

or reviewer who has clearly perceived this intention behind his imagery has been Robert Cantwell.

Various reviewers have commented upon the influence of Proust in Dahlberg's writing, and this opens up a second question of associated interest here. Proust always struggled to achieve precise effects. If he sought to describe a railroad journey he had taken, he did not seek to describe any railroad journey, and the obvious sights and sounds that he had experienced, or might have experienced on any railroad journey. Rather, he sought to give his readers a sense of the specific and particular railroad journey, and none other. With him, the meaning of recapturing a sense of things past, was not that of evoking generalized memories of obvious categories, but rather of bringing onto the printed page a sense of the specific objects, of specific associations, sensations and feelings that were evoked in definite atmospheres, and not in other atmospheres that were similar but not precisely the same. Dahlberg seeks to achieve the same type of effect. Critics have commented upon a sense of strain in his writing. This sense of strain is the concomitant of his type of sensibility. He strains and struggles to achieve precise and specific effects. When he sets a character walking down a street, he does not try to evoke the familiar sights and sounds of any streets, and the generalized sort of responses which these would evoke in any character of a certain background, and a certain grouping or class.

Rather, he tries to give his readers a sense of that specific street, and a specific character whose reactions are not totally similar to those of any other characters. These kinds of effects are achieved by the selection of unique and highly distinguishable details. And his use of imagery is also put into the service of this intention. The major effect of Proust on his work is that of stimulating this type of a literary intention, and it is a wholly legitimate and non-imitative one.

There is a third question of literary technique of equal relevance here. A number of contemporary or near-contemporary writers, who have had a widespread technical influence, have attempted to perfect a literary device describable as telescoping. They have, in other words, attempted to compress into their writings, description of objects, the sensations called forth by these objects in their characters, and the selection of these objects in the manner in which the eye sees them, jumping from one to another. Amongst such writers are Joyce and Eliot. Their perfection of this device is best illustrated by a comparison of their descriptions with those of, say, a writer like Dickens who ordered his description in a more formal pattern, and more in consonance with the composition course dicta of unity, coherence, and emphasis. Dahlberg also puts his use of imagery into the service of telescoping objects, and sensations together.

Criticism of his imagery must then be

made in terms of whether he gives one a sense of the things he sets out to establish. In his use of imagery and symbols there is revealed a brilliant originality. By them, he has been able, much more successfully than many of us who are his contemporaries, to endow his books with a sense of atmospheres and backgrounds. When he has been successful, as he is in the final chapter of *Those Who Perish*, with these devices, the writing is considerably enriched. In that volume, the criticism of his use of imagery should be made in these terms. To achieve the kinds of effects in any number that he seeks to achieve, a long book is required, so that the narrative progress is not too impeded with the building of atmospheres, and the establishment of a sense of concrete and unique details. And *Those Who Perish* was too short a book to bear this kind of a burden. Secondly, all the images and associations are not of equal relevance, and some of them, though brilliant in themselves, fail to achieve a sense of the things he seeks to describe. In other words, there is a certain amount of inequality in the relevance of all his metaphors. And those that are irrelevant are subject to criticism. This, however, is a different matter from criticizing him because he uses imagery. The intention is wholly valuable, if used with the proper sense of proportion.

To some, such a lengthy discussion of matters of technique and imagery may seem to be mere formalism. The ideal of a writer is that of presenting his fiction in such a manner so that the reader will feel that this

is not merely a book he is reading, but that, to the contrary, it is an actual unfoldment of living people. Bad writing, inappropriate style, and such factors in a book tend to destroy this illusion, and if these occur too repeatedly, the reader is often inclined to put the book aside. Because of this, stylistic and technical discussion and criticism, if approached as an aspect of criticism and not as an end in itself, is not vain formalism. And it is one of the merits of Dahlberg's writing that he is conscious of matters of style and technique, and seeking to solve them.

Also, each writer must convince and educate his readers in terms of his own sensibilities and attitudes. It is characteristic of good writing that it eschews a dependence upon the literary conventions and labels and symbolisms of other writers, and to the contrary, seeks to present fresh imagery, and additional understanding of characters, and the like. If readers seek to be given what they already know, and are anxious merely to have repeated for them, symbolisms that have already been developed and conventionalized, they are reading at a low level, and they derive little new understanding from writers. In consequence, matters of style, of technique, of symbolism are constant problems facing the writer. A greater familiarity with them on the part of readers, and a more thoroughgoing interest and understanding of these problems by critics and reviewers likewise add to the total literary atmosphere, and tend to create a situation producing better writing.

JAMES T. FARRELL.

A Study in Comparative Literature

I SIDOR SCHNEIDER'S collection of poems, *Comrade-Mister* (Equinox Co-operative Press, \$2), is divided into two sections, the first, I take it, containing poems that he wrote before he became a Communist, the second those written since. There are important differences between the two sections, and these differences are worth examining.

In a note on revolutionary poetry Schneider points out that the two most common themes of the poetry of the last three or four hundred years are love and nature. These are also the dominant themes of the first section of his book. His treatment of them, however, is by no means that of conventional romantic poetry. There are, for example, two parallel poems, one describing a tree on a city street, the other a well-cover in the country, and the two observations suggest "the two eternities," the power of nature and the power of man. The hanging of clothes in an orchard brings the reflection that nature "can set anything at home." An overheated room reminds the poet that city life breeds its own kind of strength. The five or six poems concerned with travel in Europe pose serious questions of the destinies of men and nations. A visit to the Louvre, for example, calls attention to the dual nature of man, his need

for security and peace and his need for action and change. And a poem in praise of France ends:

We shrank to see distend your armies,
your ranks of beetles wasting green
your youth. You have the maw imperial
whereon men, steel-edged, hinge for teeth.
It rends the strength of nations: you
it nourishes never. Oh train out
this canine towardness to the stools of death.

Obviously Schneider is a poet whose mind reaches out from simple experiences to far-reaching questionings and bold generalizations. The same trait appears in his poems of love. "A Night of No Love" is a rather simple and very poignant expression of longing for the beloved one, but usually he strives to transcend the immediate experience by finding in it ultimate significance. "You Are My Sun," for example, suggests the limitations of passion: after a stanza that is pure tribute, it concludes:

When you are away
I sit in cold silence, and my hands knot in the
cold,
and a night hollows my mind and the hollowness
is sealed.
And then, as in the absence of the sun, the stars
can glitter,
remote and struggling, tinily flare up and flicker
the little constellations of ideas.

It is apparent that Schneider, in his pre-revolutionary phase, belonged to the school of poets we call, rather inaccurately, metaphysical. Not only his concern with ideas and his striving to discover the far-reaching implications of simple experiences but also the originality and difficulty of his figures of speech and the hard-packed terseness of his style place him among the followers of John Donne. The resemblance is particularly striking in the poems of life. The first part of "Marriage" has the same ecstatic quality as have Donne's love poems, and the conclusion raises a question that Donne might have raised. "Harem from a Bus Top" rests on a "conceit" that would have delighted either Donne or Marvell, and line after line of the poem explodes with the startling effectiveness so characteristic of them.

But Schneider's metaphysical poetry does not escape, could not escape, from the dark shadow that has hovered over Eliot, MacLeish, Tate, Gregory, and the other poets who, despite their many differences, have alike turned to Donne and his school for inspiration. These poems have an air of perplexity that comes dangerously close to despair. It is not only that some of them, such as "Sleep" and "In the Syrup See Dead Flies," echo the concern with death that Eliot has celebrated in his "Whispers of Mortality"; they all strain, almost in agony, toward some sort of release from the meaningless of life. The attempt to twist by sheer brutality more meaning out of words than they have symbolizes the poet's effort to assault the universe and make it deliver an answer to his questionings.

Turning to the revolutionary poems, one finds, naturally, that Schneider has not wholly changed. He is still an intellectual poet. But at last his mind has found something that will nourish it. It seems to me that, in the earlier poems, he was not quite convinced himself that his themes were worth the effort he spent on them. They were the best he could find, but I feel in his treatment of them a certain self-distrust, as if one part of him knew that all his tense striving could win no fruitful victory. In the revolutionary poems there is self-confidence; the assurance of a man who has found allies and has come to terms with his world. He no longer needs to tear himself to pieces to find his theme; he has been released from sickly subjectivism and has learned to contemplate fearlessly the men and movements of his day.

One consequence of this release from self-preoccupation is the development of a notable talent for satire. The first two stanzas of "For the Tenth Anniversary of the Daily Worker" and the whole of "In a Hotel Lobby" and "Dollars" magnificently combine shrewdness and savage contempt. "Portrait of a False Revolutionist" not only defines a type; it inoculates against contamination.

Furthermore, without losing any of that extraordinary terseness that is perhaps his greatest gift, Schneider has sloughed off the kind of deliberate, literary obscurity that oc-

asionally vitiated his earlier work and that is found in Eliot and all his followers. His poetry demands an effort of comprehension, just as it always did, but there is no willful concealment of meaning behind forced figures of speech and private references. Note, for instance, the first stanza of the eloquent and richly burdened poem, "To the Museums":

Come to the museums, workers; and under every landscape
paste this label: "Workers! Is the earth as beautiful where you live?
You on the poverty farms, boarded to hogs,
your sore fields scratched to the stone by the chickens?
You in the slums who can span between two fingers
all you can have of the free horizon; who must lean,
somehow, over a tenement's shoulder to see the sun?
This is your homestead, farmer. Worker, this is your summer place.
It has been kept beautiful by your labor. Enjoy its grace."

The same quality is to be found in most of the poems in the second section. "Comrade-Mister" explores with soundness and ingenuity the meanings of the two barricade-separated forms of address, and "The Reichstag Trial" catches some of Dimitroff's own eloquent fire. Best of all, it seems to me, are the four revolutionary orations which appeared in *THE NEW MASSES*. It is a fine theme that Schneider has chosen, the theme of the great deception. In the first of the orations the priest speaks to the people, to exploit them. In the second the king, to further his own greedy ends, allies himself to the priest. In the third the priest and king are made part of the profit-machine of the business man. And in the fourth the workers rise to overthrow this unholy trinity.

In the first three of these orations Schneider has written with insight, with sardonic wit, and with power, illuminating both the process and the psychology of exploitation. The fourth oration seems to me less successful. Written in a slangy prose, it sometimes achieves the sharp eloquence of working-class speech, and it is always vigorous and hard. But there are passages in which the language

is overdone, and as a whole it seems forced.

If I am right, I think the explanation is not hard to find, and it is the explanation of other weaknesses in these revolutionary poems. Like many other revolutionary writers, Schneider knows so well what he wants to be that he is not quite content to be what he is. We are all like that; we all want to force the process of adaptation to revolutionary ways of thought and proletarian ways of feeling. But the process takes time and much experience in the radical movement, and it is always a mistake for anyone, and perhaps especially for a poet, to substitute what he thinks he ought to feel for the feelings he actually has.

In "Prophecy to Myself" Schneider writes:

So, vain and doomed is personal love.
If it has destiny, it is like a potted tree,
that as it grows must break the pot,
and if it reach not more abundant earth, must die.
My love has cracked its pot; but has struck
the more abundant earth, the earth of comradeship;
and I can, all my length grow out,
in revolutionary act.

This seems to me less than completely sincere. It is a commentary, of course, on the love poems of the first section, and I suspect that the reversal of attitude it describes is scarcely an accomplished fact. I have a similar complaint against "Seed on my Desk," in which the wind-blown seed suggests to the poet the teachings of revolution. Nature still, I am sure, has meaning for Schneider other than its power to provide illustrations of revolutionary processes. If his enjoyment of nature and his eagerness for revolution are not fully integrated, that is no great matter at the moment; better frankly recognize the division than create a false integration.

I could find other examples of essentially the same weakness, but to dwell upon them would give a false impression of their importance. I do not want to obscure from the reader my conviction that Schneider is the most fully developed revolutionary poet in America. There are younger American poets who in occasional poems have given promise

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of going beyond Schneider, but at the moment they are his inferiors. His methods are stronger than theirs, more disciplined, more appropriate. His sensitivity is surer, less erratic. His imagination has deeper roots in

revolutionary thought and action. His work has much of the sturdiness and vigor of the proletarian movement of which he is an important part.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

discovered that the smashing of the slave-power was an incident in the dialectic process by which the bourgeoisie fulfilled its historic function of freeing the working class from slavery and serfdom and of preparing its own expropriation.

DAVID BURROWS.

History for the Leisure Class

AMERICA'S TRAGEDY, by James Truslow Adams. Scribners. 415 pages. \$3.

DR. ADAMS long ago abandoned all pretence of being a scholar, and devoted himself to the more profitable task of vulgarizing American history to suit the ideological requirements of the American leisure class. His latest compilation is an interpretation of the Civil War. The Old South, Dr. Adams tells us, had developed a humane way of living—a fact which he attributes to the combined influences of climate, agrarianism and heredity. The slave-owners had realized that there were things in life more important than working or making money; they had acquired the public spirit, the grace and the generosity of an European aristocracy. Unfortunately, the Old South was unable to teach these virtues to the North, which was overrun with vulgarity and materialism; in fact, "largely from the accidental nature of its labor economy," it became more and more isolated, and was finally compelled to defend its humane way of living by secession. The Northerners, however, loved the Union and plunged into war in order to preserve it; and though the soldiers on both sides fought nobly, the conflict was embittered by the fanaticism of abolitionists and other unpleasant characters. The cause of this unfortunate occurrence was "Fate," whose "footfalls" can be discovered by the discerning historian. In spite, however, of the triumph of materialism, all is not lost. We may still hope that the southern way of life may be adopted in the north, though of course "social prestige and influence are not likely soon again to inhere in ownership of land." They will belong in future not to the planter, but to "the president of a great modern corporation . . . controlling the lives of a hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand employees."

The rentier-class basis of this fairy tale is sufficiently obvious. The evils of American life, Dr. Adams wishes us to believe, have nothing to do with the relations of production; to concern oneself with questions of economics is vulgar and materialistic. What we have to do is to accept the enlightened leadership of people who live graceful and leisurely lives. Of course this enlightened leadership may fail, but if it does it will be because of "the footfalls of Fate" or some equally inscrutable cause. To admit that human behavior has any connection with property relationships, or that there are any ascertainable laws of historic development, would destroy the whole of this mechanism of defense; and accordingly we may search Dr. Adams's study of the Civil War in vain

for any understanding either of its real causes or of its more fundamental results. That American politics before the war was a conflict between the owners of two different economic systems, each of whom needed federal protection and new territories into which to expand; that in 1861 northern capitalism acquired complete control of the federal government and used its power to raise the tariff, to subsidize the railroads, to import cheap contract-labor from Europe, and to consolidate the banking system; that the planters were concerned primarily with increasing the value of their slave-property and that they seceded because, owing to their exclusion from the western territories, they needed to seize Cuba and Central America; that northern capitalism fought secession because it needed the South as a market for its tariff-protected goods, and in order to recover the debts which the planters had repudiated, and because it was already planning to invest capital in the South; that it had the support of the class-conscious workers of Europe and America, who knew that the freeing of the slaves was a necessary preliminary to the winning of their own freedom; that the war brought enormous profits from war loans and army contracts; that emancipated Negroes were used as strike-breakers; that the motive of the reconstruction policy was, by completing the ruin of the planters, to prevent them from ever again competing with capitalism for control of the federal government: all this is either glossed over as relatively unimportant or wholly ignored. It would probably be paying too high a compliment to Dr. Adams's intelligence to suggest that his omissions are conscious and not merely instinctive, but certainly the care with which he has avoided any damaging statements is extraordinary. If he had admitted that the connection between the leisureliness of the planters and the fact that their work was done for them by slaves, was more than merely "debatable" or that the "materialism" of the northerners was a direct result of the competitiveness of early capitalism, then he might have been led on to the horrifying possibility that the modern "chaos of moral values" which he professes to deplore might be merely a symptom of the decay of an economic system. And if he had considered the notion that the Civil War might have been caused not by "Fate" or even by the devotion of the northerners to the Stars and Stripes, but by the requirements of capitalist society, then he might have been compelled to face the fact that that society is governed by certain laws of motion and that those laws of motion may conceivably be still operating. He might even have

Minus the Most Important Problem

PROBLEMS OF THE PACIFIC, 1933. Edited by Bruno Lasker and W. L. Holland. University of Chicago Press, 1934. \$5.

No review can be expected to deal adequately with the vast amount of material which is crowded into the extensive reports of the biennial conferences of the Institute of Pacific Relations. The present volume, constituting the proceedings of the Banff Conference held in August, 1933, is more than usually comprehensive. It grapples with the formidable theme of "International Economic Conflict in the Pacific Area: Its Control and Adjustment," embracing such broad subjects as economic conflict and control, currency instability, and differences in labor and living standards. Chapters on these topics, summarizing round-table discussions by representative nationals of the Pacific countries, are supplemented by others dealing with the concrete problems raised by Japanese expansion, the U.S. recovery program, reconstruction in China, and the agreements reached at the Ottawa Conference.

Each of these chapters contains an astonishing amount of valuable information, much of which is not readily available from other sources. For this reason, if for no other, the time taken in reading the volume is well spent. A store of factual knowledge is disclosed, which can be usefully referred to on many subsequent occasions. Any careful attempt to follow the line of reasoning developed through a chapter, however, leaves the reader with a sense of aimlessness and futility. The reason for this is readily discernible. It is not merely the obvious fact that round-table discussions necessarily prove difficult of summary in logical form. It is rather that the participants in these discussions, which deal with subjects directly and inescapably conditioned by basic class issues, almost wholly ignore the relevance and applicability of class criteria to the phenomena under consideration.

Much the most penetrating analyses are presented in several of the documentary appendices, notably the first one on the control of industry in Japan and the second on the agrarian problem of China. The first document, prepared by the Tokyo Institute of Political and Economic Research, emphasizes the extent to which the concentration of capital and the development of trusts has proceeded in Japan. As early as 1930, however, the intense competition engendered by the depression had forced the Japanese capitalists to appeal for restraints enforced by the state apparatus. The result was the legislative enactment in March, 1931, of a Japanese N.R.A., which has since been applied to virtually all