

used the creed to destroy a system that they hated.

Despite the changes in American society and the turmoil of the past, Huntington is optimistic that the creed will survive. But will it suffice for a future of limited resources, excessive population, and foreign threat? Huntington perhaps too flippantly dismisses Willmore Kendall's suggestion that, given the built-in discrepancy between the creed and the existential, the 17th- and 18th-century ideas must be discarded. Perhaps Kendall's position might be modified: the creed is taught and learned, hence there is the possibility of flexibility.

Attempts to explain the American experience will and should continue.

What is the meaning of the American experience? Is it an exception? Is it unique? How does it fit into European and world history? What can the past tell us about the future? Have we a future? About all of these questions Huntington has thought deeply and argues persuasively. He both builds upon and dissents from the conventional wisdom. His work merits consideration, but it is best read with some supplementary studies that place recent events in a somewhat different perspective: Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims*, Eric Voegelin's *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* and Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* would not detract from but rather supplement Huntington's "promise of disharmony." □

ture. All literary works were roughly of equal importance; each was a datum in the reconstruction of the past; each was an equally significant part of one index to our culture. I do not overstate the case when I say that Oliver W. Holmes was given more attention than Nathaniel Hawthorne and that Jefferson received more attention than Edward Taylor. It is instructive now to review the volumes in the American Authors Series (American Book Company) which had such powerful influence then, especially the one of Poe, for instance, who was admitted into the canon only after it could be shown that he, too, had extraliterary significance (political, social, scientific). Our professors were historical and "scientific" with a vengeance, and we were being trained to be like them. We did not think it outrageous, as I do now, that Brooks had read some 900 original works in preparation for the writing of *The Flowering of New England*. I can recall my admiration for the wealth of material it contained and the unusual approach it sometimes took. It was a time that simply had to produce *The Literary History of the United States*, and it did.

By way of taking a poll, I spent a week asking graduate students in my present Department of English if they knew of Van Wyck Brooks. Only three did, and none was able to give me the name of his magnum opus, *Makers and Finders*. He was one of the most influential critics of his time, winner of the Dial Prize in 1923, the National Institute of Arts and Letters Gold Medal in 1946 and many other honors in between and after. Edmund Wilson called him America's premier literary historian; Carl Van Doren described *Makers and Finders* as the best literary history in any language. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. While Nelson himself does not deal with why the *transit* was so rapid, he provides one with the information and impetus to pursue that subject.

Brooks was a leftist idealist and a socialist. He joined the Socialist Party in 1916 and was a Socialist candidate for office in 1936. Although the group he rep-

## Passage to More than India

Raymond Nelson: *Van Wyck Brooks: A Writer's Life*; E.P. Dutton; New York.

by Joseph Schwartz

While reading Raymond Nelson's serviceable, competent biography of Van Wyck Brooks, I had occasion to consult my personal library to check particular passages in his work on American literature. Rather to my surprise, I discovered I owned a good deal more of his work than I had remembered. From the dates penned on inside covers it appears that I acquired my collection over a longish period of time—a hardcover or two from the early 40's, most from the late 40's when I was in graduate school, some after that for a quarter or so from the Salvation Army, Goodwill or St. Vincent de Paul stores, none after 1960. Although Stanley Edgar Hyman said in 1948 (*The Armed Vision*) that no one connected with literature had taken Brooks seriously for almost a decade, those of us then at Madison did. The University of Wisconsin

sin was, in the late 40's, the great center for the study of American literature in the United States, and its distinguished professors took Brooks very seriously indeed. Almost every professor I knew was an historian of literature for which Brooks was the nearly perfect model. When the "other" Brooks (Cleanth) was invited to campus to talk about the new criticism a minor tempest arose. Howard Mumford Jones was asked to be on the same program just to keep the meeting honest. The union theater was filled to capacity, the smell of confrontation having drawn students. I remember only one member of the department who, afterward, was willing to allow that Cleanth Brooks had much to offer; Jones was generally regarded as having saved the meeting. Such were the battles that we in our innocence then fought.

For those concerned with American literature, a small minority then, Van Wyck Brooks was important. In his innocent radicalism he was discovering, or inventing, what he called with inadvertent arrogance a "usable past" for American literature. His method was in large part the method of history, not litera-

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resented grew quite conservative as time passed, the original liberal sensibility remained the most powerful force on whatever legacy he may have left us. Hence, it is important to understand something about his anti-Marxist socialism. "I caught it from my wife," he told Malcolm Cowley. He was an old-fashioned socialist who could not make class warfare the tyrannizing principle of his social philosophy. He was also the kind of socialist who could build a mansion in a rich man's suburb with the proceeds from his later affluence. He trusted, or thought he did, in the fundamental decency and intelligence of people. He believed in social justice and to that end favored the elimination of economic competition. Socialism was pretty much what he wanted it to be: at one time it was Jeffersonian democracy and at another time it was "pure Christianity." Bohemian poverty was literary, making him delight in holes in his trousers and shoes, "wearing at the same time a flower in my buttonhole." His conscience was at peace when he connected himself "with the venerable cult of shabbiness, poverty and failure." Brooks flirted with a social philosophy which he would never really put in practice. He best illustrates the type of intellectual Lionel Trilling described as never testing his ideas in the real world. The communists were the first, I believe, to find him tiresome. After some initial resistance, he became associated with the League of American Writers, the successor to the John Reed Clubs. It was not until after the Soviet invasion of Finland that he broke from the Marxist group. There was an unmistakable naiveté in his political side:

... though I believe in the humanitarian mission of socialism, my own angle of approach is not humanitarian but personal. I consider individualism the very worst enemy of personality.

Good was progressivism and the future; evil, if not an illusion, was the barbarism of the past. If antifascism led to pro-Marxism, well, he would think about that tomorrow.

Like Waldo Frank, Anatole France and others of that stripe, Brooks was ambitious to develop a general system of culture, a theory that would account for what the United States was and could become. He held the conventional liberal position that the great writer is or can be the single greatest force for social change. (One remembers how Waldo Frank almost destroyed Hart Crane with that formula.) His study of Herbert Spencer led him to believe that the great writer was one who believed in social and spiritual evolution: "The principle of inevitable progress . . . stirred his deepest imagination." He was fond of the Spanish saying that the left is on the side of the heart.

But certainly no true social revolution will ever be possible in America till a race of artists, profound and sincere, has brought us face to face with our own experience and set working in that experience the heaven of the highest culture.

Revolutions are made valid by their exalted desires. Brooks was typical of a kind of intellectual of that era: Newton Arvin,

Lewis Mumford, Waldo Frank, Archibald MacLeish, Clifford Odets, Donald Ogden Stewart. They wanted a "literary" war and found it in Spain, but to their horror the blood was real. What Brooks did finally was to work up a usable past which found its mainspring in the Jefferson-Emerson-Whitman tradition. The whole liberal aesthetics since World War I has been built on that basis. This progressive, utopian liberalism affirmed life and believed in the future, maintaining that man was by nature trustworthy and good. After Whitman came Lincoln, the early Melville, the early Twain and William Dean Howells. The disastrous alternate "antitradition" set against it was aristocratic, conservative and pessimistic, preoccupied with sin and bound to the past. These "traitors to human hope" grew out of puritanism, the end result being the monster, T.S. Eliot. Brooks's abomination of Eliot was not, I think, irrational, although the depth of it may be problematical: he hoped that Eliot would die in agony. He knew the enemy when he saw him; Eliot stood for everything that Brooks despised. I suspect that

### In the Mail

*The Quest for Excellence: The Neo-Conservative Critique of Educational Mediocrity* by Norman R. Phillips; Philosophical Library; New York. A comprehensive analysis of the conservative educational philosophy by an educator who has taught at every level from kindergarten to graduate school.

*Christian Married Love* edited by Raymond Dennehy; Ignatius Press; San Francisco. A collection of essays considering the ethical, Biblical and theological aspects of birth control within marriage.

*Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th-Century Christians and the Arts* by Franky Schaeffer; Crossway Books; Westchester, Illinois. In an illustrated paperback volume, Mr. Schaeffer provides a provocative and unflinching critique of the current condition of the arts, expressed in the broadest sense, from home decorating to the works of Michelangelo. With wit and humor he offers suggestions for becoming "unaddicted" to the current mediocrity.

*Modern Social and Political Philosophies: Burkean Conservatism and Classical Liberalism* by Dwight D. Murphy; University Press of America; Washington, D.C. The second in a series which analyzes major competing systems for the interpretation of social reality in modern society.

*The Effect of Collective Bargaining on Teacher Salaries*; Public Service Research Council; Vienna, Virginia. An examination of the actual change in educational salaries during the last 15 years and to what means those changes may be attributed.

*C.S. Lewis and the Church of Rome* by Christopher Derrick; Ignatius Press; San Francisco, California. Possible explanations of C.S. Lewis's writings and why he remained Anglican rather than becoming Roman Catholic, written by a Roman Catholic.

there was some jealousy mixed in as well.

Brooks's liberalism made it impossible for him to understand or to be fair to a great many of the most significant 20th-century writers: Proust, Joyce, Pound, Eliot, Stein, Faulkner. They were, like Hawthorne and the later Melville, concerned with sin, weakness, the chaos of the present and, as such, were probably fascist to the core. For Brooks, Whitman was the moral hero of American literature, the writer most fully engaged in his work—the artist as hero. While many are repelled by Whitman's excessive individualism, Brooks did not see him that way. He saw instead an expression of personality as the great writer moved heroically in the direction of social change. Whitman gave us for the first time the sense "of something organic in American life"; he "precipitated the American character"; he created out of disparate materials a fresh democratic ideal. Everything good in the modern world owes something to Whitman; he laid the "cornerstone of a national ideal"; like Virgil, he gave to America "A certain focal center in the consciousness of his own character." What Whitman stood for was progress, the unified community absorbed into one powerful emotional force, moving proudly and inexorably into the future, willing everything to be better in a place where dreams come true. Passage to more than India.

It must be said that Van Wyck Brooks was not comfortable with this liberal formulation until quite late in life. I think there was a connection between his uneasiness with this view and his extended mental and emotional breakdown which lasted through much of the 1920's and part of the 30's. I find none of the explanations offered for it convincing in the slightest, least of all his alleged agony over his book on Henry James. I think the crisis was spiritual—based on religious concerns and precipitated by the strong opposition of his first wife to Van Wyck's interest in Catholicism. The material relevant to this topic in Nelson's

biography is new to me, and I do not know how much more of it there may be in his papers. Nelson feels that he would have become a convert but for Eleanor Stimson's opposition. In any event, after his marriage it was a "forbidden subject." Brooks's "religious sensibilities continued to exacerbate his emotional troubles." As a young man he felt that he could "abide only in Rome or Rationality." The price of domestic peace was Ra-

tionality. Was he perceiving the bankruptcy of liberalism and the folly of his choice? The trauma he underwent was formidable. His whole past demanded that he choose Rationality quite deliberately during his crisis. He made himself become arbitrarily and firmly indifferent to all transcendental terms. Secular humanism was his choice: "There is only one world, and we had better make the best of it. Our only

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### *America, America . . .*

A declared fellow traveler and unabashed procommunist, the Greek cinematographer Costa-Gavras has made an openly anti-American movie, one that is fiercely hateful of the American socio-political system. He made his movie in America, using American money. He then received the resounding acclaim of so-called liberal—but still American—critics, and he packed American movie houses (mostly with American haters of America). Finally, his American star, who plays the part of an American who is corrosively disenchanted with the American government, is reverentially received in real life by the American President in the American White House—the symbol of American statehood.

All this isn't so bad, considering the history of American self-abuse with which America has survived for centuries, and which makes it nonetheless the perpetual dream of all the poor people on earth who wish to escape the communist paradises for the wretched, the needy and the destitute. Self-flagellation was always the favorite American pastime, and that habit of self-abasement has become in our time more and more an object of shoddy manipulation—the most obvious intention of Mr. Costa-Gavras. His easy victim is rudimentary good sense.

To make the matter clear, one must put *Missing*, the movie in question, into a certain perspective. Mr. Costa-Gavras made an earlier movie about the

heinousness of right-wing dictatorships, and we had little quarrel with his condemnation of them, although its tone was that of a defeated KGB agent rather than that of a true lover of freedom. Then he made a movie in which he condemned Stalinist corruption as detrimental to the decent, much-abused, humane idea of communism—mankind's best hope. We detested that movie: not a single sequence of it or word in it attested to the fundamental structural atrocity of the political reality of Marxism-Leninism—as Costa-Gavras saw it, some mean people had soiled the ideal, which remains as sacrosanct as ever. How the communist state has martyred societies and annihilated humanness all around the world since Stalin was not mentioned.

Now Mr. Gavras has made a movie in which the structural evil of a freely elected government, i.e. the American political system, is allegedly bared. His point is not that Americans may commit mistakes (like the unreasonable, overidealistic Stalinists) but that the very core of our statehood is a source of abomination. The fact that he freely sells his movie in America means nothing to him. In older, better, days guests like Mr. Costa-Gavras were kicked out onto the street. In the decaying America of our time, he is fawned upon as a celebrity and included on the liberal cocktail-party circuit in L.A. and New York. And his star lunches in Washington, D.C. with the chief executive of this symbol of wickedness—the battered idea of American democracy. □



chance. Anything else is evasion, mythology or self-deception,—*get all spirituality into it.*” Good is in man and is not to be found anywhere else. His own identity was such a precarious thing, he was afraid of losing it in Catholicism. Much is revealed by his intense hatred for T.S. Eliot: why, for instance, did he consider him “a demonic anti-self”?

Looking now at the whole of his achievement, I can say that many of the virtues perceived earlier were real. It was a gracious work; the writing was elegant. The gentility of the man of letters, so like Ruskin, was reflected in it. It was a confident work, not marred on the whole by annoying mannerisms. And it was serious, almost ponderous with the passage of time, but American literature needed to be treated seriously then. Unfortunately, his limitations now appear as evident as his virtues. He disliked the new criticism, which became the most important critical movement of the first half of the century, principally because he resented its success and influence. It was a challenge to the acceptance and appreciation of his own work. In his own work he failed to understand and to distinguish between major voices that transcend an age and minor voices that only bespeak an age. Not understanding this made every writer seem to be of approximately the same importance. Nevertheless, he had favorites, but could not justify them since they were picked on the basis of their being either especially American or especially spokesmen for Brooks’s values. Their literary merits were of little consequence. For reasons already suggested he could not understand what was going on in the work of the important writers of the 20th century, and, as a result, he could not be fair to them. His criticism was all too creative when he put together various writers’ work with his own, sometimes giving the reader a misleading impression of the point being made. With respect to the artistic value of American writers, he chose the wrong side in what Nelson calls “the mortal combat” between “Tory and democrat.” His con-

fused liberalism aged badly. He could not understand or adequately respond to the writer who wrestled with evil as a necessary aspect of the human condition. The past filled with the half-truths he constructed from his bias was not such a usable past after all. It did not even tell the more important part of the story since it failed to recognize the tragic view of life, the view which is, after all, at the base of the great literature of the West.

## Ain’t He Sweet?

Tom Wolfe: *From Bauhaus to Our House*; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York.

by Leopold Tyrmand

Substituting the adjective “sweet” with the word “right” touches the essence of Mr. Wolfe’s minitreat, or maxipamphlet, the past season’s best-selling, passionately discussed, reviewed, admired and denounced book on feelings about modern architecture. It is also about the manipulation of architectural creeds and aesthetic ideologies, their fratricidal warfare, personal hatreds and holy conflicts of opinion. Is he right, Mr. Wolfe, about what he believes in and pronounces with his usual ingratiating flair? Actually, rightness is beside the point. An immutable value resides in his very divagation, in the methodology and dialectics with which he treats the nature of an intellectual dialogue (monologue?) on the state of the arts, their contemporary interaction with daily life, social questions and the cultural climates of our time. Thus what Mr. Wolfe performs is an act of speculative vibrancy which results in the unmistakably Wolfe-ish reportorial intellectuality that rings charmingly and possesses an inimitable rightness of tone. Right or wrong aside,

Mr. Tyrmand, editor of *Chronicles of Culture*, studied architecture briefly at *l’Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris*.

It is proper for Professor Nelson to have written this book and for E.P. Dutton, Brooks’s long-time publisher, to issue it. Brooks is, paradoxically enough, part of a usable past. The biography can do nothing, however, to reconstruct his influence or to make his theory better than it was. He was lucky that he had as much influence as he did for over 30 years. That will have to be enough. It is.

he is sweet, Mr. Wolfe, to my ears, and he flavors my reaction to his assumptions and inferences—many of which seem to me downright *incorrect*—with intense pleasure. In the end, as one reads him it makes little difference if he’s misleading or inaccurate—some mysterious quality in his approach restrains us from making even those distinctions.

In spite of all these powers of appeal, it must be said that this time Mr. Wolfe, our favorite nonconformist, has not scored a *Volltreffer*, a direct hit, as he did with *The Painted Word*, where his central concern was irrefutable. In that book, the audacity of his idea was grounded in a strong tradition of a *coup de grâce* meted out to the quite-obvious nakedness of a dimwitted emperor. But architecture and the arts are not exactly the same: the former is art and something more—an ingredient that seems to elude Mr. Wolfe in his soliloquy. Architecture ingrains itself differently into perceptive sensitivities, and it lends itself less to the coining of interpretations that are divorced from its fundamental staying power (which is unmeasurable by short-term standards). Mr. Wolfe’s judgments of Le Corbusier may prove to be correct a hundred years from now, but they also may be seen as totally obsolete; we just do not know. Insisting too strongly on an accuracy of opinions is a dangerous intellectual game: one may wind up looking like a literary stand-up comic, something far below Mr. Wolfe’s