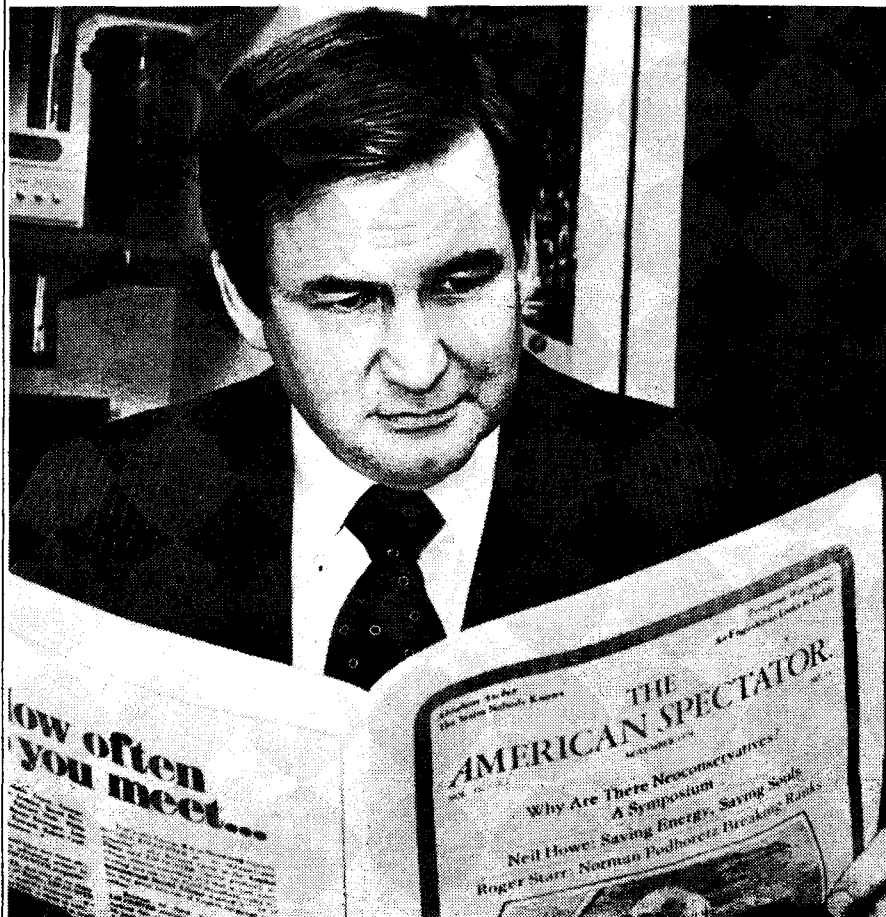


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integrated (though not always deftly) into a prose texture so rich and persuasive that Chandler's novels, flaws and all, have earned the standing of minor masterpieces. "As a writer," Miriam Gross has said, "he owes everything to his style; which is perhaps just another way of saying that he *was* a writer, not just an entertainer, and one whose work seems likely to outlast many a contemporary with apparently more serious pretensions."

Chandler's virtues as a writer are equally apparent in the letters Frank MacShane has chosen for his new collection, and they are joined by something not found in the novels: the literary opinions of a widely read, unusually perceptive correspondent. Sometimes the opinions come wrapped inside a patented Chandler simile; Edmund Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County*, for example, is dismissed as "indecent enough . . . and in exactly the most offensive way—without passion, like a phallus made of dough." More often, though, they are delivered straight, and are none the less impressive for it; writing to Charles Morton about the reason why Dashiell Hammett stopped writing, Chandler simply suggests that "he may have come to the end of his resources in a certain style and have lacked the intellectual

depth to compensate for that by trying something else." The letters tell us much about the life of a troubled, difficult, and uncertain man, and so they will interest anyone curious about the details of Raymond Chandler's career; but they also provide innumerable glimpses into the mind of an insightful author who knew his craft, and so they will also interest anyone who cares about literature.

Despite its formidable accumulation of detail, Frank MacShane's Chandler biography was oddly unsatisfying; so it is a pleasure to report that the present volume is first-rate, not as good a job of editing as (to cite a model example) Carl Bode's *The New Mencken Letters*, but infinitely better than, say, Carlos Baker's recent Hemingway collection. Correspondents and references are identified carefully, and the index is thorough. Whenever possible, MacShane has returned to the original letters instead of using the edited versions reprinted in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*—a commendable decision; the whole adds up to an outstanding piece of work and a highly readable volume in its own right. Those who, over the years, have had cause to regret the fact that Chandler wrote so little will want to add *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* to their shelves at once. It isn't another *The Long Goodbye*, but it will do. □

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE OLD REGIME: EUROPE TO THE GREAT WAR

Arno J. Mayer / Pantheon Books Inc. / \$16.95

T. John Jamieson

Professor Mayer wishes to establish that World War I, the "war of the masses," was not a venture in capitalist expansion, but an attempt by the ancient feudal aristocracy of Europe to recover its ebbing political and economic hold. To this end he furnishes 300 tedious, repetitious pages of generalizations and statistics showing how the *ancien régime* continued to own most of the land, thereby controlling the languishing agricultural economy; how successful businessmen were assimilated into the aristocracy, ostensibly to keep them from conspiring to overthrow it;

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how "rotten boroughs" mitigated the effects of universal suffrage; how museums discriminated against *avant-garde* artists; how the Papacy "feudalized" religion; and how classical education kept down budding Marxist historians. Professor Mayer, who received his doctorate at Yale, and taught at Columbia, Brandeis, and Harvard before arriving at Princeton, is a Marxist historian. Bismarck's phrase for his kind was "intellectual proletarian," what Paul Elmer More called "a *nouveau intellectuel*, bearing the same relation to the man of genuine education as the *nouveau riche* to the man of inherited manners." We understand too that Waugh spoke of "university-nurtured cultural barbarians." The book

is dedicated to the evangel of sixties' campus anarchy, Herbert Marcuse. Professor Mayer's existence is evidence of the persistence of another regime.

His atrocities of language bear witness to the observation that history is no longer a literary discipline: "bourgeoisification," "denoblement," "monumentalization," "artisanal," "associational," "historical," "fin du siècle." Couched in his unreadable style is an account of prewar European society distorted to support his theory. Among his abounding absurdities are these: As evidence of the nobility's domination of agriculture through ownership of land, Mayer cites the Duke of Sutherland, whose million Scottish acres were fit for little more than a gigantic hunting preserve. Oscar Wilde, dandy *manqué*, appears in Mayer's book as an "aristocratizing" champion of the old order, despite his authorship of an infuriating book called *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*. And, curiously, the Marxist who values art only as "social criticism" seems to take the side of modern abstract artists (decadent aestheticists condemned by Soviet academicians) against the taste of the *ancien régime's* academies. A royal academy condemning bad taste constitutes, in Mayer's view, a reactionary political conspiracy and leads to a world war. It is as though to say Lord Jeffrey's disgust with Wordsworth ("This will never do . . .") was a distant cause of the Napoleonic defeat.

Mayer fails even to render a picturesque account of the *ancien régime's* crepuscular splendor. Instead he provides a dry report on the process of annoblization (assumption into the nobility of worthy candidates from inferior classes) which he castigates as "co-optation" of the middle class. This means another reactionary conspiracy to keep bourgeois "class consciousness" from forming, which would lead automatically to the abolition of aristocracy. Never mind that annoblization has occurred for centuries, even before the existence of heraldry, since families do become extinct and are supplanted. Mayer at once pities and despises the men of wealth aspiring to the prestige of men of birth; social climbing is actually self-humiliation. Somehow, Mayer implies, kings and lords would have been more honest in their contempt of inferiors to have kept the upstarts down completely. These royal scoundrels even had the audacity to grant hereditary titles to Jews. Furthermore, for the sake of completeness, Mayer incorporates republican France into his theory of

an enduring *ancien régime*, speaking of its society as though an invisible king continued to preside over it. But the assimilation of American heirs-esses into the Faubourg St. Germain was not a cause of World War I, indirect or otherwise.

To the Marxist mind, classical education was also a reactionary

conspiracy, therefore a cause of the war. Mayer nods to the notion that studying Aristotle, Virgil, and Horace instilled ideals of *honor*; but such a word echoes meaninglessly in the hollow dark of Marxism. One might choose to consider the extent to which a system based on honors, honorifics, and codes of honorable behavior was actually a rule of honor; but the professor of dialectical mate-

rialism has decided in advance that any pretensions which would raise man above the primordial slime are a monstrous joke. Mayer maintains that the classics were really "a finely tuned screening mechanism," and a device for the "co-optative integration of the sons of magnates of business and the professions into the ruling class." Presumably this literary education, which often diverted

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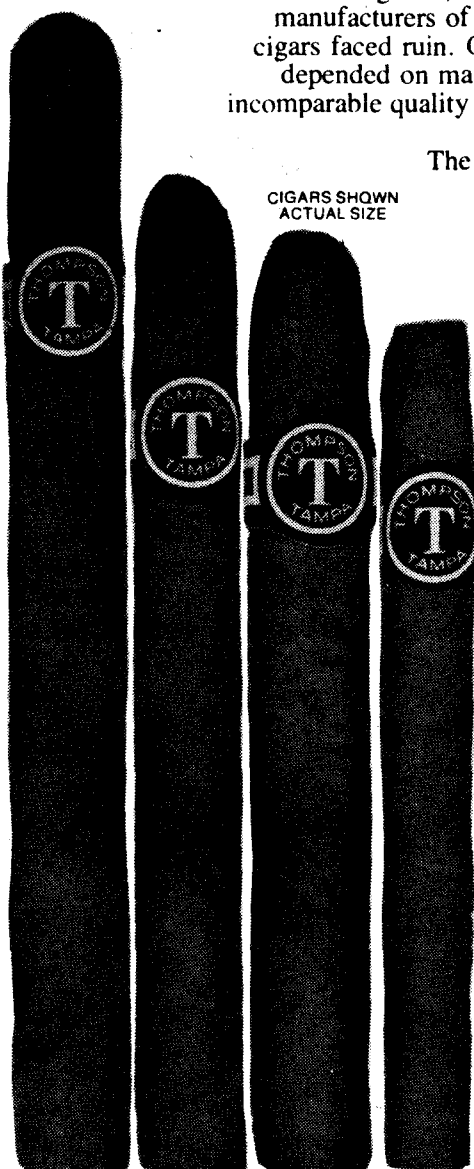
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the sons of the bourgeoisie into the academy or the arts, also impeded the formation of "a counterelite and counterhegemony" by keeping the scions from piling million upon million through the second generation.

Mayer sets out to prove that monarchy itself was the immediate cause of the Great War; then he destroys this thesis by stating that both world wars were really one war with the same cause. A more credible Princetonian, Paul Elmer More, wrote an essay in November 1914 called "The Philosophy of the War," in which he cited "Nietzscheism and Treitschkeism" as the paramount excuses for German aggression. The Will to Power, not *Dieu et mon droit*,

justified the war to its promoters; Pius X refused to bless Franz Josef's cause. A romantic creed of nationalism which glorified strength for its own sake triumphed over traditional morality, which would have found the Central Powers on the unjust side. This romantic creed is the slender fiber which supported Nazism—an anti-aristocratic movement setting out to institute *national* socialism before conquest by *international* socialism. Mayer mentions the paradox of the aristocracy, which Nietzsche excoriated as "decadent," taking up Nietzscheism as a goad to drive the masses into fighting its war. But 20 years later a political establishment that was the *ancien régime's* antithesis harnessed the same doctrine for the same ends. The fault lies in individuals, not institutions.

In his 1914 essay, More notes that the nation which gave the world Nietzsche also gave it Marx. Both were the ugly spawn of the original romantic heresy which he and colleague Irving Babbitt found personified in Rousseau. The two clashing impulses of romanticism, egoism and humanitarian sympathy, ultimately divided into mutually exclusive philosophies, though both were equally relativistic and antinomian: Communism and the creed of the Superman. In the egregious Professor Mayer we observe the representative of one side of the heresy trying to analyze a situation induced by the school of the opposite extreme. The result? Utter irrelevance.

Burke observed that human vices are the cause of great public evils. Human ideals are only the pretexts. Monarchs may be the actors and instruments of evil, but "you would not cure the evil by resolving that there should be no more monarchs." Different ages have different names for the actors and different ideas for

the pretexts; the evils remain the same, as does their consequence. Only romantics believe that the evils can be eradicated, or else *revised* into virtues.

Few will care if Mayer's kind seek academic tenure by beating dead horses; but creators of havoc in the world of ideas must not be tolerated. We know that Communism is founded on a lie; we may say that monarchy is based on a myth. But the assumptions beneath democracy are historically, philosophically, and theologically, at best questionable. The voting machine perpetuates a far more pernicious superstition than the Holy Ampulla. The idealism of democracy is a poor thing beside the idealism of monarchy, and this fact should humble us. For the doctrine of divine right, as T.S. Eliot pointed out, is really a doctrine of divine responsibility. Christian kings have souls subject to damnation. Democratic

politicians, though they promise never to tell a lie, do not claim to have souls. This Eliot meant when he said they "are not men enough to be damned." They bear, therefore, no responsibility, only "accountability" before what Coriolanus called the beast of many heads. In the end, "making the world safe for democracy" is as absurd a pretext for war as the Will to Power.

What Mayer calls the "Thirty Years War of the twentieth century" resulted in the fall of nine European thrones; in their place are three socialist regimes and eight Communist dictatorships. Liberal American politicians, encouraging social democrats and dictating plebiscites in defeated countries, as well as acquiescing to the captivity of Eastern Europe, seem personally implicated. The world might be quite different today, had the place of Wilson and Roosevelt been filled by men who understood the latent virtue of prescriptive institutions. □

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JOURNEY TO NOWHERE: A NEW WORLD TRAGEDY

Shiva Naipaul / Simon & Schuster Inc. / \$13.95

Howard Kaplan

Three years after Jonestown the Monday morning quarterbacking continues. *Journey to Nowhere* makes its appearance among a fresh batch of "as told to" hack works and hard-core investigative accounts.

Howard Kaplan is a free-lance writer living in Minneapolis.

Compared with the competition, Naipaul's effort is a miracle of imagination. The first literary man to tackle Jonestown, he's turned this ready-made horror tale into the occasion for a travel book heavy on the sarcasm. The journey to nowhere is Naipaul's journey. We begin with the apprehensive author zooming into Georgetown in late 1978; a London resident, he hadn't heard of People's Temple until the cyanide party two weeks before. His only plans are to see what he can see.

Yet the Trinidadian-born Naipaul wasn't really starting from scratch. Over the years he and his big brother, V.S. Naipaul, have been bringing us the news from Third World hellholes in their fiction and nonfiction. And the Third World angle is what Shiva is pushing here part-time—another miracle, since everyone but Shiva seems to forget that the Jonestown folly occurred in Guyana. At first he feels like backing out, not because he has to "solve" 900 deaths, but because he has to set foot into the Cooperative Socialist Republic (Guyana's tag since 1970). Because he follows world politics like

There is opportunity in America!



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