

sky has furnished no clue as to how he found release from his obsession." And Yarmolinsky fingers in vain the pages of the novels that followed. Carr, however, using facts that Yarmolinsky neglects, furnishes a plausible explanation. He observes that Dostoevsky virtually stops gambling in 1865 when his wife stops accompanying him to gaming resorts. Each of the three trips that occur after this date end with a frantic appeal to his distant wife upon whom he was becoming more and more dependent. The last was in 1871. In 1872 Germany passed a law forbidding gambling, and the Dostoevskys did not have money enough to pursue it in resorts further away from home.

Thus, Yarmolinsky's volume suffers because it has not the advantage of Carr's detached and sceptical approach. Written with no consciousness of environmental influences upon Dostoevsky and no consciousness of environmental changes since Dostoevsky's death, it is a product of the old Russian mentality. Its subjective method, apparently as modern as Maurois, only masks an uncritical acceptance of orthodox Russian mysticism. Personality, according to Yarmolinsky, does not change because of a complicated response to changes in environment. It is formed by God through the paradoxical method of heredity as something spiritually complete, buffeted but unmodified by circumstances, modified only by the interaction of its own elements.

In other words, Yarmolinsky writes with complete indifference to the fact that the Revolution has swept away the old Russian belief in the Russian soul. This "soul" and this belief survive chiefly in the aged, in the illiterate and in the hearts of expatriates like himself. But the most serious consequence of his obscurantism is that he does not bring into the foreground those aspects of Dostoevsky's personality and of his books which furnish a bitter ironic commentary upon this very mysticism. I do not wish, of course, a falsification of the facts, an attempt to show that Dostoevsky died a harbinger of the Revolution, but, rather what Carr has given, a stress upon those facts which are of most interest, and significant for our present moment in history. If we are to have another presentation of Dostoevsky as the prophet with no bigger message than the paradox, virtue is a distillation of sin, we might at least be afforded a comparison with Baudelaire and the other decadents. But what we really need is more investigation into those reaches in his personality where scepticism and shrewd observation of human nature awaited their cue while the decadence of old Christian Russia hugged the center of the stage.

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Brief Review

TIME: THE PRESENT, by Tess Slesinger. Simon and Schuster \$2.50. Miss Slesinger's stories are well made; she has wit and insight but she deals primarily with defeated individuals and her presentation is static.

THE MAN OF ARAN, by Pat Mullen. E. P. Dutton Co. \$3. That Flaherty's photographically superb film, *Man of Aran*, was incomplete is indicated from a reading of this Aran Islander's autobiography. Instead of an epic of human perseverance we find the Aran Islander's lot involved in misery with the rest of the capitalist world, his living in more precarious dependence upon the kelp market than upon storm and tide.

A SAGA OF A PAPER MILL, by Laurence Pratt. The Caxton Printers, Ltd., Caldwell, Idaho. We are told the author of this book of verse has been "largely self-educated," working as "printer's devil, elevator boy, groceryman, music teacher, longshoreman, gas-meter man, pressman, high

school teacher, college professor." But in his poetry, Mr. Pratt gives no evidence of ever having been a worker.

In *A Saga of a Paper Mill*, the manufacture of paper is glorified but as for the workers who make the paper, they are so many individuals whose histories are told in sonnet form in the manner of "Spoon River Anthology."

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The boss manufactures the paper; the workers merely enter and come out of the factory. The mediocrity of the poetry can be judged from the sample quoted.

P. S. These 77 pages of paper cost \$2.

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As Benito Desires Me

HENRY HART

LUIGI PIRANDELLO is about five feet high, sixty-eight years old and has a fine, bald, egg-shaped head, intense brown eyes and a small, gray goatee. Like most Sicilians, his skin is quite dark. Thirty years of his life were spent teaching Italian literature in a woman's normal school in Rome and some of the effects are still with him. One of these is his taste for formal amenities.

This was apparent the instant he entered the living room of his suite on the forty-first floor of the Waldorf. He repressed his surprise at our youth with such quick and complete urbanity that all five of us momentarily felt a sense of guilt because we were not Robert Underwood Johnson representing the American Academy of Arts and Letters. It was clear that our host did not know what the League of American Writers and the New Theatre League are.

Signor Pirandello does not speak English, but he is accompanied in this country by a kind of manager with whom he converses in French and who translates the French into English. This manager, or interpreter, was not a typical example of his profession, and, as the interview progressed, his personality became more and more interesting. His name is Saul Colin. He is approaching forty, has a white and round face, large pale blue eyes and spectacles and a habit of forming the letter O with his thin lips at the end of each sentence. Mr. Colin referred to Pirandello as "maestro," as did John Macrae, Sr., the redoubtable chairman of the board of E. P. Dutton & Co., Pirandello's American publishers. One other person was present. This was Mr. Colin's wife, an attractive woman with an eager personality, whose spontaneous translations seemed to please Pirandello more than her husband's, especially later on in the interview when things were becoming warm.

Aware that the purpose of our visit was so completely unknown to him as to make our presence a form of misrepresentation, we approached the point from a great and gentlemanly distance. "Is Signor Pirandello now engaged upon a play?" one of us politely asked.

A slight and almost undetectable relaxation occurred in the great playwright as he sat on the back of his spine in an especially

low chair. No, he had just finished one. But neither travel nor New York interrupts the progress of his creative impulse. Like all of the best writers, Signor Pirandello keeps theme, plot and character within him for a long time before he starts to write. The idea for *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was with him for five years; the play was written in twenty days.

This indirection, however, irked the forthright honesty of John Howard Lawson, who precipitated the very kind of psychological drama of which Pirandello is so fond—the transformation within a short space of time of the human personality. We began to observe, with fascination, the metamorphosis of a distinguished cosmopolite, a recipient of the Nobel Prize, into an irritated aesthete affronted by being asked to consider ideas he had intellectually parked in a logic-tight compartment years ago.

"We have come here," Mr. Lawson said with native and admirable candor, "because your great literary reputation has been employed to defend a form of society which we believe means the death of culture. We believe literature has suffered under fascism and we would like to ask what work is being produced in Italy which would disprove our view."

Mr. Colin toned this down in translation and Pirandello mentioned the names of two Italian writers, unknown to the English-reading public. He was then asked whether, when he was fabricating his psychological dramas, he was not led to realize how much interior psychology is conditioned by external environment, by the kind of society in which the individual lived and loved—whether he did not think the individual was different in Russia, in Italy, in the United States.

Pirandello lit a cigarette.

He replied that governments are what people make them.

Herbert Kline, the editor of *New Theatre*, asked if he did not think the picture of fascism contained in *Fontamara* sufficient to alienate the allegiance of all writers. Signor Pirandello replied that he had never heard of the book.

He was then moved to exclaim that he regretted very much to find young writers in America so preoccupied with politics. Art and politics, he said through Mr. Colin, who took special pleasure in anglicizing the old Latin phrase, are antagonistic—one is of the moment, one is eternal.

Before Mr. Colin had finished translating, Pirandello spoke again with animation. It is dangerous, Mr. Colin said he said, it is dangerous to your artistic careers. Then, pointing toward Clifford Odets, Signor Pirandello said that if his plays were good plays, as he

had heard they were, it is because they are good artistically, not because they concern politics. You young men are wasting your time and your talent, he added.

(In 1931, when he announced that he yearned to visit America, Pirandello said: "Europe is senile, full of animated corpses, living on the glories of two centuries ago.")

Mr. Colin declared, irrelevantly and on his own behalf, that he had once, as a young man, been interested in improving the world but that now, but now—. He finished the sentence with a wave of his hand.

Pirandello lit a cigarette and began wagging his knee rapidly from side to side.

Mr. Kline earnestly and politely asked whether Gordon Craig's statement that the theatre is dead in Italy must not be accepted as an indication of the effect of fascism—of politics—upon literature. Pirandello answered that it was most unkind of Gordon Craig to say the theatre in Italy is dead while Pirandello is alive.

Pirandello leaned over and spoke privately to Mr. Colin. "The maestro says," Mr. Colin declared with forced geniality, "that he had expected to talk about art with artists and that he does not wish to talk politics. He is willing to discuss the theatre in Italy or any literary subject. But as he has already explained, he considers the man and the artist separate."

"We appreciate that that is Signor Pirandello's position," Mr. Lawson said, "and we would like to know about the theatre in Italy, but we also feel that Signor Pirandello's public utterances endorsing the projected war with Ethiopia disproves the possibility of separating the man and the artist."

"Mr. Lawson says," Mr. Colin translated to Pirandello, "that they would like to learn of the great growth in the Italian theatre."

Pirandello began to speak rapidly and to wag his knee. He alluded to his own theatre, which he opened in 1925, and to the companies which tour with repertory. What is the subject matter of this repertory? Why, the best plays. Would anti-fascist plays be included?

"There is no anti-fascism in Italy," he said and lit a cigarette. He leaned forward and as though at bay, declared: "As an Italian citizen I am a fascist and hence am for the war." He fell back in his chair and his knee wagged rapidly from side to side.

Mrs. Colin and Mr. Macrae (who had not said a word) then intimated that we were abusing Signor Pirandello's hospitality. Realizing that this was so, we arose and asked Signor Pirandello to read a brief statement we had prepared in advance. This statement was:

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