

conversion, the abandonment of the Western ethic. Neither path was easy. But criticizing the People's Republic set one against people who, on other issues, were one's allies and friends.

Still, whatever the personal difficulty, for Westerners honesty costs very little. Both these writers, on the other hand, have faced the implications of their revolutionary sympathies with heroic integrity, and both, in consequence, have suffered exile. In 1967, Chen Jo-hsi left Taiwan with her husband to live in the People's Republic. She stayed seven years with her two children and was then allowed to leave. (Neither she nor Simon Leys in his introduction explains how she escaped the statutory years of reeducation that would normally have been exacted.) She now lives in Canada and has resumed the writing she abandoned while in China. Chen carries, without effort, the intellectual baggage of the West. When she writes about Nanking neighborhood life, or foiled loves in Peking, she instinctively brings a standard of comparison to bear from her years abroad.

H SIA CHI-YEN DOES NOT have this interlining of liberalism, for the only Western influence detectable in his novel is Soviet. Hsia's is a unique voice, and his book an extraordinary document; not for its literary quality—Chen's style is of first-water purity compared to Hsia's—but for the authenticity of its testimony. He has taken a huge canvas—from the steppes of Mongolia to Washington—with dozens of characters, real and fictitious, and proliferating subplots. The handling of the material is usually clumsy, and characterization is often weak and rhetorical. But Hsia saw his experience in a rare and irrepressible way: he—one person among millions—owned up to the state of the revolution. For this he is hiding under a pseudonym in either Japan or Hong Kong.

The chief interest of *The Coldest Winter in Peking* does not lie in its portrayal of the political cutthroats at the top, but in its astonishing descriptions of lower-class society in China. Privilege and corruption are the people's bane: During the famine of 1960, in the Great Hall of the People—their very own temple—high-ranking cadres are wine and dine while the people starve. There are special schools for the children of this elite; there are

strings to be pulled and queues to be jumped—if you know the right people; and all the while the chronic frittering of human resources of imagination, idealism, intelligence, and learning goes on.

The hero, Paleface Scholar, has become, after many political squalls, "one of the superfluous men in China." His band of friends consists mostly of fallen Red Guards, exploited for their energy during the Cultural Revolution and later repressed. They have fled the corrective farms to which they were banished, and are living without papers, ration cards, or other legal handles in the city, off their wits, in the rubble of the nuclear-shelter tunnels, like some latter-day Artful Dodger and his gang. They sell goods on the black market—toys, for instance, plaited from the Little Red Book's shredded cover. Indignation has perhaps broadened the outlines of this picture; it sounds exaggerated, but not fanciful.

Hsia Chi-yen is not an artist; his novel would have been turned down if it were a Westerner's, and, if it were a fraud, *The Coldest Winter in Peking* would have no value at all. (I introduce this caveat only because there is a long history of faking Chinese evidence, and the publishers have not produced much background on the provenance of the book.) Chen's stories, on the other hand, are written with urgency and clarity and are beautifully shaped. She creates vivid characters—P'eng Yü-lien, the brightly dressed beauty whom the whole neighborhood hopes to catch *in flagrante*, or Keng Erh, the dispirited scientist who cannot find himself a wife—and though the author holds herself aside, she is never cold. The limpid quality of her prose, self-effacing and restrained, is in a Chinese tradition of short-story writing, like the stories of the master observer of seventeenth-century life, P'u Sungling, recently introduced to non-Chinese readers in Jonathan Spence's *Death of Woman Wang*. Chen has been well served by Nancy Ing and Howard Goldblatt, her translators.

The Coldest Winter in Peking has an altogether different outlook, one that makes Hsia's novel much tougher, more indigestible, less polite to the reader. It is rough-hewn, poorly organized, lumpy as a four-year-old's baking attempt, and the translation by Liang-lao Dee (a pseudonym for an academic of Chinese origin living in

the United States) is dreadful. At first I thought Doubleday owed Hsia a better version; I have not altogether changed my mind, but it now seems to me that the novel's analogue would be some primitive masterwork like the *Chanson de Roland* or the Bayeux Tapestry, where the very uncouthness of the execution at times stresses the epic dimension of the themes. To have turned nice phrases would have blown some of the anguish out of Hsia's voice. For, in his own mind, Hsia, I would say, has not left China for good. He writes from within Marxism-Leninism; he proclaims not the failure of the revolution but its betrayal by those in power today. He sees Chou as his cherished ideological master, Mao as the leader whose romantic love of power in the end made him as despotic as any feudal emperor. Chen writes as someone who has taken her final leave; she is looking back on events with the wisdom of separation. But Hsia sounds like someone planning ahead, like someone who wants to get back. □

**FAIRY TALES AND AFTER:
From Snow White to E. B.
White, by Roger Sale. Harvard
University Press, 280 pp.,
\$12.95.**

Into the mainstream

SELMA G. LANES

R OGER SALE HAS WRITTEN a most unusual book on the subject of children's literature: one that refuses to pigeonhole its subject matter as a distinct—and, therefore, implicitly minor—literary genre. What's more, he doesn't once apologize for taking seriously books generally remembered with pleasure by large numbers of adults, yet seldom discussed, "except," as the author notes, "very chattily." It is this very elusiveness of the subject matter, the fact that

SELMA G. LANES is the author of *Down the Rabbit Hole*, a collection of essays on young children's books. She is currently working on a biography of Maurice Sendak.

the magic and power of so many children's books are difficult to pin down, that seems most to have engaged the author's considerable critical acumen.

Sale is a professor of English at the University of Washington, and he writes as an adult for other adults. Wisely, he makes no effort to cover all bases, concentrating instead on just those "books for which I feel some marked imaginative sympathy." No lukewarm enthusiast, he asserts from the start that "children's literature is one of the glories of our more recent literary heritage."

Yet he eschews any definition of his chosen subject, contenting himself with the Olympian assertion that "we all have a pretty good idea of what children's literature includes." Without a trace of pedantry, Sale addresses himself more to literature's broad function, "that it gives profit and delight, and by this definition children's literature has given as much profit and delight as other kinds of literature." Because he finds the category "children's literature" too uncomfortably vague and loose to permit much generalizing (and the great children's books themselves "too different from one another to suggest more than occasional comparisons between two or three"), Sale focuses on particular works and their creators.

And what a joy it is to join so interesting a mind and so responsive a literary sensibility in reexamining books by Dr. Seuss, Lewis Carroll, Frank Baum, and others. Refreshingly, there is not a hint of condescension in Sale's sharp scrutiny. Of *Peter Rabbit*, he says simply, "It is one of the world's best known and best loved books because without it humanity would be the poorer."

Not of the school of criticism that would isolate the work from its author, Sale soundly observes that Beatrix Potter's power to charm her readers "has to do with smallness . . . with the way Potter uses smallness to force concentration from her reader." And, offered several telling glimpses into Potter's genteel and suffocatingly claustrophobic youth, we can only nod assent to the judgment, "Given the confined nature of her life, given her tendency to write in tiny letters, given her desire to copy little things other people usually ignored, it is not surprising that enclosed spaces gave her the crucial assurance that within them she could be brash and full of pronouncements." And what Potter aficionado will not raise a small cheer for his ultimate appraisal: "How loose and baggy, how



easy on themselves she makes most other writers and artists seem."

Seldom do Sale's insights fail to deepen our appreciation of even the most familiar nursery favorites. Commenting on Jean de Brunhoff's "sombre equilibrium," Sale notes, "He shows us misfortunes of a kind seldom found in children's books: betrayal, desertion and cruelty . . . de Brunhoff's tone in the presence of these events is impassive and accepting. . . The impassivity that seems for a moment like indifference also assures us that this moment will pass." It is only mildly disconcerting that Sale makes no distinction be-

tween the early Babar stories written by Jean de Brunhoff (those under discussion) and the later, lesser tales by his son Laurent, with which today's children are probably more familiar.

IF SALE IS GENEROUS AND incisive with his praise, he can also be firm and withering in his judgments. He does not hesitate to point out A. A. Milne's "shallow snobbery" (that author's tendency "to calculate one's superiority to someone else"), or to condemn the distasteful underlying premises of a traditional fairy tale like *Rumpelstiltskin*, with its

"alien insistence that the king must always be accepted, and even married, no matter how dreadful, and that the little man in the woods must always be thwarted, no matter how sympathetic." Of so sacrosanct a figure as Hans Christian Andersen, Sale writes, "What is wrong with his work is, almost without exception, what is wrong with all inferior children's literature and what mars even some of the masterpieces." The fault Sale pinpoints is the tendency "to make the central relation be between the teller and the audience rather than the teller and the tale." Thus he finds, not only in Andersen but in much of Kipling as well (notably the *Just So Stories*), "an essentially patronizing attitude toward the audience."

Nowhere is Sale more compelling than when he is examining fairy tales (and the oral tradition) as they relate to later works specifically intended for children. He reminds us that children's literature is a product of "the latter days," dating only from the beginning of the seventeenth century, by which time magic had been generally discredited and childhood was invented. In fairy-tale literature, "What was was, and was equally for everyone." Thus, Sale cautions, when we return to the old Grimm tales today, "We need to adjust or even temporarily to abolish our sense of older and younger, parent and child, and let the tales give us their sense of these people and these relations." But, admiring as he is of the purity of fairy tales in their portrayal of good and evil, the ugly and the beautiful, he cannot subscribe to the near mysticism of writers like Tolkien who look on these primitive works as an open sesame into some realm of the Other, a place beyond human experience. "I hear testimony in a story or a collection of tales, and a voice is speaking across a large abyss," Sale confesses to us. "But it is only a voice, or some voices, not something beyond human personality, not something beyond human relationships."

What makes *Fairy Tales and After* so much a work to be reckoned with is the wholeheartedness of its author's own responses. It is exhilarating to find the world of children's books so openly welcomed—at long last!—into the larger cosmos of general literature. How refreshing to witness Kenneth Grahame's Toad of Toad Hall, for example, compared unself-consciously to another antihero, Hemingway's Robert Cohn of *The Sun Also Rises*. And

what a pleasure to read that "de Brunhoff shares with Flaubert and Proust those qualities for which the more famous adult authors are admired, and if their display of these qualities is more copious than de Brunhoff's, it is no more pure."

What doubtless gives most resonance to Sale's observations and pronouncements is that they are informed by a sober awareness of mortality, by that tragic sense so often purposely excluded from children's books by those who would protect their readers from what they already know in their growing bones. In admiring the stark closing line of a Grimm tale ("And so they were all dead together"), Sale writes, "One minds mortality less when remembering that we will all be dead together, along with the hen and the cock and the teller of that tale."

Perhaps never has so urbane, so civilized—in sum, so adult—a voice been raised on behalf of children's books. It is high time. □

HARVARD HATES AMERICA,
by John LeBoutillier.
Gateway, 168 pp., \$7.95.

Kremlin on the Charles?

STEPHEN CHAPMAN

WHO AT HARVARD "hates" America? Does Oscar Handlin? Edward Banfield? James Q. Wilson? Adam Ulam? Robert Nozick? Richard Pipes? Daniel P. Moynihan, still on the faculty when John LeBoutillier arrived in Cambridge? Henry Kissinger, who gave up his tenure during LeBoutillier's undergraduate years? No, their patriotic credentials all appear in order. Maybe the student body? The Harvard Republican Club, until recently the largest undergraduate organization on campus? The Christian Fellowship, a big, active evangelical

STEPHEN CHAPMAN writes frequently for the New Republic and the Washington Monthly. He graduated from Harvard in the class of 1976.

group? The *Harvard Independent*, a moderate student weekly? Well, no, not those either.

So what is the evidence for LeBoutillier's bold title? To be honest, it's pretty thin: a roommate with a taste for mind-altering substances, a tutor with a Mercedes and a line of dime-store Marxist patter, a section teacher infatuated with JFK, and not much else. If such easily recognizable campus types are all that is needed to prove a prevailing mood of subversion, this book could have been titled *Texas A&M Hates America*.

Harvard's own *God and Man at Yale*, as this book has been touted, certainly deserves to be written, and maybe someday it will be. As a classmate of LeBoutillier, whom I have never met, I expected him to draw a damning indictment of the dominant orthodoxy at Harvard and the ways, subtle and overt, in which students are indoctrinated in it. Apparently that enterprise would have been too much work, so LeBoutillier has settled for recounting a few random incidents to illustrate Harvard's decadent, rebellious character—this is the sort of whining that, one suspects, goes on at the Porcellian Club all the time.

Possibly LeBoutillier could have made a case for his thesis, since there are plenty of people at Harvard who might be characterized as "haters" of America, even granting his terms. While I was there, the university boasted several leftist organizations, a few outspoken socialists on the faculty, and a student daily, the *Crimson*, whose name was widely regarded as suggestive of its ideological coloration. There would be problems, however, in relying on these examples. The leftist groups were taken seriously by hardly anyone, the faculty members were notable only for their scarcity, and the *Crimson*, besides suffering endless dining-hall ridicule, harbored a few editors—including me—who were more interested in the ideas of Friedman and Hayek than of Marx and Engels.

LeBoutillier never gets around to considering such problems, perhaps because less than half of his book has anything to do with Harvard, the remainder being given over to outlining his political ideas—such as they are—and reminiscing about his work in raising money for former prisoner of war Leo Thorsness, who ran for the U.S. Senate in 1974 against George McGovern. LeBoutillier was moved to