

Were the work offered as a popular survey of some of the products of various historical cultures, the conscientious industry with which Dr. Durant has carried out that task of compilation would call for little more than unqualified commendation. But he expressly claims and professes to offer a philosophical history, to "contemplate, in their causes, character, and effects," those products

of culture which he reviews, and he even tells us that "the passion for philosophy has laid the compulsion to try to see things whole, to pursue perspective, unity and understanding through history." He does not approach even within glimpsing distance of such purpose. And, in history, to fail to understand is to misrepresent and mislead.

ROBERT BRIFFAULT.

New Heroes and Heroines

THOSE WHO BUILT STALINGRAD, as told by themselves. Drawings by Fred Ellis, foreword by Maxim Gorky. International Publishers. \$1.

THE proletarian writer in a capitalistic country is confronted with certain limitations and restrictions. It is not difficult, of course, to indict truthfully and vigorously the world we should like to lose, but it is not so easy to write convincingly of the world to be won—the future socialist society. The American proletarian novel still adheres pretty closely to the patterns of defeat, frustration, suffering and struggle—not against time or nature—but against human oppressors. There are temporary triumphs, portents of the future but dimly seen as yet. Readers and critics clamor for something solid; some clear picture of the new life in its day by day aspects.

Those Who Built Stalingrad is a book whose content can be felt and examined, every dimension explored and realized. It is like stone beside the fabricated falsefronts of the Hollywood apologists and romancers. It is the kind of thing we need to steel us and to give us faith to battle for the life we see ahead, but have not lived. This is the heroic, collective epic of the men and women who built a great tractor plant and set it in motion. There are fourteen stories of the workers and engineers, unadorned, not sidetracked on psychological excursions by which the bourgeois artist, empty of any important ideas, labors to lend interest to his creations. These stories of the Stalingrad workers smell of air, earth, wood, fire, and water—sweat, too—not of the musty cloisters of the library. They are wholesome, good and familiar to any one who has worked with his hands, like beans and bacon to a miner coming off his shift, or a draught of cold spring water to a farmer who has hoed all day in the sun. How they will impress academic critics whose callouses are on their buttocks rather than on their hands does not matter.

There are men and women whose hands take lovingly to a tool or a machine, and their stories are here. Even in the capitalistic world where the machine is used as a means of exploitation, workers take pride in their tasks, but this pride is quenched by the realization that greater efficiency and speedier work too often means overstocked warehouses and turns the creators of wealth out into the streets to root hog or die. At Stalingrad it was not always easy, but there

was always the joy of knowing a new world was being assisted from the cocoon of the old.

"Who are they—these men and women who helped to make the Stalingrad Tractor Plant?" ask Ilyin and Galin in a postscript. "They are members of that class which is now the rising class, while the bourgeoisie is the declining class—of that class which took its own destiny into its own hands in October, 1917, and which since that time has been building a new socialist society. We have chosen only one factory and these are only a dozen people from that factory, but can we not say that their various life stories blend together into one whole, and that that whole may be expressed in an upward curve of growth, in an upward curve of the development and unfolding of human personality in a society where there is no such shame as the exploitation of man by man?"

"There is no place for them in literature of the bourgeoisie. There they are consigned to obscurity, to the backyards and alleys, to holes and corners. Bourgeois literature possesses neither the strength nor the capacity to show their true face. But they can be portrayed in their full stature in the literature of the victorious proletariat. And our Soviet literature has already set about the great and difficult task of depicting the class of the new masters of life."

The udarnik at Stalingrad is a more heroic character than Napoleon or a master of finance. We must not only realize this fact, but know that the udarnik's story is more important and interesting, too. The run of the first tractor off the line at Stalingrad was more important to workers than the oft-told encounters of history. Novelists who keep trying to titillate jaded readers with the paprika of sex and faked aestheticism should seek new heroes and heroines who believe in the world of *Those Who Built Stalingrad*, those who affirm the natural goodness of the man and the woman unstultified by capitalism. Mother Jones, Debs, Mother Bloor, Bob Minor, Angelo Herndon, and the thousands of semi-anonymous organizers and leaders—these are the breed of the "heaven-stormers." The builders will come after.

Meanwhile, we'll read *Those Who Built Stalingrad* and from these heroes and heroines of the world to be won we can gather fresh enthusiasm and hope.

JACK CONROY.

Stylish Miss Cather

LUCY GAYHEART, by Willa Cather. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.

A VAPID story dedicated to the genteel version of American provincial life. After Miss Cather retreated from the democratic sentimentalization of the emigrant-pioneer West, she veered, for the sake of her readers, in the reactionary-sentimental direction, toward aristocrats and saints of the church, characters from the Old World in the crude American wilderness. Her early books accompanied the optimism and social reform of figures like Jane Addams' just before and during the war; her second group came at a time when middle-class America grew conscious of Europe—when the franc and the lira and the pound and the mark and the peseta permitted.

This story is on a new tack. It lacks the faint historical flavor of *Shadows on the Rock* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and turns back again to Nebraska, but with a difference. The ingredients are simple and sugary. We still have the sensitive heroine,—such a stock figure for middle class readers who love to "aspire to better things," is essential. Next, a suave, middle-aged artist who supplies Glamor, Passion, Melancholy and Luxury and who exhibits those proofs of genius so fascinating to the above middle-class reader. The young Babbitt, who turns out—(and here it is that the reader will undoubtedly feel that Miss Cather is profound in her understanding of the human heart)—to have under all his brutal American faults the great qualities of Vitality and the Deep Feeling. All the other characters die and the young Babbitt survives into a kind of Depression repentance. Miss Cather's handling of her young Babbitt suggests a whole string of soothing middle-class slogans. Business has its place; and We all can't be artists; and The Great gilt-edged heart of America is O.K. after all. It's Character that counts.

Then for minor figures, an adoring valet. (Ah the beautiful relationships between master and man in the Old World!) We have a quaint father who tinkers watches and plays the flute. (Touching in Nebraska.) We have a sinister green-eyed boy from the London slums, named Mockford, and is he a stock figure! Then we have a poisonous sister who misunderstands sensitive Lucy. And we have an old lady who with the most touching candor tells Lucy that nothing matters in life but Living!

The best critics, with this merchandise before them, are forced to admit that Lucy Gayheart is a commonplace book; but they continue to uphold the myth of Miss Cather's style. Will NEW MASSES readers please refuse to be taken in by this last reservation? The book has no style. It is hard to believe after reading Miss Cather's last best seller that she was ever a writer of any consequence whatsoever.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD.

The Theatre

Drama for Both Ears

PEOPLE like myself who hold our theatre to be the chief hope for poetry will be exhilarated by the Kreymborg program of poetic drama produced by the Peterboro Players at their New Hampshire summer theatre. To the audience the program once again proved the impossible—that poetry can be tremendously exciting theatre. For students of drama it placed across the footlights a group of knotty problems many of which were resolved by the final curtain. Significant of the evening as a whole was the production of “America, America,” seen by this reviewer a dozen times but emerging now with overtones and emphases sufficient to make it a new and infinitely greater experience.

The program is divided into three parts; and only as carefully-arranged sequences can they be understood, since they represent three stages in what is essentially a single dramatic concept. Taken separately, “The Dead Are Free,” “Monday” and “America, America” stand stripped of a rich fabric of inter-related meanings; for as anyone familiar with this poet knows, Kreymborg’s most forthright statements are often broadcast in undertones. It is patently impossible after a single attendance to write a thorough account of all that lies between the lines but even the economically-inexpert New England audiences needed no blueprint to show them they were listening to revolutionary drama.

The evening opens with *The Dead Are Free*, a blank-verse tragedy which immediately gives away the plot so that it can get down to its real business: the study of upper-middle-class New Englanders under emotional crises. Two young women brood over the corpse of a beloved young man whose emotional instability had led him to suicide. Leaving the springs of his action somewhat in a blur, the scene gives full emphasis to the behavior of the mourners. Blank verse lines of tough and austere fibre give off in effluence the pitiless mental squalor of this aristocracy-in-decay, with its bitter, ludicrous humor, its sudden sentimentalities, its muffled pathos. That this is the real business of the play is made clear in the double planes of reaction to the common tragedy. While the two mourning lovers of the dead man clash before his coffin, the older generation stages its own private carnival of hates variously pointing. The minister’s wife in the course of her condolence-visits sneers at the *châtelaine*: “And still you’re grand, playing the lady now in furnished rooms.” But the victim isn’t listening, she is struggling with the disgraces bubbling out of her own heated brain—

Reviewed by Nelson Algren in
AUGUST 20th NEW MASSES

Annunciation, by Meridel le Sueur
Edition limited to 500 numbered and signed copies, 50c
Platen Press, 646 Micheltorena St., Los Angeles

Lucky I,

To be in time for roses to array
The cold, and see how farmers dig a hole
When man’s the vegetable they’d like to grow . . .
. . . I need the air?—and how much would they
charge
To bring some air to me, these business men.

Scene Two shifts in locale, characters, verse-form and theatre-form. Originally published as *Monday: A Lame Minuet*, it has been frequently performed as an entity, which has provided some auditors opportunity for generous miscomprehension. Those who found it “folksy” have only their own miserable obtuseness to blame, for throughout the speech and action of the three tenant-housewives one merciless word beats a tom-tom: *Money*. So pitilessly are the three proletarian women harrassed by the need for skimping, so saturated are their lives by the poison of economic want that they run around in a giddy ballet of petty bickerings. Director Beliveau has intensified the ironies of the free verse anti-phonial by producing *Monday* as a combination dance-and-poem. By this handling the farcical antics and verses casually let drop double-and triple-edged words and phrases that slowly accumulate into a heap of accusations pointed at the human degradations of poverty.

From the forthright study of distorted characters, followed by the ballet spectacle of deformed lives, the action rises to an explicit indictment: the mass recitation “America, America,” familiar to left-wing audiences since it first appeared in THE NEW MASSES eighteen months ago. Following the restraint

of Scene One and the indirection of Scene Two, it takes on a kathartic power hitherto impossible. Nor does the juxtaposition against the other material entirely explain it. The three divisions of “America, America” themselves, acted realistically throughout, compact the elements and dam up the emotional pressure for a single terrific release in the finale. This thoughtful, controlled interpretation of “America, America” is of particular significance because it uncovers once and for all the hidden veins of irony which are present underneath many of the lines for example, the ironical uses of the jingle-jangle rimes themselves which when taken in dead earnest as the living speech of all the characters shrivel the whole.

It is hardly necessary to add that this Alfred Kreymborg program should be presented for enlarged audiences; but this reviewer hopes that before the curtain rises the onlookers will have read some kind of program notes. Not that there is anything mysterious or difficult about understanding these scenes; on the contrary, they are unequivocal if one listens to the lines with both ears. Program notes in this case would be an insurance against the sort of half-baked interpretations which Kreymborg’s work has frequently received at the hands of bourgeois critics, who have advertised as “whimsical” passages in his writing which are profoundly bitter, who have consistently performed a valiant job of mutilation. There should be no doubt that our audiences, a hundred times keener than any other theatre group, would respond to the vibrant living speech of the verse, understand the varied meanings of the tragi-comic ballet and take even more deeply to their hearts the mass recitation which has become by now a proletarian battle-cry.

STANLEY BURNshaw.

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