

Punish Unlawful Interference with Employers and Employees," has a familiar enough ring today. It was met by a storm of protest throughout the state, with demonstrations in every major center. The response was summarized by a leather-lunged worker at one rally when he shouted: "We shall send them to hell next election." The legislators, convinced that the workers would indeed send them to hell, retreated and killed the bill.

NOTHING is more inspiring to read than the role played by the American workers in the struggles of the nation for its freedom, first from the British, later from the slave-owners. It is a special contribution of Foner's that he does not separate the history of labor from that of the nation as a whole. He does not push labor into a corner and divorce its struggles from those of the nation. Instead he demonstrates that the workers and their movement have been at all times an integral part of every major struggle. Starting with the artisans and mechanics who made up the great body of the Sons of Liberty at the time of the American Revolution, he traces the contributions of the "Patriotic Diggers" who built fortifications on Brooklyn Heights in the War of 1812, of the men and women workers who backed Jefferson against the Federalist reactionaries, of the working men who supported Jackson against Biddle and his bank. Of particular interest is Foner's picture of the relations of the free white workers and the Negro slaves. While some white workers were duped by fears aroused by the slave-owners, the workers saw generally that an end to slavery was essential to the well-being of workers everywhere. It was particularly the Marxists who were clearest and most vehement in their opposition to slavery.

Foner's material on the growth and development of the unions after the Civil War shows most forcefully that the interests of the nation and of the labor movement are inseparable. The titanic struggles of the 1870's between a growing, powerful capitalism and a working class which was reaching out for unity with workers throughout the world, testing political strength and mobilizing its forces, show that from that time on every advance for the workers was an advance for the nation. The great obstacle for the whole people had become capitalism itself.

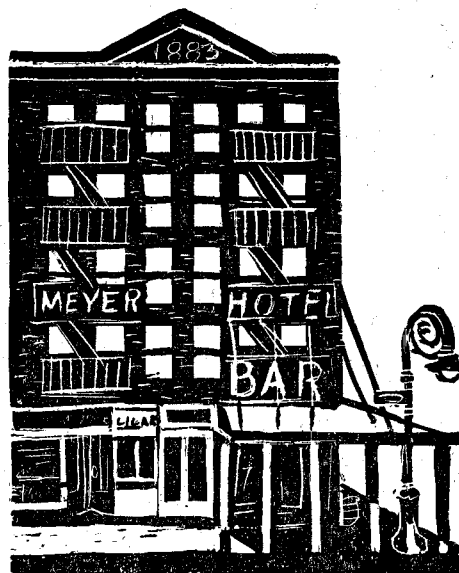
While Foner presents as fully as

his space allows the contributions of important individual leaders such as Evans, Luther, Sylvis, Weydemeyer, Kate Mulaney, Meyers and many others, one of the most gratifying aspects of the book is the sense of the role of the workers as a class, of the thousands of men and women whose energies and sacrifice slowly and painfully built the labor movement. There was Elizabeth Haggerty, who in the fight for the ten-hour day in 1848 was arrested and sent to jail for fighting scabs: "We went to get the girls out; we went to get them out the best we could." Or Carroll, a member of the Mollie Maguires, who was hanged through the false testimony of the finger-man McParlan. Or the slave who sought to become a free worker and "swam every river from Tuscaloosa (Ala.) to Pennsylvania." Or the miners, defeated in their strike of 1875, who sang their bitter song:

*Well, we've been beaten, beaten all
to smash,
And now, sir, we've begun to feel
the lash. . . .*

If there is any weakness in the book, it lies not in the material itself but in its not containing sections directed explicitly at the errors and misinterpretations of Commons and others. While the material is strong enough to stand by itself, the polemical nature of the preface gives the impression that what is going to be presented will incorporate argued refutation of previous writings.

Not the least of the book's value lies in its numerous quotations, poems, songs and newspaper comments, which give the reader a sense of having been



part of the past struggles of labor. Foner's style is simple and clear. His book should be read by everyone who lays claim to understanding our past and the American labor movement.

Statesman & Poet

RESIDENCE ON EARTH, by Pablo Neruda.
Translated by Angel Flores. New Directions.
\$3.50.

PABLO NERUDA, who was born Nephtali Ricardo Reyes just after the turn of the century at Parral, in Chile, has been a power in the literature of South America and of the world since the publication of what Jorge Carrera Andrade calls "his great book," *Residencia en la Tierra*, from which the present collection takes its title. Nevertheless, it was not until the late war magnified interest in South America that translations of Neruda's work began to appear. During the past several years, four collections of his poems have been translated and published, the present volume being the most ambitious undertaking.

Neruda began writing poetry very young; he won a national prize at the age of sixteen. While in college—where, it is reported, he was a desultory student—he continued to write, and he carried the practice into the diplomatic career which he soon entered and which kept him in the Far East for a number of years.

Probably the most important period in Neruda's life, so far as his writing is concerned, at least, was that in which he held a diplomatic post in Republican Spain. He later resigned the post, in opposition to the policies of the conservative Chilean president of the time, but the experiences of the Spanish struggle opened up new areas to his verse. Like many poets of South America and Spain, Neruda had been strongly influenced by surrealism. The new poems, written out of the period in Spain, broadened his communication while at the same time taking over much of the exciting verbalism, the shocking imagery, of his earlier work.

Neruda's political development apparently continued in the direction it had taken in Spain. Stalingrad, during World War II, assumed for him the same emotional-political significance as Madrid had earlier. It was during the war that Neruda formally became a Communist. He is at present a Chilean senator, and was recently awarded Chile's National Prize. All in all, Neruda is a remarkable combination of

man of action and poet, a type no longer common in the literary world. More remarkable still is his poetry.

Residence on Earth brings together a sizable number of poems written between 1925 and the present. Students of Neruda may raise objections on the basis of specific omissions, but for the general reader the poems, culled from several books ranging from the early *Residencia* to the work-in-progress, the *General Song of Chile*, are a big enough collection to give the feel of the whole body of Neruda's work. For most readers his best known poems are probably those from *Spain in the Heart*, a group written during the Spanish Civil War, the finest of which is perhaps "The International Brigade Arrives at Madrid":

*The morning of a cold month,
of an agonizing month, soiled by
mud and by smoke,
a month without knees, a sad
month of siege and misfortune,
when across the wet window-
panes of my house the African
jackals were heard
howling with their rifles and
their teeth full of blood, then,
—I saw with these eyes that I
have, with this heart that sees,
I saw the arrival of the staunch
ones, the towering soldiers
of the thin and hard and ripe and
ardent brigade of stone.*

This poem may be taken as one of the poles of the method used as well as of the experience dramatized in this book. Clustered around it, or arrayed along the lines of force, are the other poems on Spain, the Stalingrad poems, the "Brief Oratorio at the Death of Silvestre Revueltas." Many of these poems are definitely political, and in any case they are dominated by ideas to a greater extent than are the others. The method here is simple and direct, the structure of these poems being grounded in statement rather than symbol. The danger in this method, which is that the statement becomes abstract and finally tyrannizes over the poem, reducing it to sentimentality or hysterical vulgarity, is avoided by what seems even in translation a sure control of tone and by a steady translation of public ideas into personal experience.

The section quoted may be taken as a case in point. To some readers "month without knees" may seem a little unlikely, at best. As an example

of the pathetic fallacy it is a large part of the surrealist's stock-in-trade, and while Neruda is by no means a pure surrealist (and therefore probably not a surrealist at all) this kind of metaphor is the norm in his verse and most of the poems are built up out of similar irrational figures. But here the metaphor has an easily referable context and works perfectly. I take it to mean three things. In the first place it suggests the figure of a cripple, an amputee; and in a sense the time, and Spain, were crippled, "cut off at the knee" in that period. To be without knees is to be, in a figurative sense, incapable of prayer, a condition which the poem suggests more fully as it develops: "for hope we had only a dream of gunpowder." Finally I think there may be here an oblique reference to the slogan of Pasionaria, and if this is the case we have a certain amount of conflict between the attitudes at the second and third levels. Even if we were to discard these readings, the metaphor would still work in that it would help to establish the general tone which Neruda is trying to create and to round out the "situation," which helps to dramatize his experience. This kind of metaphor occurs with the greatest frequency in the earlier poems, poems which represent the other pole of Neruda's work. While it would be wrong to speak of them as surrealist in conception, the problems they present are similar to those posed by surrealist poems. They might seem on first consideration to be "all on the surface," without any real structure or development, as if they had been written for the value of the language alone, like sophisticated versions of children's playthings:

*The pigeon is filled with fallen
papers,
its breast is stained by rubbers
and weeks,
by blotters more white than a
cadaver
and inks afraid of its sinister
color.*

Since in this poem Neruda is dealing with a favorite theme, at its broadest that of the brutalizing affect of the contemporary world, we may take the pigeon as a symbol of natural goodness but it will not help us much toward breaking down the passage. This tendency to resist paraphrase is a quality of a good poem, but sometimes the resistance is not due to com-

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plexity but to imprecision, inadequate structural organization or an ordering of images wherein logical or emotional connectives are not supplied. The latter is one of the sources of the private quality of surrealist verse and it weakens some of the poems here. Neruda, aside from the shock quality of his images, is working close to the French symbolist tradition, and the attempt to communicate tenuous emotional states through this kind of irrational imagery sometimes breaks down. Generally though, as with Lorca, in spite of the daring and frequently irrelevant imagery, the poems come through with clarity and power. When they fail, they can still be read for the delight in language alone.

There are other poems, notably the ode to Lorca, "Hymn and Return," and "A Song for Bolivar," which work toward a synthesis of the two polar tendencies. These poems unite the electric quality of imagery with explicit and valuable themes and add structural qualities through the use of symbols. I think they are the finest poems in what is one of the most important books to be published in some time.

THOMAS McGRATH.

Technicolor Lava

UNDER THE VOLCANO, by Malcolm Lowry.
Reynal & Hitchcock. \$3.

SINCE I can't see anything in *Under the Volcano* other than an ill-conceived and badly-written novel, it is only fair to tell you that Mr. Alfred Kazin thinks it "belongs with the most original and creative novels of our time" and Mr. Stephen Spender says it is the most interesting novel he has read "since Lawrence and Joyce." The only explanation I can find for such misjudgments is that some literati, while capable of spotting bad writing on a wood-pulp level, are suckers for bad writing that models itself upon Proust and Joyce.

It is "modern" writing in the sense that people didn't write like this in the past century, but it is an academic modernism, for one can be as academic in following Joyce as in following Longfellow. Joyce and Proust wrote of a wealth of human beings and a sweep of social history. Their styles were fashioned to probe the new areas of experience, inner and outer, which their stories called up. Lowry has a headful of stylistic tricks, but the shining quality of Joyce and Proust—origi-

inality—is precisely what he lacks. I can think of no phrase, image, though or characterization in this book that conveys a fresh perception of life. Its general tone, in fact, is of experiences and people taken from literature rather than from life. His play with language seems to come out of a need to give his work a complexity, through its style, which it lacks in its content or people. He constantly telescopes time, writing of today, tomorrow, yesterday and a year ago in one sentence. There is never a straight passage of conversation. Conversations are two at once, like a badly-tuned radio, or else with each remark and ejaculation separated from the next by a scenic description full of symbols. Stream of consciousness is the favorite narrative method, but with a bewildering montage resembling no possible consciousness, and never attaining the sensitivity of word it has in the hands of an artist. Every noun is surrounded by adjectives, invariably violent. Things are not blue but cobalt, not red but mercurchrome, always burning, twisting, exploding, crashing, full of portents of doom. Even the Mexican setting seems to have no other purpose than to provide a garish scenic backdrop, and to enable the author to increase the turgidity of his style with handfuls of Spanish. The Mexican people are described with the attitude of a slumming tourist.

The story itself, but for its end, could have taken place on a Somerset Maugham South Sea Island. It deals with an Englishman drinking himself to death, while beating off the efforts of his beautiful ex-wife and idealistic half-brother to save him. The end comprises a thunderstorm, shots in the dark, mutterings about a fascist underground, and a body tossed into a ravine. There are also throughout sad, knowing, nostalgic and invariably unilluminating references to Mozart, the Ebro, Christ, the Rig Veda, Marx, Juarez, Maximilian and Carlotta. The author seems to feel that simply by mentioning such names frequently enough his book will take on an intellectual tone, just as he seems to think that by repeating an image throughout the book—a ferris wheel, a corpse, a flock of butterflies—it will magically take on a symbolic character, though it is unrelated to the story. It is often the case in contemporary art that difficulties in finding meaning are due to the fact that there is no meaning to be found, and so such vacancy this book is a prominent example. In fact, its quality of re-