



CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL, CRITIC

By LOUIS HARAP

It is a sad commentary on the state of Marxist criticism and esthetics that the most profound historical materialist study on art in English has never been discussed in any American Marxist publication. *Illusion and Reality* was first published in 1937 in England, was later reissued here in a very small edition, and is now out of print. The author, Christopher Caudwell, a young English Marxist born in 1907, was killed fighting fascism in Spain in the same year that his book appeared. *Illusion and Reality* climaxed a versatile career as writer in both science and the arts, and is an original contribution because Caudwell has deeply assimilated underlying Marxist principles and extended them into poetry and art.

Illusion and Reality is based on anthropology, literature and the arts, philosophy, and abnormal psychology. Final judgment on the work would require collective examination and discussion by a group of specialists in these fields. This would, I believe, reveal deficiencies in the book. Caudwell's method is the hazardous one of generalizing and of characterizing broad trends. Inevitably the question arises of accuracy in application to all particulars. At the same time Caudwell's ideas cast brilliant light on the interpenetration of art and society. His insights, which are numerous and important, issue from a clear grasp of Marxism and are precipitated in an original mind. His style reflects the difficulties of grappling with tough problems, but seems unnecessarily abstract and involved at times.

Caudwell set out to uncover the sources of poetry. He shows that primitive poetry, which is "heightened speech" not yet separated out from music and dance, is an "economic" activity in that it functions to forward the realization of social needs. Since no classes exist in this period, poetry is a "common medium of collective wisdom" of the whole tribe and a "great switchboard of the instinctive energy of the tribe." Like all art, poetry is illusion, or the belief in the reality of something which does not then exist. The social

health of poetry, says Caudwell, depends on whether this collective expression is an anticipation of reality, like the harvest dance, or whether it is the expression of a class in decay and hence seeks to evade reality altogether. Caudwell applies these criteria to various types of society and periods in poetry with great subtlety and fruitfulness.

Mythology is generated in the classless society to answer the needs of the tribe as a whole. But in a class society mythology becomes the expression of the ruling class alone, and consequently the mythology "ossifies" into religion. Assent to this religion is forced upon the subject class. The agency of compulsion is faith, which is a sign that the mythology and art no longer express group collectivity. Caudwell makes

original use of anthropological concepts to develop these leading ideas.

"Modern art" dates from the fifteenth century, writes Caudwell, as one phase of the culture complex resting on the emerging bourgeois system of production. The character of modern poetry alters as the bourgeois system unfolds; changes in the latter are reflected by changes in poetry. Caudwell has selected English poetry to exemplify the modern period because he explains that capitalism has developed most evenly and in greatest detail in England, where the most varied realization of the possibilities for bourgeois poetry have appeared. He delineates the reflections in poetry of the three major phases of capitalism; accumulation, the industrial revolution and decline, and the sub-phases in each

American - Soviet Cultural Relations

IT WOULD be well if, in the other fields of international relations, a level as high as that in cultural relations were reached. In a period when the efforts of American reactionaries have been rewarded by a progressive political deterioration of American-Soviet relations, cultural relations between the two countries remain at a high level. Lillian Hellman's play, *The Little Foxes* is a hit on Soviet stages and Konstantine Simonov's *Days and Nights* is an American best seller. These are only the more spectacular evidences of a vigorously growing mutual interest. To this pleasant reality the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship is making acknowledgement in its current annual celebration of the anniversary of American-Soviet relations, by expanding its cultural sessions. These, for the first time, will include a panel on literature with Howard Fast, John Hersey, Mark Slonim, Alexander Kendrick and David Burliuk participating, Dr. Arthur Upham Pope presiding as chairman. Equally impressive are the theater and music panels with Margaret Webster, Cheryl Crawford, Harold Clurman, Norris Houghton, James Gow and John Martin participating in the first; and Aaron Copland, Elie Siegmeister, Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein and Olin Downes, with Serge Koussevitsky as honorary chairman, in the other. The sessions are being held at the New York Engineering Society on Sunday, November 18, from 2 to 5 P.M. At an evening session there will be scenes from new Soviet plays, the American premiere of two arias from Prokofieff's new opera, *War and Peace* and recitations of translations from Mayakovsky and Simonov and addresses by the Hon. Pavel Mikhailov, the Hon. Helen Gahagan Douglas, Edward S. Smith and Charles J. Child.

of them. The result is undoubtedly the most penetrating Marxist analysis of English literature.

IN MARLOWE and Shakespeare are expressed the exuberant, "intemperate" period of accumulation: Shakespeare's genius was so expansive that he "cloudily anticipates" the whole development of capitalism. Milton was "England's first openly revolutionary poet" and was revolutionary both in style and content. From the betrayal of the Great Revolution issues the cynicism of the Restoration. Not until late in the eighteenth century does the poet finally become the "bourgeoisified producer for the free market," which established the "cash-nexus" in art, as in all relations. The romantic revolt expresses the isolation of the poet from society which was brought on by the industrial revolution. This revolt takes different forms in Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats. As capitalism declined, the separation becomes so complete that the poets finally remain the only audience for poetry. This tendency moves from art for art's sake to its ultimate expression in surrealism, in which the poet is essentially writing for himself alone, since his language is purely personal. Throughout the bourgeois development, as reflected in poetry, Caudwell exhibits the vicissitudes of freedom, "the consciousness of necessity."

The analysis of illusion's relation to reality in poetry acquired a powerful tool in the psychology stemming from Freud, and Caudwell uses this tool critically in searching for the sources of poetry. His extended discussion of this question constitutes also a weighty Marxist criticism of Freudian psychology. The fundamental distinction between science and art is also drawn in this discussion. Caudwell's final conclusion is that, while art changes man in order to change society, science changes outer reality in order to change man, and the two processes interpenetrate.

In the course of his discussion of the future of poetry, Caudwell analyzes some of the important writers of the day in which he wrote. "All *sincere* bourgeois art," he says, is "decomposing and whirling about in a flux of perplexed agony."

The way out of this agony is not in opposition to or even in mere alliance with the proletariat, but demands an "assimilation" of the proletarian attitude. At the hour during which Caudwell wrote, Gide, Auden, Spender and Lewis had accepted the proletarian movement, but were only in

alliance with it. Their subsequent desertion of that movement can be explained by Caudwell's analysis of their relation to it. They mistakenly thought that they should accept "proletarian dictatorship in art," whereas the proletariat "demand that you, an artist, become a proletarian leader in the field . . . refashioning the categories and techniques of art so that it expresses the new world coming into being and is part of its realization." Instead, these writers tried, says Caudwell, to revise revolutionary ideals in the direction of petty bourgeois ideals. Their defection is thus not hard to explain.

Without minimizing the importance of Caudwell's work, serious limitations must be pointed out. Unfortunately Caudwell uses the concept of "instinct" as fundamental to his argument, and he

nowhere clarifies his sense of the term, which has been rejected by American psychology as misleading and confusing, when not entirely wrong. The fact that English theoretical psychology lags behind ours may account for his use of that concept, and of the idea of the similarly unclear "genotype." He refers to the genotype as "the individual, the instinctive man as he was born." On the same page he says that the "genotype is never found 'in the raw.' Always it is found as a man of definite concrete civilization with definite opinions, material surroundings and education." These two statements cannot stand for the same thing.

Although Caudwell's book must be read critically, it must be read, and assimilated into the body of Marxist criticism and esthetics.

ON THE "CHRISTIAN FRONT"

FOCUS, by Arthur Miller. Reynal & Hitchcock. \$2.50.

IT WILL be the purpose of this piece to review a new novel by Arthur Miller called *Focus*—a novel filled with great dignity, a novel which is a controlled but angry indictment of one of the worst cancers in our body politic and social, a novel in which its author—in his first try at the form—has excitingly demonstrated how well the form can and should be used. But before I get down to such a review, I should like your permission to wander, for a moment. My eye, I hope, will remain on the ball.

I want to ask all of you who happened to notice the full-page advertisements of the Doubleday One Dollar Book Club, in the Sunday book review supplements of the New York *Times* and *Herald Tribune*, these last few Sundays, to raise your hands, please. I'm talking about the ads which revealed, among other things, an enchanting young lady sitting naked, up to her bosom, in a pool of water. Remember? They advertized, reading from left to right, recent novels by Mr. Ben Ames Williams, and the Misses Gwethalyn Graham, Adria Locke Langley, and Daphne DuMaurier. In these ads, there appeared, every now and then, such coquettish questions as: "Was she saint or demon? Ask the men in her life—her father, her husbands, her sons, her lovers"; readers (and prospective buyers) were titillated by such come-ons as: "Rough, handsome, and ambitious, he

set her modestly afire." With no disrespect intended to the four writers mentioned above, it must be set down that their books are being peddled on the basis of a genteel prurience.

Now then: How many of you, when your glazed eye slid over this full-page advertisement, experienced, as I did, a sweetish, sickish, sticky, thickish taste in the mouth? It's unanimous? Thank you. I assume that like me you do not wish to deprecate any writer's ability to make a quick buck; I assume that like me you find it discouraging in the extreme to note that the nipple on the breast and the eye in the keyhole and the perfumed moment of extra-marital passion are the *sine qua nons* of successful novels today.

There can be no question that the novel deserves better than this.

The news today is that an American writer has turned to the form of the novel and has proved again—just when it was beginning to seem that it would have to be proved—that an important, contemporaneous theme can be seriously and successfully tackled in such a way that the reader learns, is agitated, convinced, and fired. Mr. Miller's novel *Focus* deserves to shoot to the top of whatever list of best-sellers there is contrived, and deserves to stay there until every thinking American citizen has had Mr. Miller's idea moved into his brain. *Focus* is a study of bigotry; specifically, of anti-Semitism. It is a study of a soul in torment: the soul of an anti-Semite who finds that he has perforce played