not familiar with the ten or twelve novels considered here should be able to follow the discussion and many such readers will, I think, be interested enough to read the books themselves after finishing Bone's account of them.

The fourth and last major section, The Revolt Against Protest 1940-1952, is the least satisfactory, although it too contains several excellent and important individual studies. There are here a number of provocative, unexplored, half-truths such as:

> During the Depression these three novelists [Wright, Himes, Ellison] were brought into the party fold primarily through their quest for racial justice. But when the party adopted a "soft line" on the Negro question during the war, the very militancy which originally attracted them to the party now caused them to break away. This break, as recorded in their subsequent fiction, was in each case a traumatic experience. And in each case "the plunge outside of history," as Ralph Ellison calls it, was

followed by a reaction against racial protest as such.

Similarly unpursued and undeveloped insights appear in specific literary analyses, as in the discussion of Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man,* where Bone says: "He [the hero] withdraws not merely from Stalinist [sic] politics, but from politics as such" A real exploration of this statement would give its author a much more profound and better balanced understanding of the entire group of anti-political novelists with whom he deals here, and of the dangers as well as the possibilities of their literary genre. This section, which was completed before the appearance of John Killens' *Youngblood* selects Jean Toomer's *Cane,* Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* as the three best works of Negro novelists, and three of the best American novels since 1890.

In the substantial ten-page epilogue entitled Freedom for the Negro Novelist, Bone presents two contradictory "fallacies" which, he thinks, are major handicaps to the free development of Negro literature. His definition of the "Art-as-Weapon" theory is badly oversimplified, but not much more so than it often is by its most zealous proponents. Since he deals with this theory only in the crude form which implies that the "task of criticism" is "wholly ideological: a novel is good if it serves our cause," he has no difficulty at all in demolishing it. Next, dealing with the "Cultural Ghetto" fallacy, Bone says:

> Lloyd Brown, who writes at his best when attacking the assimilationist critics, has exposed the basic fallacy in their reasoning: "There are some Negro writers who confuse the essential and all-i portant struggle to break out of ghetto with the false idea of breaki away from the people who are confi in the ghetto." [Which Way for Negro Writer? *Masses and Mainstrea* March 1951.] It should be obvious t there is a common denominator of perience to be found in all cultures, cluding Negro culture. Why, then, i novel based on Negro life thought be less "universal" than a novel bas for example, on life in a small N England town? Why indeed, unless critic is convinced of the inherent periority of all things white?

He concludes with a well balan if unoriginal summary:

> In exceptional circumstances, th both the protest novel and the novel white life are legitimate concerns of Negro novelist. To restore perspecti however, it is necessary to restate general rule: a high protest content not likely to produce good fiction; studious avoidance of Negro life scarcely more promising; the treatm of race material, though not necessa race conflict, is by all odds the likel alternative. . . . In the long run, an centered Negro fiction will evolve, f from the crude nationalistic propaga of the past and the subtler assimilati ist propaganda of the present.

Finally the book ends with a scho teacherish appendix solemnly mark over a hundred novels the equival of A, B, C, D, or F, and with an cellent bibliography which includes wealth of critical material in compa tively unknown periodicals as well a large number of books. The bibli raphy, like the book as a whole, ma tains a high level of scholarship, will prove useful to anyone seriou interested in Negro literature today.

ANNETTE T. RUBINST

Books Received

THE WOMAN AND THE WHALE, by Delmar Malarsky. Little, Brown & Co. $3.75.

THIS very pleasant anti-fascist fantasy has a plot with as many twists and turns as the most ingenious of librettos. Its locale is the island of Minomita, "one hundred and twenty-five kilometers directly south of the island of Mallorca and two hundred and fifty due west of the Spanish seaport of Alicante." The personal property of Sr. Alberto Pomposo Melendez, a relative of El Caudillo, Minomita is inhabited by a number of hardy, half-starved, stiff-necked fishermen, grossly underpaid by the patron of the island; and by an approximately equal number of vivacious women determined to put an end to the economic exploitation of their husbands and to their own traditional wifely subservience. Among those ranged against Pomposo are the two principals, María Montierra and Gustavo Mujerno. María, leader of the fishermen's strike, is a kind of "Salt of the Earth" heroine, if one can imagine that film set in the Mediterranean and remade as *opera buffa*. Gustavo is the brave one who makes it possible for María to be faithful to her stubborn spouse in her own fashion.

These attractive human elements are thrown into a veritable whirlpool of adventure: sex withheld—the Lysistrata theme—and love bestowed; a shot in the nick of time; ambushes, and hostages hidden in belfries; homes burned and ships boarded; volleys of shot and volleys of rocks; executions announced and postponed; love renounced and marital reconciliations; and lastly a dead whale whose intolerable presence on shore contributes to the victory of the fishermen —in what manner, you will discover on reading Mr. Malarsky's tale.

If one has to quibble, it might be about the somewhat unsuccessful attempt to render the Spanish idiom into an English which turns out alternately florid and stilted in the dialogue But here the author has done no more than venture where Hemingway, too, should have feared to tread.

THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES 1959, ed. Martha Foley and David Burnett. Houghton Mifflin Co. $4.50.

IN her foreword to this, the forty-fourth annual volume of "the oldest and most successful collection of short stories in the world," Miss Foley tells us that its editors have always "tried to avoid the slick, the contrived or the ephemeral." To judge from this year's 20 choices, the effort is hardly rewarding at the moment. Perhaps a greater interval between anthologies would allow for a fairer sampling of the medium.

Certain selections seem strange by any standard: a tenth-rate "Somerset Maugham" sketch; a tale of the effect of an old man's curse upon a Western town; the rewrite of a newspaper story, in which a respectable citizen, overcome by heat and novocain, plays at holding up a bank, etc. Grammar school stuff. On a slightly higher pitch are various accounts of personal defeat and what is called alienation today. The latter concern generally the effort and inability of middle-class people to establish contact with one another; their feelings are either inhibited or too weak to be-

gin with. The last few years' crop of children have almost shrivelled up, to be replaced by their elders: nervous upper-income bracketeers whose egos put up a weak defense against beggars, petty swindlers, divorced wives and other threats to their banal security. Even a Negro with a hard luck story which proves to be untrue has joined the crowd of specters that menace the wallet and the carefully guarded heart. It is as if the ring of human sympathy had contracted to some three feet beyond the skin of the central character and his family. There the writer has built a wall crowned with irregular pieces of cut glass.

Apart from those stories which are frankly juvenile in conception, one will find the normal number of well-tailored anecdotes. But of all the writers represented, only Hugh Geeslin, Jr. ("A Day in the Life of the Boss" from *The Georgia Review*") and Harvey Swados. ("The Man in the Toolhouse" from *The Western Review*) have much grasp of the implications of the conflicts to which they bear witness.

THE CHOSEN, ed. Harold U. Ribalow. Abelard-Schuman. $5.00.

OF the twenty-three stories in this collection of Jewish-American authors, six or seven are well worth reading—a good record for these times. Among the rest, a number are old hat. (Will it take another generation to wean these writers from their grandmother's chicken soup?) Still others are tainted with humorless irony, like a "between-friends" joke too ugly to be told to strangers. In at least two such stories concerned with anti-Semitism, the Jewish protagonist emerges as a coward or idiot. Maybe that's life. More likely, it is the expression of the writer's hope to overcome the "disability" of his origin by proving that he is capable of self-mockery If the judgment seems censorious, let the reader compare the laughter of the classical writers with this sour spite against one's own people.

Apart from these, there is much love in this group of tales—love between mothers and children, grandfathers and grandchildren, love of learning, love of books. There is little sexual love, except by indirection. Among American writers, this may be considered a small achievement, were one not struck by the general blandness and lack of passion—except grief—exhibited by the characters. The hero is usually the wise man rather than a man of action. There are more cowards than one would except, or hope for.

"The Proposition," by Ashur Baizer is a moving story about a little boy and his grandfather. There is no "perfect" ending here; each character lives as he must—not as the author plans things for him. Other well-told tales are "Jacob," by Leonard Greenbaum; "A Stone Should Live Alone," by Jack Luria; "The Last Mohican," by Bernard Malamud; "The Golden Years," by Sylvia Rothchild; "The Flower," by Miriam Rugel; and "The Happy Ending," by Sylvia Grossman.

NEW FACE INN THE MIRROR, by Yael Dayan. World Publishing Co. $3.00.

MISS DAYAN is the daughter of General Moshe Dayan, former Commander-in-Chief of the Israeli

rmy. She is twenty years old, uni-ersity educated, well travelled, and a eteran of two years' service in the rmy, where she rose to the rank of ieutenant via officers' training school. Her self-obsessed short novel provides nteresting evidence that Israel has, in he few years of its existence as a state, eveloped an elite little different from hat in the advanced capitalist countries. This caste within a class appears to be oth intelligent and disciplined, con-inced of its superiority to the masses f people, and determined to retain its ight to order others about.

The author—or let us say, her alter go, Ariel Ron—belongs to the younger eneration of this privileged group. What in the father is purpose has al-eady turned to caprice in the daughter; he father's power to bend people to is will has become the daughter's use-ss and ugly compulsion to dominate ocial "inferiors"; where the father is motionally obtuse, the daughter sim-ers continually with forced and in-ensitive feeling; if salutes are due her ather, attention is mandatory for her. o each of her affairs becomes a skir-ish from which her opposite number s lucky to emerge still in command f his private parts.

The novel is cast in the form of a onfession. Such revelations have be-ome quite fashionable recently, and are upposed to be both psychological stu-ies and moral documents. What pre-ents them from being the first is lack f interest; and from being the second, ack of conclusion. Since the ego con-emplates only itself, it cannot observe ven itself with objectivity; nor acquire ny judgment to lead it outside itself here it might learn to act in ordinary situations. It is truly a face in the mir-ror, murmuring. "How interestingly heartless you are! How fascinatingly nasty! Why not write a book to present your unusually unpleasant character to the world? And when the world is suf-ficiently entranced, show it how you can change for the better. *Find yourself.* Renounce your petty cruelties; become nobler; stand, 'utterly free,' on a cliff in Brittany (to which the labor of others enabled you to fly), and let the amazed multitudes of readers behold a fresh-minted, beautiful and unselfish soul."

It would be ungenerous not to wish Miss Dayan, or Ariel, well in her moral enterprise. (She is probably nicer than her description of herself.) But it is not enough to stamp a new face on a coin. And finding oneself is only a be-ginning—if it is that—toward more im-portant changes in which the ego plays a surprisingly tiny part.

COMMON SENSE AND NUCLEAR WARFARE, by Bertrand Russell. Simon and Schuster. $2.50.

JUST ten years ago Bertrand Russell was calling for preventive war against the Soviet Union. Today, this famous British philosopher and mathe-matician is an outstanding advocate of peaceful co-existence.

In this short book (92 pages), Russell sets forth the logic of his change of political heart. At a time when only the United States had the A-Bomb, he called for compelling the Soviet Union either to submit to Ameri-can proposals or to be destroyed by

atomic weapons. With the acquisition of both the A-bomb and H-Bomb by the Soviet Union, Russell now sees the urgent need for guaranteed peaceful co-existence if "Western Civilization" is not to be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust. It should be added that, although unacknowledged by him, the power of the world peace movement has likewise deeply influenced his present thinking.

This book must be welcomed as a genuine contribution to the world peace struggle. It urges negotiations between the Great Powers leading towards: outlawing of nuclear tests, destruction of nuclear weapons, world disarmament, a united and disarmed Germany, and withdrawal of foreign troops and bases from all European countries. It vividly depicts the horrors of a nuclear war and denounces the policy of brinkmanship.

The chief defect in Russell's general position is his plague-on-both-your-attitude. He believes that the U.S., British and Soviet governments are led by irresponsible and stubborn politicians who must be convinced of the errors of their fanaticism if war is to be avoided. However, when only the Soviet government has been so characterized these many years, this represents a real advance. Also, it would be too much to expect that Russell, who has devoted such a vast quantity of his intellectual energies to the "defense of Western Civilization," should now recognize the genuine quality of the Soviet stand for peace.

Common Sense and Nuclear Warfare can strongly impel its readers to think more deeply about the dangers of nuclear war and to act more urgently for peace since Bertrand Russell has shown much common sense in his plea that nuclear warfare be banished from this earth.

etters

DITORS, *Mainstream*:

It was with consuming interest that read the article, "Little Cloud Over uffalo," by Kay T. Horne in the ugust issue of *Mainstream*. It had oth insight and understanding of the conomic and cultural deterioration of ur once proud "'Queen City of Lakes." onditions, in some cases, are even orse than those described by Miss lorne. However, I think a little more ttention should be given to the subject f so-called "illegitimate children" and ie "burden" they are to the Welfare epartment. Especially the desperate light and circumstances of Negro nothers and their children who make p the majority of recipients of aid for ependent children. Lately there have een many tirades in the newspapers gainst these unfortunate women as wel- re "chiselers" with the avowed pur- ose of "cheating" the Welfare by de- berately having "out of wedlock" nildren to avoid working. It has also een hinted both overtly and covertly iat as the high percentage of these omen are Negroes this gives truth to e lie of inherent Negro immorality, roviding justification for the restrictive venant and school segregation. As a egro woman, I know these charges to e false. The inhuman and abysmal overty of these Negro women and nildren belies the reasoning that any- ie would rather live that way than ork. The contrary is true. It is the nial of job opportunity that forces ung Negro women into the vicious rcle of concubinage, unwanted preg- ncy and welfare. Unemployment, er-crowded ghetto living conditions, no recreational facilities and often the lack of even elementary conditions of personal privacy and sanitation, causes the breakdown of family life and perpetrates a feeling of helplessness and defeatism. Forced into an existence without hope, Negro women nonetheless have to survive. Add to this the insane policy of denying scientific birth control knowledge to welfare recipients. Most times driven by desperate privation and the desire to obtain the "luxury" of a warm bed, a decent meal or a pair of nylons these women are forced into relationships with men in which the natural biological outcome is pregnancy. Negro women are virtually outlawed in Buffalo. From the age of puberty on they are open to the deliberate sexual abuse of Negro men and helpless prey to the avaricious sexuality of white men. Open to insult on the street, in their own home, in places of business, without police protection, ostracized socially and exploited economically, many Negro women are forced into concubinage and prostitution. Unable in most cases to obtain support from "fathers" for their "out of wedlock" children, they are forced on relief rolls. Outstanding reasons for this being: a) unemployment of Negro men; b) laxity in the courts in regard to Negro paternity suits, the tendency to regard each case as just another example of "Negro immorality"; c) poverty of the Negro community being such as to discourage adoption; d) the impossibility of winning or bringing a paternity suit against white fathers.

These are the welfare "chiselers" Commissioner Burke would have us penalize with jail sentences and/or taking their children and placing them

in institutions. I personally know of mothers with five or six children trying to make ends meet on $200.00 or less a month. This "magnificent" sum would hardly permit "chiseling." In fact one wonders that it permits survival. These abused and exploited women have already been punished enough by a cruel and indifferent society that wishes to reverse nature by making childbirth a criminal offense, and condemning innocent children to motherlessness and life in an institution for the unheard of "crime" of being born. I would be very much interested in hearing other opinoins on this very important subject.

M. S. J.

EDITORS, *Mainstream*:

Last evening Helen and I read aloud "Little Cloud over Buffalo" (August *Mainstream*). We often read aloud things that seem worth while.

We felt greatly rewarded by the reading. The article gave a graphic and intimate picture of the "Buffalo crisis." We thought the first half of the article superior to the latter half. But the entire unit was good.

We wish *Mainstream* could print equally descriptions of similar local situations that, on second reading, prove to be of universal importance.

Good wishes,

SCOTT NEARING

EDITORS, *Mainstream*:

Michael Gold, our great progressive writer, critic and journalist had a column in the *People's World* 8/8 about Mainstream.

It is high time that some discussion is brought forth about the only progressive literary magazine in this country. This should be a matter of progressives, because with our critic we should help to improve this publi tion.

Michael Gold brought out only aspect, poetry. It is very sad, that modern drivel has made its way i all forms of art and so many artists f they are not artists if they do not with the crowd. It is a long time since I stopped reading the poems *Mainstream,* they had lost their me ing and the sentences had lost th continuity.

The paintings very often reflect same drivel. Lines and blotches n have a meaning to Freud, but they not communicate with me, they doodling!

The last short story about that ca taker family was stupid and disgust just like that stocking story.

We need a literary magazine bad but you cannot expect support, if cannot give the readers something n You have to be careful that the arti are not too involved and that the w ers do not show off with their kno edge of the English language. Sev of my friends who read the wee papers and *New World Review* f *Mainstream* too hard going.

I have just finished reading s German (East) literary magazines short stories and poems. It seems to that the writers did not fall into trap of "western art" and they h plenty to say.

Americans can write good s stories. I got here *The American C tury* edited by Max Lieber, with sto written in the 30's. I liked the bl prints by Anton Refregier. We here or there a good poem, but one to go through an awful lot of junk

ind a good one.

A San Francisco Reader

DITORS, *Mainstream*:

Perhaps I should be grateful to S. F. Reader's" diatribe against the oem about the tarpit lady in the July *Mainstream,* as it prompted me to sal- age this issue (which had come when I vas deep in a writing project of my wn) from its unslit wrapper. It is the est issue of the magazine I have seen.

I was curious to see if I would agree vith S.F. Reader, and I did not. I don't hink he knows his iambics from his entameters. I admit I've seen greater oems. Even his insensitive soul might eel the impact of lines like the fol- owing about a dead soldier:

. . "Life to be sure is nothing much to lose
But young men think it is, and we were young,"

lthough with his cut and dried ap- roach to art he would probably con- der it un-Marxist to "lean on the nought of death after 70 years," in the on-Socialist corner of the earth he and inhabit—or the following four lines, vhich even he might approve:

My spoon was lifted when the bomb came down,
hat left no hand, no face, no spoon to hold;
wo hundred thousand died in my home town,
his came to pass before my soup was cold."

requires extreme artistry and re- raint to produce such a jolting effect such a few lines; and admittedly *orning Departure* isn't in this class. ill I savored it; the words went to- gether with euphony; and the writer really had something in stanza II. But what really annoyed me in S. F.'s stereo- typed brushoff was his failure to note the three really terrific prose selections in the same issue: *The Bloody Court- house,* The *Creative Thought of Frank Lloyd Wright* and The *'Superfluous' Millions.*

Michael Gold, who is a writer of some perception, did mention them in his criticism of the tarpit lady, in the August 8 P.W. Gold also brought out that *Mainstream* is the "only magazine in our backward country dedicated to Marxist culture."

Given these three pieces and the Re- fregier blockprints, which S.F. liked; and he could, if he wern't so didactic and did not have fibrosis of the imagi- nation allow such "decadents" as my- self the one page occupied by *Morning Departure.*

As for the "stocking story," which appeared in *Mainstream* last year and which also riled S.F., I found that a warm, human and utterly delightful tale! And I also like the *Berlin Report* by the same writer.

KATHLEEN CRONIN

Editors, *Mainstream*:

That was a *very fine* article by Sidney Finkelstein you published on Frank Lloyd Wright in a recent issue of *Mainstream.* I knew Wright's work well, as a layman (I am not an architect), and I met him once and was with him four or five days. Finkelstein's estimate is properly appreciative of Wright's monumental achievement, which is the main thing. Yet the criticism of Wright's weaknesses and shortcomings

is remarkably accurate, and thoroughly just. It was a real pleasure to read such an article in *Mainstream.*

Do you know what would be a good subject for treatment in the magazine, if you could get someone competent to do it? A re-evaluation of the so-called new American painting—abstract expressionism, action painting, etc. Such a re-examination is beginning to take place in the art world (see Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's article in the April issue of *Arts*) but the colossal arrogance and anti-social attitude of the abstract expressionist painters keeps growing.

A.

Mainstream *did run a critique of the late Jackson Pollock, one of the most important members of this school of painting: "Jackson Pollock: Waste of Talent." The article, by John Berger, appeared in our April,* 1959 *issue.—The Editors.*