

student. And this separation is "the Southern way of life."

It is a remarkable feat of social observation and a remarkable feat of literary skill that Mr. Martin has managed both to convey this spontaneous attitude without adopting a *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner* attitude, or falling back on pharisaical reflections of moral superiority. He can understand the not necessarily wicked reluctance of the whites to come into a strange and uncomfortable new world; he can make comprehensible if not admirable the silence or worse of some professional Southern liberals; and he can convey the resolution of the Negro to stand erect even if that means casting his shadow over the white man's sacred plot. The heat, the strain suffered, the genuine distress of Southern educational leaders who, as one of them recently said to me, have only just succeeded in getting the elements of a good school system for black and white and now see the whole painfully-reared structure threatened, all this is admirably conveyed as is the atmosphere of covert civil war. It is not easy to be hopeful of a quick, easy "liberal" solution—and this in a world where, as *Pravda* reminded all Americans, *Sputnik* daily passed over Little Rock and the federal troops at the High School.

D. W. Brogan

## Redressing the Balance

**The Shaping Spirit: Studies in Modern English and American Poets.** By A. ALVAREZ. *Chatto and Windus*. 15s.

THIS is an extraordinarily suggestive book; and it is a pity that it is not a little more, for there is not one of its many suggestions that is not worth worrying out a little farther. However, it advertises itself as studies in modern poets, not a treatise on modern poetry, and the outspoken informality of these essays is very much part of their nature. The time has probably not yet come to make a frontal attack on its central theme. For it has a central theme—Anglo-American poetic relations in the early part of this century. The situation is probably unique; we are always hearing of the new world redressing the balance of the old in the political sense, but I cannot think of any other time before when it has happened in literature. The distinctively modern note in modern poetry has been largely the creation of two writers—Eliot and Pound; both Americans, and both, in differ-

ent degrees, accepted now as landmarks in English poetical history. Eliot indeed has been absorbed into the English literary tradition. Pound has not, and with good reason; yet the diversions, by-passes, and no-road signs that Pound has erected have been the guide of most subsequent travellers, English as well as American. Meanwhile a whole poetic literature has been developing in America, on similar lines, but without much direct influence from these elderly expatriate masters; and—as this is Mr. Alvarez's central point—the need which drove these two writers to see the literary scene as they did has been largely unfelt by English poets. The conscious modernity, the "Make It New" feeling, has been largely an American need. Yeats, the greatest poetic genius of our century, was largely untouched by it; so was Lawrence; so was Graves; and so, after a not very prolonged age of technical anxiety are most of the poets writing to-day.

Most of this deliberate novelty was achieved in the name of "tradition." But tradition, as understood by Eliot, and still more by Pound, is a word used in a highly Pickwickian sense. It involved a re-writing of literary history in a new way to suit the needs of the moment. One is reminded of what is supposed to happen at some American colleges—"As from 1030 hours to-morrow there will be a tradition that..." But things like the Imagist manifesto and the doctrines of Eliot's early essays validate themselves only in practice. Their justification was "Mauderley" and "The Waste Land." The doctrines in question have now pretty well got down to the secondary-school level, which means that they will be formally refuted to-morrow or the day after by the next wave of critical consciousness. Meanwhile they have imposed themselves, and nothing will ever be quite the same again.

This is the background to Mr. Alvarez's essays, though some of the remarks above are more my responsibility than his. He does not, fortunately, write "explications", since there are plenty already, and the commonplaces of defensive exegesis, which is what much of the criticism of modern poetry has been, really do not need repeating. To deny oneself the commonplace might make it very hard to say anything new about Eliot, but what Mr. Alvarez has to say is extremely fresh and vigorous, and at the same time just. He emphasises the fact that Mr. Eliot has always had a "fine mind" in the conventional University sense; that the striking originality of his criticism comes out of a perfectly regular academic education. This has resulted in a body of poetry of the utmost formal perfection, decorum, and completeness. Each poem has been an achievement so complete that there has been nothing left for anyone else to

develop. Hence the smallness of his direct poetical influence. Would-be imitators have been driven to learn from his theories and his sources. He remarks, too, on the extremely literary nature of Eliot's poetry, the constant, deliberate control of diction and rhythm, the rare power to use pastiche and poetical learning, not for mimicry, but for his own purpose. "He uses tradition; Yeats was in it."

With this conscious discipline Mr. Alvarez contrasts Yeats's magnificent acceptance of fallibility; his acceptance of the fierce tension between "rage and generosity, impotence and desire, between, often, an attitude and truthfulness." And he rightly, as I believe, sees Yeats's greatness in this, in his belonging to the tradition of Shakespeare and Donne, rather than in the reference to his elaborate symbolic system.

There is no need to quarrel with the essay on Pound; but it ought to be more astringent. Of course his influence has been enormous, and the achievement admirable, within its limits. But the limits, both of quality and quantity, are much narrower than most people who have tried to cope with Pound at all are willing to admit. The bad is much worse, the gap between professions and achievements much wider, the element of sheer flummery and bamboozling much greater than Mr. Alvarez suggests. On the other hand, the essay on Auden seems an admirable piece of judicial criticism. It gives the liveliest appreciation of the wit, the inventiveness, and the technical brilliance, the sense of contemporaneity that prevents his verse from ever being dull; and records at the end an apparent lack of the central core of knowledge that we find in the great poets, the creative effort to know and judge their own experience. I believe that this sort of judgment is one that time is not likely to alter very much. In other essays there are some helpful pointers to what is good in Hart Crane, and a useful sort of exposition of what Wallace Stevens is about. But it would be nice if someone could write of Wallace Stevens in such a way as to give a real *feeling* of his virtues to those who do not feel them already. The essay on Lawrence's poetry does not tell us very much; or rather it tells us that the merits are pretty well what we knew them to be, but that Mr. Alvarez likes them more than many have done. In the last chapter there is an excellent, appreciative, but genuinely critical passage on Robert Frost—a poet so good that criticism can only bring out his quality the more clearly, and so much a loved institution that he rarely gets it.

This last chapter tries to make some generalisations about the Anglo-American situation; and naturally some of it has been said before. But

## *An Aspect of Modern Slavery*

"I know only one Russia, that of the camps. But this I know thoroughly."

## **KATORGA**

BERNHARD ROEDER

The author was for five years a *Katorgan*, a man condemned to slavery in the Russian forced labour camps. In his book he describes the camps' vast population, their place in Russia's development and what they explain in the Soviet scene today, through the case histories and opinions of selected but typical prisoners. 21s.

**HEINEMANN**

Mr. Alvarez brings out particularly clearly the need of the American poet to create a personal manner of his own, the impossibility, in his situation, of taking anything for granted. The moral, probably, is that we ought now to recognise here the existence of two distinct literatures; two literatures that happen to have a common language, but are pretty decisively not brothers under the skin. American literature will always be more accessible to England than any other, for obvious reasons, but if we learn anything from it, it can only be as we learn from France or Germany. The civilisation from which it springs, the basic presuppositions, are too different for any direct transfusion to be possible, in spite of the constant to-and-fro movement across the Atlantic. And for the American, the whole English literary heritage will come more and more to represent the classical past of his language; an inescapable background, but with little direct reference to his daily experience. This is a whole new cultural situation that must some day receive a great deal more examination than it has been possible to give it up to now.

*Graham Hough*

## A Problematic Lot

**The Conscience of the Rich.** By C. P. SNOW.  
*Macmillan.* 15s.

**Four Black Cars.** By STEPHEN BARLAY and  
PETER SASDY. *Putnam.* 15s.

**No Bedtime Story.** By MARY CRAWFORD.  
*Putnam.* 12s. 6d.

**The Mountain is Young.** By HAN SUYIN.  
*Cape.* 18s.

**Company of Cowards.** By JACK SCHAEFER.  
*Deutsch.* 11s. 6d.

NO ONE can complain that this month's novels are unconcerned with the present-day world, with current problems and morality. In their various quiet ways they are a highly problematical lot. Most of them have chosen a moral—in its widest sense political—situation, something like Hungary or witch-hunting, that concerns us all closely if not yet intimately, that hovers in the daily sky above us if it has not yet come in at the door. This is as true of the giant among them, *The Conscience of the Rich*, which deals with the outlook and morality of the 'thirties, as it is of the sligher, more directly contemporary novels; for we are shown the 'thirties as only the eyes of twenty years after can see them: with their political morality in place, their mistakes and innocent idealism and guilty avoidance of unpleasantness seen through the disillusioning filter of the next two decades. This massive but soft-spoken book (another of the Lewis Eliot novels, with Lewis as narrator only, and scarcely coming into the plot at all except as occasional *deus ex machina* and universal uncle) seems to keep underplaying its own importance, softening and almost shying away from the points it has to make, so eager is it not to point out anything specific but simply to say: This is what happened: out of the world it produced, make what you can of it.

And there is plenty to make. The novelist social-historian, as opposed to the social gossip, is able to give an age's flavour without any obviously "period" motifs at all: almost without description. Indeed, the most satisfactory period flavours are often pounded in the stark pestle of the novelist's own immediate experience: from facts, attitudes, states of mind, unconscious-looking declarations that only in the light of later experience come to look pregnant and purposeful. The pattern of events is seldom clear while the events are happening; still less the pattern of morality. And the moral and political pattern of the 'thirties is peculiarly complicated by the fact that where, in those simpler days than ours, there were two extremes of outlook you could label "left" and "right," two opposed poles called "fascist" and "anti-fascist," politics

have proved less simple since then, and opposites very much less opposite. To show this, with an irony so unstressed you barely notice it for the first half of the book, C. P. Snow has taken what is, after all, a hackneyed method of popularising the movement of history—has traced it through the fortunes of a family; but with none of the popular tricks, none of the usual landmarks—jazz tunes, newspaper gossip, current names; he has not even used the conversational idiom of the period, very noticeably. The March family is a fine piece of re-creation: rich Jewish bankers settled prosperously in England since the 18th century, their orthodoxy is at last beginning—like their financial importance—to crumble: marriages disappoint, new professions are adopted, the old family self-sufficiency—like the famous March "Friday nights," where the family comes together in dozens, as it has done since the first Friday in England, two hundred years back—is beginning to be questioned by the young. One of Leonard March's children marries outside the faith, another within the faith but outside the family's circle of loyalty. A Communist within the family, ready to risk even the March good name for political reasons, means the end of the March solidarity. The scandal that results is not very explosive: just the dismissal of an elderly minor politician, the faint but unjust smearing of an honourable name. A novelist less sure of his subject would have followed drama with counter-drama: a suicide, or at least a family row. Sir Charles makes mere disappointment far more moving. The book pauses, perfectly satisfactorily, in mid-air: as indeed the middle 'thirties paused before the explosion of the world.

Politics again: the Hungarian rising is the theme of two more novels. One is the story reported, day by day, fact by fact, inch by painful inch of the way, by two men who fought in it; yet it sounds novelettish and unconvincing. The other sets the same tale in an imaginary country, sees it through a child's eyes; and the woman who writes it, if one is to go by her biography on the book's jacket, never saw street fighting in her life: yet every word of it rings true. *Four Black Cars* is a joint effort—a thing that makes artistic nonsense in so personal and individual a form as the novel; and you can hear the joint authors' joint ideas rattling about like peas in a jam-pot. George Mikes vouches for its authenticity; and I am prepared to accept that every word of it could be factually true. But this doesn't make it ring true artistically, doesn't make it seem to matter: and yet it did matter, even to outsiders far away, who had never seen street fighting; which just goes to show that the most heroic events on earth can seem trivial, if wrongly treated (as, indeed, vice versa).