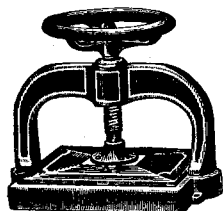


Perceptibles

James Leasor: *Who Killed Sir Harry Oakes?* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.

To say that life imitates art is to put too fine a point on things. Consider, for example, the case of Sir Harry Oakes. Oakes, a self-made millionaire who gained his wealth by sinking a gold mine beneath a Canadian lake, was found murdered in his lavish estate on the Bahamas in 1943. The murder was performed in a gruesome and bizarre manner. The prime suspect: his son-in-law, a rake who ran off with the daughter, a playboy who made money by running a chicken farm. Add the Duke of Windsor



(the man who, thanks to Wallis Simpson, would not be king), two dubious cops from Miami, the Mafia, Thomas Dewey, the U.S. Army, and an equally fulsome cast of minor characters. Life in this case is not imitating art, but the lowest sort of pulp fiction. □

* * *

Herbert Schlossberg: *Idols For Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society*; Thomas Nelson; Nashville, TN.

When Jehu, an ancient king of Israel, found his realm sliding into idolatry, he solved the

problem summarily: he gathered all the idolaters together in a single building and slaughtered them. Such a decisive course of action, of course, is fortunately not open to any religionists in the pluralistic democracy of 20th-century America. However, as an articulate and widely read Christian scholar, Herbert Schlossberg practices a less bloody and more helpful version of Jehu's tactic: he has assembled the ideas informing all of the regnant idolatries into one book, where he annihilates them as mer-

cilessly as Jehu did the priests of Baal, and with sharper weapons. Mr. Schlossberg compellingly demonstrates that Western civilization rests upon Judeo-Christian underpinnings and that, by weakening that foundation, the idolatries of modernity inevitably drop society into anarchy, barbarism, and totalitarianism. Hence, even those who do not share Mr. Schlossberg's hopes for the next world have reason to laud his defense of the best and most humane in this one. □

WASTE OF MONEY

Dubious Fraternizing

In Praise of What Persists; Edited by Stephen Berg; Harper & Row; New York.

by Joseph Schwartz

In Praise of What Persists is a "Wouldn't-it-be-a-good-idea" kind of book. "Wouldn't it be a good idea," says the editor, "to bring together a number of essays about what writers believe has influenced their work." Such books are almost always failures or at the least disappointing; this collection is no exception. It does not bring together essays by "leading" writers as promised, although there are a few prominent writers presented.

It so happens that 15 of the 24 essays appeared elsewhere, one as long ago as 1972. It is unlikely then to be the case that "most of them agreed to contribute" only when they were encouraged to rethink the subject of influence

"in the light of their own experience."

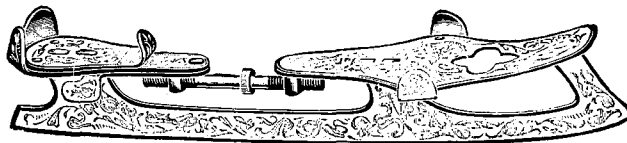
The idea of "influence" as used by Berg in his introduction (the essayists are to "illuminate the question of literary influence") is to be interpreted very broadly. While some writers specify their debt to another or other writers, others "reach back in their experience" to connect the conditions which "have formed their work." In a provocative essay John Hawkes tells of the influence on his work of a cold, dark Atlantic island: "I'm obsessed with the sea and islands, and whereas Donne says that 'no man is an island,' I believe that we're all islands—inaccessible, drifting

Berg's hope is that those who emphasize non-literary influence will "break new ground at the source." The hope is not justified. Autobiography, biography, and the ubiquitous interview have always provided the materials Berg thinks of as so special. Influence studies, too, have been around for a very long time.

The underlying premise of the collection is uncertain: "I want the author to tell me. Only the person who created what I love will do." I do not wish to raise in detail the whole question of the intentional fallacy here, but it does present a strong case for making one wary of an author's expression of the meaning of his work *outside* the work itself. T. S. Eliot always would refer readers to his poems when they would ask him what they were about. D. H. Lawrence's advice to trust the tale not the teller is still pertinent.

Nevertheless, one essay in this collection is noteworthy, Reynolds Price's "For Ernest Hemingway." It is a loving presentation of Price's growing awareness of Hemingway's "lifelong" subject: "saintliness." Most of Hemingway's work seems

intended to enhance, even create if necessary, the love of creation in its witnesses and thereby to confirm an approach by the worker toward goodness, literal virtue, the manly performance of the will of God. *Saintliness*, I've called it (goodness if you'd rather, though *saintliness* suggests

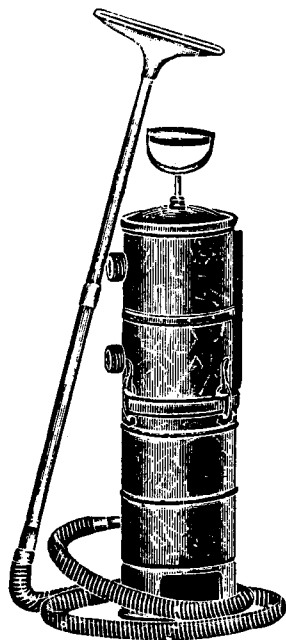


apart, thirsting to be exploited, magical." Hayden Carruth on the influence of jazz on his poetry is unexpected and very tantalizing.

at least the fierce need, its desperation)—a saint being, by one definition, a life which shows God lovable.

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The essay is remarkable in that it was inspired by *Islands in the Stream*, by common consensus one of his poorest works. Intensely moved, then, by the memories of his previous reading of Hemingway, Price took to



heart the lesson of one master: *"Prepare, strip, divest for life that awaits you; learn solitude and work; see how little is lovely but love that."*

Berg's method as editor more commonly produces pieces like Carolyn Forché's "El Salvador: An Aide-Memoire," the worst essay in the book. Between 1978 and 1980 Forché visited El Salvador a number of times; she writes this essay to explain how politics came to dominate her poetry, or as she would have it, how the poem is more political than politics. She claims that the 20th century demands "a poetry of witness," by which she means that "there is no such thing as nonpolitical poetry." The poet's voice must have authority and this authority comes from an ideologically charged vision. All

language is political; hence, she wishes to write a poetry of documentation. The essay is violent, justified, I presume, in the same way that she attempts to justify the rape of poetry by politics. The fundamental premise of the essay has been proved wrong repeatedly, especially by the experience of the American leftist writers of the 1930's. It is still true that those who do not know the past are determined to repeat it. □

Subtle Siren for the Soviets

***Nuclear War in the 1980's?*; Compiled by Christopher Chant and Ian Hogg; Harper & Row; New York.**

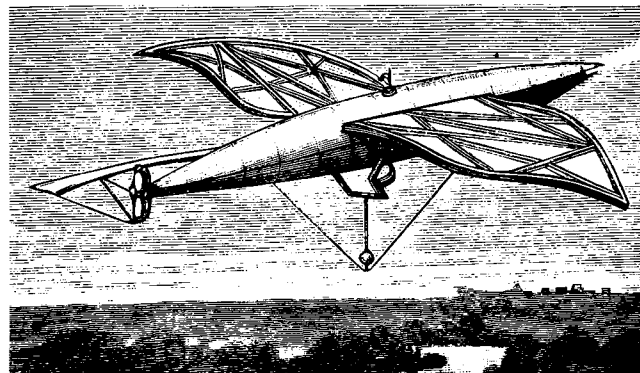
While the mark of interrogation in the title is heartening, the illustration on the cover is a cause of more thorough doubt: it shows an ALCM (AGM-86), an air-launched cruise missile, designated as belonging to the U.S. Air Force, that's zooming across a mountain range, presumably Ural-like in nature. While the text purports to present "the very latest facts and theories" about you-know-what "in a clear and unbiased way," there is still the question of that cruise missile. After all, don't the Soviets hate those turbofan-powered crafts more than anything since the neutron bomb? Things become very clear very quickly.

In the 1950's, not only was there a great deal of attention given to the then-new threat of nuclear war, but also to the effects of comic books on youthful minds. One of the consequences of the latter was the advent of "Classic Comics," which retold tales from literature through illustrated pulp. The concerns of the 50's have

been parlayed in this text into various scenarios including "Surprise Attack." It goes from 12:00 "Early Warning System detects nuclear attack" to 12:30 "Both nations will suffer devastating casualties and urban destruction" in a mere nine panels. The whole thing amounts to a massive trivialization of a possible catastrophe, but there is a more telling point to it. Whereas the cartoon shows a figure who is obviously Ronald Reagan, there is nowhere a sketch of whomever his Soviet counterpart is. In addition, another two-page spread features a cutaway illustration of the E-4B, "The Flying White House," but no picture of the Politburo's Rats' Nest. The cartoon sequence "Command Under Fire" shows the U.S. president turning tail and flying away. One explanation why this retreat is so one-sided can be found in the text: "Little is known of the Soviet C³ [command, control, and communication] apparatus." A person must *read* to glean that bit of information, which is always a sensible practice when confronting a book. But it is patently obvious that this book is meant to be *looked at*—given the pro-

Superpower Armoury," should be carefully consulted by any of those who are ready to freeze anything other than ice cream. When it comes to warheads and equivalent megatonnage, the U.S.S.R. has the U.S. beat cold. In the late 1960's and through much of the 1970's, Americans were enamored of things Oriental, from fragrances and fabrics to food and fighting techniques. Sandalwood, silk, and shrimp are still with us. Most of the judo studios have become mini porno theaters. However, the concept that properly placed jabs, thrusts, and kicks can devastate punches, slugs, and haymakers remains. Thus, people are lulled into a false sense of security here in the U.S., thinking that our sophisticated technology makes us equal to the brute force of the Soviets. Chuck Norris movies notwithstanding, the fact is that quantity still counts.

Books that claim to be unbiased and which smoothly slip in the knife are the last things needed in this country. A stiff dose of—dare we say?—counter-propaganda is in order. After all, the Soviets aren't building all of those missiles, subs, and bombers and maintaining a giant



liferation of graphs, maps, charts, and drawings all in bright colors—so one who makes a perusal may come away believing in the pacific nature of the Soviets.

One series of charts, "The

military machine because they have an overabundance of manufactured consumer goods and like to keep their men employed: there is method there, not merely madness. □