

Books Encountered

The Mistinguett Legend. By DAVID BRET. Robson Books, £16.95.

Illustrated, gossipy, but unindexed and unbibliographed biography of Jeanne Bourgeois, whose songs, stage career, and love affairs did so much to belie her original surname. As showbiz lives go, this is erudite: it includes a discography. Records, thin and scratchy, barely convey Mistinguett's vitality. This book does.

Russian Nationalism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. By STEPHEN K. CARTER. Pinter Publishers, £29.50.

Scholarly, pessimistic study of the perennial defensiveness that has little to do with ideology and has recently produced some extremist groups, the best known being *Pamyat*. "If Gorbachov fails", concludes Dr Carter, "and a regime sympathetic to *Pamyat*' succeeds him in power, Armageddon may be much nearer than we think."

Images of Woman in Literature. By DAVID HOLBROOK. New York University Press, \$35.00.

Bitch/goddess, whore/virgin, mother/stepmother, good fairy/wicked witch—the dichotomies are as familiar as the ambivalence of the emotions. Dr Holbrook, buttressed by his customary referees (Winnicott and Guntrip in particular), aptly analyses the contradictions, notably in Shakespeare (gradually resolved) and J. M. Barrie (not).

The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval Europe. Edited by GEORGE HOLMES. Oxford University Press, £9.95.

Bargain paperbacking of an attractive piece of *haute vulgarisation*. It suffers only slightly from being a compilation by seven hands (including the editor's), and has a useful chronology and bibliography: but there are many omissions—Bonaventure, Bacon, Humbert, Cerularius, simony, schism (barely noted among the dates).

Ford Madox Ford. By ALAN JUDD. Collins, £16.95.

Big, fat, juicy biography of big, fat, juicy writer, whose best book was *The Good Soldier*, but whose "Tietjens" quartet has a certain forlorn nobility. Friend and helper of Pound, Joyce, Hemingway, Conrad, Lawrence, and Henry James, he wrote less well and far too much: but this book wonderfully explores his intelligent eccentricity.

Music of Another World. By SZYMON LAKS. Translated by CHESTER S. KISIEL. Northwestern University Press, \$24.95, paper \$10.95.

Astonishing addition to *littérature concentrationnaire*: the story of the Auschwitz orchestra, by its conductor. A spiritual aid? No, says the canny author: a practical help to survival. Brutal SS guards could turn emotional at familiar tunes. Hope for humanity or unsurprising sentimentality? Perhaps both.

Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR. By BOHDAN NAHAYLO and VICTOR SWOBODA. Hamish Hamilton, £20.00.

Immensely timely, well-documented study of the non-Russian half of the USSR, with handy maps. The authors are less gloomy about *Pamyat*' than Dr Carter (above); but they find that "genuine democratisation and the preservation of empire, however disguised, are incompatible". Break-up? Confederation? "Yugoslavisation"? Russian takeover? No bets.

Comedy: An Introduction to Comedy in Literature, Drama and Cinema. By T. G. A. NELSON. Oxford University Press, £19.50, paper £6.95.

Sprinkled with enough jokes to disarm fears of donnish pomposity, this tours the expected subjects: marriage, sex, death,

crime, folly, language, fantasy, etc., and adds thoughts on carnival and feminist disquiet at sexist humour. But it leaves out far too much, including the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy, and Jacques Tati.

Haydn and the Valve Trumpet. By CRAIG RAINE. Faber, £20.00.

The title is from the title piece, about reviewers' howlers: not a feature of the sparkling 68 literary articles collected here as "essays". They succeed best when subverting conventional verdicts—on Douanier Rousseau (not great but good), on Betjeman's supposed "religiosity". Enjoyably waspish on fellow critics.

Japanese Cinema: An Introduction. By DONALD RICHIE. Oxford University Press, £6.95.

Learned, very brief survey which purports to guide Westerners through the cultural assumptions underlying films liable to misunderstanding without such knowledge. But it rather sacrifices this, and stylistic analysis, to a chronological narrative, only occasionally lifting the veil. Helpful, therefore, but limited.

The Blackwell Biographical Dictionary of British Political Life in the Twentieth Century. Edited by KEITH ROBBINS. Basil Blackwell, £49.95.

A two-column tome as mammoth as its title, with authors brilliantly chosen: several summarise their own full-length biographies; the editor supplies 44. Up-to-date, it includes John Major; eclectic, it has spies, journalists, and Irishmen; bright, it tells jokes like Margot Asquith on F. E. Smith: "His brains sometimes go to his head."

The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St George' Orwell. By JOHN RODDEN. Oxford University Press, £22.50, \$27.50.

The blurb makes large claims for this, by a teacher of Rhetoric at the University of Virginia; but to Britons it may seem a re-run of old disputes. The author recalls Leopold Labedz's ENCOUNTER analysis of the attempted Left-wing takeover, but alleges a symmetrical Right-wing bid. Orwell would have snorted.

Traces of Another Time: History and Politics in Postwar British Fiction. By MARGARET SCANLON. Princeton University Press, \$27.50.

A sideways look at sideways looks at politics—by Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Bowen, J. G. Farrell, Kim Philby and other spy fictioneers, Paul Scott, Doris Lessing, and Anthony Burgess. The themes are Ireland, treason, and the Apocalypse. The tone is crisp, ironical, erudite, amused, and the product of extensive reading.

A. A. Milne: His Life. By ANN THWAITE. Faber, £17.50.

Marvellously comprehensive and sympathetic account of a complex, serious, humorous, talented, hard-working man—much more than the author of the *Pooch* books. Mrs Thwaite deals frankly and tactfully with Milne's son's problems as the original of Christopher Robin; and she quotes to great effect. A masterly portrait of an age.

James Baldwin: Artist on Fire. By W. J. WEATHERBY. Michael Joseph, £17.99.

Affectionate portrait by a writer and journalist who knew him well: it successfully recreates what Baldwin himself called "a very tight, tense, lean, abnormally ambitious, abnormally intelligent, and hungry black cat". But it could use a proper bibliography, as well as more analytical criticism of the books.

R.M.

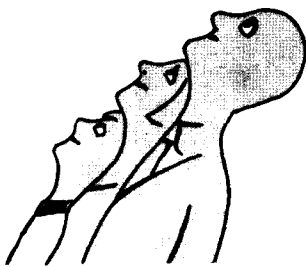
CONTROVERSY

Three Concepts of Racism

“Anti-Racism”, Prejudice (and worse)—By ANTONY FLEW

“I want to be a man on the same basis and level as any white citizen—I want to be as free as the whitest citizen. I want to exercise, and in full, the same rights as the white American. I want to be eligible for employment exclusively on the basis of my skills and employability, and for housing solely on my capacity to pay. I want to have the same privileges, the same treatment in public places as every other person. . . .”

DR RALPH BUNCHE (the first black American to serve as, among many other things, US Permanent Representative at the UN).



WHAT is racism? And why should we abominate racists?

It should be obvious that these two fundamental questions ought to be both asked and answered before anyone either denounces some particular person as “a racist” or puts forward policies supposedly

intended to combat racism in general. But the truth is that today they are two questions very rarely either asked or answered. Instead the word “racist”, like the word “fascist”, has become—especially for those most eager to employ it—a vehemently emotive term of abuse, but one with precious little if any determinate descriptive meaning.

It is, for instance, significant that when the National Union of Students first adopted its now notorious “*No Platform!*” policy, it was whomsoever the local militants might choose to denounce as racists and/or fascists who were to be prevented from speaking in any institution of tertiary education within the United Kingdom. It is equally significant that the supporters and implementers of this “*No Platform!*” policy never provide definitions enabling us to determine either *whether* and of precisely *what* those to be forcibly silenced are guilty, or why guilt on these counts deserves to be treated as egregiously heinous.

1. Racism as Unjust Discrimination. Once, however, we do put and press the two straight questions with which I began, it becomes quite obvious that if racism is to be deservedly condemned as wicked, then it must be a kind of bad behaviour rather than a sort of false or otherwise disfavoured belief about matters of supposed

fact. This first point remains both true and crucial even after we have gone on to recognise that, with this as with other kinds, there are those who will attempt to justify bad behaviour by appealing to various matters of actual or alleged fact.

“Racism”, therefore, should be defined as the advantaging or disadvantaging of someone for no other or better reason than that they belong to one particular racial set and not another. The reason for writing “sets” is that this word does not carry the unwanted implications of “group”, “class”, or “community”. For, by Cantor’s “Axiom for Sets”, the sole essential feature of a set is that its members share at least one characteristic, any kind of characteristic.

Those who insist upon talking of blacks or of any other racially defined set as “a community” are thereby suggesting that the people concerned actually do see themselves—and presumably that it is *acceptable* for them to continue to see themselves—as members of a racially defined and racially exclusive (or excluded) set. And that, in this first (and recommended) understanding, is itself paradigmatically racist talk. It should be recalled, much more often than it is, that the universally condemned charter policies of the Nationalist Party in South Africa were all policies to promote racially separate development in racially exclusive local communities . . . *apartheid* being the Afrikaans for apartness.

Given this first and recommended understanding of the word “racism” it is easy to appreciate why racism is morally wrong. Manifestly, it is morally wrong precisely and only because it is unjust. The injustice does not consist in treating different people in different ways, and hence unequally; but in treating differently, and hence unequally, people who themselves are *in all relevant respects* the same.¹ The crucial term here is, of course, “relevant”. For the defining characteristics by which one race is to be distinguished from another—skin pigmentation, shape of skull, etc—are strictly superficial and properly irrelevant to all, or almost all,² ques-

¹ It would be—or, since it is nowadays frequently done, perhaps I should say that it is—preposterous to equate justice with equality. No system of criminal justice, for instance, could survive a requirement to treat offenders in exactly the same way as non-offenders.

² The trifling qualification “or almost all” does perhaps need to be included lest we be called upon to condemn some theatre director casting *Othello* for selecting for the name-part a black actor while refusing to hire to play Desdemona an otherwise well-qualified but black actress.