have behaved significantly differently once they form the ruling *élite*.

FINALLY, I BELIEVE that the One-Party State is probably an inevitable transition during the period between independence and the consolidation of the "nation-state." This transitional notion is crucial to one's assessment of what is likely to happen in emergent societies. Undoubtedly some will grow into full democratic societies in time, while others will remain arrested in various stages of authoritarian rule. Whether or not the great majority will end up as democracies will depend, I believe, on the rate of economic development which is vital to the successful modernising and harmonising of African societies in the dangerously difficult transition stage. Very few of these societies can, in fact, prosper on their own even if they were to adopt Lewis' economic prescription. They will need to be helped by more effective trade and aid—in that order—policies by the developed, and especially by the Western, nations.

Colin Legum

COLIN LEGUM and I agree completely that the "roguery" of politicians is neither a sufficient nor a necessary explanation of the single-party state. I thought I had made this absolutely clear.

We disagree completely about human nature and about social organisation. I take it for granted that most men are motivated both by a desire to be of service to their fellows and also by the need to fulfil their own personal ambitions. Politicians do not differ from other men in these respects; they are neither better nor worse.

Social organisation tries to harness personal ambition to public service by making it difficult to achieve social esteem (money, prestige) except by serving the public need. In the economic sphere the market and legal and administrative controls are designed to make it profitable to do only those things which society values. An economic system which relied mainly on the public service instincts of business men would certainly stagnate. Similarly, a political system which relied mainly on the public service instincts of politicians would have absurd results. The test of a political system is not, as Mr. Legum implies, whether the self-declared aims of the politicians are noble enough to justify their means. It is rather whether the system contains a set of controls adequate to enable society to rid itself of unworthy operators.

A political philosophy which claims that the party is above society is like an economic philosophy which claims that the business cartel is the highest form of economic organisation. Neither of these claims merits the attention of serious people.

W. Arthur Lewis

Letter from Warsaw

Mrozek's Family

Let no one leave here, until we find an Idea. Edek, don't let anybody out.

TANGO

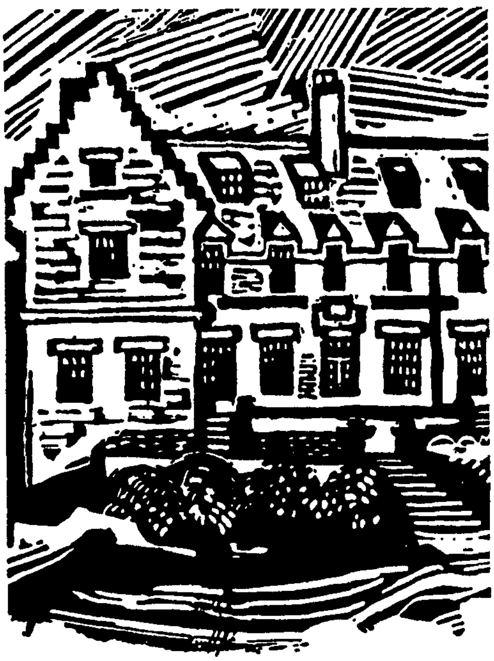
"REVOLUTION and expansion—this is our slogan. Destroy old forms, down with convention, long live dynamics. Live in creating, move and strive beyond all limits, beyond form, beyond form." This is from Stomil, one of the characters in Mrozek's *Tango*, a terrifying modern grandfather. But in the chronology game we are to play, real biographies do not matter; important are only the identification marks of generations. The action of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* takes place in Poland, that is to say, nowhere. The action of *Tango* takes place in Poland, that is to say, everywhere. Stomil represents not only the Polish older generation of "modern" ladies and gentlemen: "Do we submit to superstitions, or conventions which hamper humanity? Do we not wage a continuous fight against the old era? Are we not free? ... All these bonds, these crusted fetters of religion, morality, society, art? Above all art, Stomil, above all art." He represents also the whole generation of European formists, dadaists, surrealists: Tzara (1896), Breton (1896), Eluard (1895), Cocteau (1892), Artaud (1895).

I myself attended their short course in Surrealism in 1938. I remember games of "the exquisite corpse" at André Breton's and competitions for "de-sensed objects." A year ago they were shown at a Surrealist exhibition as museum pieces: a Surrealist iron with a nail driven in its bottom plate; a carefully bandaged violin tied up with a huge safety pin; a plate

JAN KOTT'S *study, "Hamlet of the Mid-century," appeared in the August 1964* ENCOUNTER *(together with a personal note about him by Peter Brook). His* Shakespeare Our Contemporary *was published by Methuen (and by Doubleday in New York) earlier this year. He has recently been in Edinburgh, directing* Out at Sea *and* Police *by Slawomir Mrozek, whose* Six Plays *will be published by Jonathan Cape, and Grove Press, New York, next year.*

GAVIN MAXWELL

Book Society Alternative Choice



An Autobiography of Childhood

The House of Elrig

"The finest piece of writing (he) has yet produced . . . resoundingly successful" THE SUNDAY TIMES

"Will give enormous pleasure" THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

"Sensitive, brilliantly evocative . . . This is a book to read, re-read and keep" THE SPECTATOR

"Dazzling" DAILY MAIL

Illustrated 30s

FRANCIS KING

Winner of the Katherine Mansfield Memorial Award 1965, for a short story from his collection, THE JAPANESE UMBRELLA.

A new novel

The Last of the Pleasure Gardens

"I don't think Mr. King has written a better novel than this" DAILY TELEGRAPH

"Very compassionate, very controlled" THE GUARDIAN

21s

New Poetry from Longmans

NONSEQUENCES 18s

Christopher Middleton

Author of TORSE III

BLACK BULL GUARDING APPLES 18s

Harold Massingham

1724

Longmans

with an immobilised fork protruding from it. Once these objects were frightening; now they seem good and simple, even touching. They are as childish as were the provocation actions in the sphere of morals in those days. Moral references in Mrozek are almost impeccable in their exactitude: "You possessed me in front of mummy and daddy on the first night of *Tannhaüser*, in the first row of the stalls, as a sign of protest. What a scandal that was. Ah, the times when it still made an impression...."

In *Tango*, as always in Mrozek, the terms of reference are not just Polish, but European. He is concerned with the way of life, the "style" of a generation, that of *"la belle époque."* All life's joys were treasured, but any emancipation there was, was for a very private use only. Conventions were there to be respected and evaded. That is why Uncle Eugene will easily come to stand on Arthur's side. Arthur says: "This house is beset by inertia, entropy, and anarchy." We can recognise Arthur's year of birth by "entropy," a word used in place of "the fourth dimension" and "theory of relativity." Arthur is no more than twenty-five years old; he was born in 1940. He has no political memories; October is to him only a month with very bad weather. Ala is only seven years younger than Arthur, but differences of generation, seen from a close distance, are strongly marked for young people with only a few years' gap between them; only later it becomes clear that they belong to the same generation. In Mrozek's family, Arthur is the last of the ideologists. He looks for resistance, because he wants to repair the world. Ala really does not understand what it means to "set it right." To her everything comes and seems natural: herself, her bed, the political system. She has no conflicts and has the aseptic attitude to love said to be the characteristic of Scandinavian girls. Mrozek has an excellent ear. All the differences between the mentalities of these half-generations are contained in the following dialogue:

ALA: Stomil pinched me twice to-day.

ARTHUR: The scoundrel.

ALA: He is your father.

ARTHUR: I am glad you have drawn my attention to the fact.

ALA: Well, you use such old-fashioned expressions about your father. No one talks like that about his father these days.

ARTHUR: How do they talk then?

ALA: One does not pay any attention to one's father at all.

Here one could end the chronology game. It had seemed that family comedy meant just that: wife, husband, lover, children in conflict with their parents, or a bride from a wrong social class; it had seemed that this convention could produce nothing new whatsoever, that it was not good for anything except drawing-room comedy. Whenever farce or tragi-grotesque of the absurd tried to drop the family, it found itself beyond time; at any rate beyond real time. In family-comedy there were grandparents, parents, and children; time was not abstract, it consisted of concrete biographies. Another Polish playwright, Mrozek's direct predecessor, Witkiewicz, was one of the first to put the absurd family-comedy again in the context of historic time, historic costumes, historic gestures. With one difference, though: with the end of the world in mind. His was a grand family buffo with an eschatological ending. Mrozek's eschatology is different. The grandmother in *Tango*, lying on her catafalque, has been taken from the poetics of the absurd; the corpses have been taken from Witkiewicz and from Ionesco; but the variations of time are real. Mrozek is a realist, saying his obsequies over Polish absurdities.

"IT'S JUST no use trying; the thing is hopeless. You are monstrously tolerant." (*Tango*.)

Two weeks after the publication of Mrozek's *Tango* in the Warsaw monthly *Dialog*, I met the wife of my friend, a prominent astrophysicist. "Isn't Mrozek wonderful," we greeted each other. And then, as usual, we began to discuss our daughters. "How is yours?", asked my friend's wife. "Impossible. And yours?" "Impossible," said my friend's wife, and added: "But it's really our homes that are impossible. They are not homes fit for children." "Mrozek," said I. "Mrozek," said the wife of my friend.

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I am a Marxist." We reply: "Very well, my dear child, very well. Your father was a Marxist, your mother was a Marxist. It is nice you are following your parents' footsteps."

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I think I have become a Luxemburgist." We reply: "A Luxemburgist? Couldn't you have thought of something else? But, all things considered, it's an interesting Marxist deviation. Very well, be a Luxemburgist, if you want to."

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I've become an Anarchist." We reply: "An Anarchist? Very interesting. No one has been an Anarchist for a long time. This gives credit to your intellectual independence."

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I am a practising Catholic." We reply: "Your father doesn't believe, your mother doesn't believe, but the freedom of conscience is most important of all. This is your affair. All things considered, Catholicism is a very beautiful religion."

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I've got a lover." We reply: "A lover? At your age? You're only sixteen. But some doctors say that one has to begin early. The most important thing, my child, is not to tell a lie."

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I am pure and will remain pure." We reply: "Some doctors say it is very healthy. The most important thing is to be at peace with oneself."

The daughter comes and says: "Mother, I have two lovers." We reply: "Two lovers? At your age? This is naughty. But, perhaps it's the accepted thing nowadays. Some doctors are in favour of a change. It is most important for you to have absolute trust in your parents. They never forbid you anything."

THE THEATRE of the absurd has had its representatives in Poland for quite some time. There was Witkiewicz between the wars, there is Witold Gombrowicz, who embarked on his literary career before the war. Witkiewicz came too early, Gombrowicz exists apart (in Paris, in Buenos Aires). Mrozek has been the first to come at the right time. Not too early and not too late, according to both the Polish and European clocks. The drawing-room, the revolver, the villain and the corpses in *Tango*, all this has been inherited from Witkiewicz; language and basic philosophical juxtapositions have been taken from Gombrowicz. Ala takes a bit after Miss Youthful in Gombrowicz's novel *Ferdydurke*;[1] Stomil is unbuttoned, also after the fashion of Gombrowicz. The conviction that the artist is the litmus of his time is a Witkiewicz concept. "The artists are plague. They were the first to corrode our time," Stomil says, a belief that has been shared by many outstanding statesmen (Eisenhower, Truman). The struggle of form with nullity, of convention with sloppiness, is Gombrowiczian, so is the "absolute impossibility" into which Arthur falls; just as Uncle Eugene has been "fitted with a bum" in the Gombrowicz manner and almost sent back to school in his shorts.

Arthur says: "Nothing is serious, or means anything at all in itself. Everything is null. We shall drown in this nullity, unless we give things a character. We must create some meanings, if there are none in nature." This is Gombrowicz almost literally. The Gombrowiczian system of discoveries began with a grotesque image of inadequate pre-war Poland; later all his "mugs," "bums," "juniorities" and "nullities" became only language, a universal but abstract language. All those mugs and bums found themselves in a void. Mrozek restored their reality, and even more—their new historical literality.

Arthur opposed the unbuttoned old gentlemen with their childish-old non-conformism, using Gombrowiczian form as his weapon. Form means style. Style means grandparents' furniture. Grandparents' furniture is being bought and sold by antique dealers. Lately they have been after green gas-lanterns and turn-of-the-century oil-lamps. Arthur puts a top hat on his uncle's head, asks his father to get into a corset, his grandmother to put on an evening dress of half-a-century ago, and his bride to appear in a white veil. The bride and groom kneel, Mendelssohn's wedding march is played on the gramophone, grandmother gives them her blessing, and the ceremony ends with a family photograph. But there will be no photograph: the old box-camera is not working. Moths flying about in a smell of moth balls. The old form has turned out to be dead. The reification of objects has not happened. Sociologists know full well that forms and objects which have once been sent to antique shops may grow in value, but we do not let ourselves be ruled by them any more.

Stomil says: "What are we to do.... When tragedy already is impossible, and farce bores us, there remains only experiment." Mrozek's buffo tone is unambiguous. His serious tone is far more difficult to interpret. I personally think that Mrozek sees his world also in terms of a cataclysm, but his catastrophic tendency is, as always in Mrozek, ambiguous and ironical. Arthur is also a Hamlet who has to repair a world, and he tells his grandmother: "Even you, grandma, have grown old in a world that is out of joint." And grandmother says to Arthur: "Why don't you enter a monastery?" Arthur, like Hamlet, is the last of the ideologists, and, like Hamlet, will die murdered, in the theatre of cruelty, half-Shakespeare, half-Artaud. Edek's last words have an echo of Fortinbras: "You have seen what a blow I can strike. But do not be afraid. As long as you sit quietly, don't move about, and pay attention to what I say, you will be all right with me, you'll see. I am a simple man. I like to crack a joke occasionally, I like fun. But I must be obeyed."

Mrozek and the poet Zbigniew Herbert belong to the same generation, and Herbert expressed the same essential in his *Elegy of Fortinbras*:

I must also devise a better prison system
since as you rightly observed Denmark is a prison.
Let me go about my business.

Jan Kott

[1] W. Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke* (Warsaw, 1937; MacGibbon & Kee, 1961).

Fiery Particle

On Muriel Spark — By RICHARD MAYNE

HOW OFTEN is our reaction to a writer's work affected by the chance associations of his name? Shakespeare, Shelley, and Keats are obvious exceptions; but doesn't "Jane Austen" suggest poised rectitude, "Charles Dickens" a forthright, rickety-rackety *raconteur*? Hasn't "Evelyn Waugh" a touch of the patrician, "C. P. Snow" a certain measured solemnity, "Norman Mailer" the gymnasium virility of an American athlete? One can play the game indefinitely, teasing out the sunbaked, tippling connotations of "Rudyard Kipling," the ostentatious, slightly florid languor of "Oscar Wilde," the wry, neat reticence of "D. J. Enright." The candidates are many: and most appropriate of all, it seems to me, is Muriel Spark.

Even the dictionary, here, is suggestive: "fiery particle thrown off from burning substance, or still visibly alight in ashes, or struck off by impact from flint"; "small bright object or point *e.g.* in gem"; "brilliant emanation of wit &c."; "luminous effect of sudden disruptive discharge." No less apt is the aura of words that "spark" itself resembles—"sharp," "spike," "spook," "speed," "skill," or by extension "pert" and "pat." There's no call to stretch the conceit any further; but it serves as a set of cross-references to some of the essentials in Mrs. Spark's already extensive *oeuvre*.

Wit is the quality most often singled out by her reviewers, critics, and admirers. Everyone has his favourites: my own vote goes to those brief Firbankian flashes that illumine all of her novels, including the latest and most ambitious.[1]

> "You have to take what's put before you here. Sometimes we have as many as a hundred and thirty pilgrims. Suppose a hundred and thirty people all wanted tea without milk—"
>
> ..."But I only say don't *trouble* to put milk in mine."
>
> "It isn't what you say, it's what you get."
>
> (*The Comforters*, 1957)

> "I did see this chappie at the airport," said Jimmie, "and in the moment I behold him I perceive he is not a superior type of bugger. I say to myself, Lo! this one is not a gentleman."
>
> (*Robinson*, 1958)

> The matron came in at three o'clock and read out the telegram from the Queen. Everyone applauded. Granny Valvona commented, " '... on your hundredth birthday,' doesn't sound quite right. Queen Mary always used to say, 'on the occasion of your centenary'."
>
> (*Memento Mori*, 1959)

[From a list of "suitable phrases" compiled by the ghostwriter of an actress's autobiography:]

> "I thrilled to his touch.
> I was too young at the time to understand why my mother was crying.
> As he entered the room a shudder went through my frame....
> She was to play a vital role in my life.
> Memory has not played me false.
> He was always an incurable romantic.
> I became the proud owner of a bicycle...."
>
> (*The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, 1960)

> Marlene waited outside the lavatory. A man emerged with eyebrows which were by nature fixed in slight astonishment, and which, when he saw Marlene, seemed to try to rise. "Is my nephew in there?" Marlene said.
>
> The man moved off, assuming her to be one of the maids gone mad in her private life.
>
> (*The Bachelors*, 1960)

> The girls on the Modern side were doing German and Spanish, which, when rehearsed between periods, made the astonishing noises of foreign stations got in passing on the wireless. A mademoiselle with black frizzy hair, who wore a striped shirt with real cuff-links, was pronouncing French in a foreign way which never really caught on. (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, 1961)

> Dorothy could emit, at any hour of the day or night, a waterfall of débutante chatter, which rightly gave the impression that on any occasion between talking, eating and sleeping, she did not think, except in terms of these phrase-ripples of hers: "Filthy lunch." "The most gorgeous wedding." "He actually raped her, she was amazed." "Ghastly film." "I'm desperately well, thanks, how are you?"
>
> Her voice from the wash-room distracted Jane:

[1] *The Mandelbaum Gate*. By MURIEL SPARK. Macmillan, 25s.