

which were subsequently compelled by Mr. MacDuffie's tenacious insistence.

Equally objectionable is the spirit in which Fischer writes. He deliberately trades on the ignorance of the reader. For example, he describes a girl named Maria who lives in the Ukraine under conditions of undeniable hardship, and comments, "In the last twenty years she has been taught a good deal about 'Soviet Culture,' which mostly means hygiene." So much for creative accomplishments in music, drama and literature that are outstanding in the contemporary world. New Yorkers had an opportunity last September, before the Department of Justice delivered its ukase, to hear Zoya Haidai and Ivan Patorzhinski of the Kiev State Opera in excerpts from Ukrainian operas written during the war and performed by the company in Siberia, where the singers were stationed. The picture of the individual, Maria, may be accurate; the inference involves a grave distortion of fact, as every New York music critic will bear witness. Russians would be less than human if they did not resent this kind of distortion, and it is a shocking commentary on the integrity of the editors of *Reader's Digest*, the Book-of-the-Month Club, a commentator like Raymond Gram Swing and a scholar such as Foster Rhea Dulles, that they will commend a book of this character as intelligent and accurate.

The difficulties involved in getting good books on the Soviet Union published in America are very great. Elliott Roosevelt learned this when his *Look* magazine articles, other than his Stalin interview, were suppressed outright, though the same magazine had sent him to Russia as a correspondent and itself assigned the subjects he was to investigate. That he came back impressed by what he saw, and told the facts, made his articles unprintable. Edgar Snow has obviously written his *Saturday Evening Post* articles, which form his book, with this censorship problem in mind. There was considerable division among the editors as to publication even at that, and ultimately the pieces were released with a long and detailed apology. It is a fair inference that Snow was given permission to incorporate them in this little book on the condition that they be prefaced by an introductory chapter written by the foreign editor of the *Post*, Martin Sommers. By quoting Kravchenko for his conclusions and emphasizing the possibilities of war, Sommers gives a cast to the rest of the

book which is unfair to its content but will help to neutralize its recommendations for many readers. Such is the current state of affairs that perhaps we should be grateful that the *Post* printed the articles at all, and consented to the publication of the book.

Snow undertakes to analyze Soviet policy in the light of the long history of intervention and encirclement, war-time losses, acute postwar dislocation and foreign drum-beating. With satire often biting, he shows how Western moves appear to the Russians, and points up their exasperation when they are accused of acts which others here are nakedly perpetrating. There is a useful attempt in all this to relate the differences of thinking and attitude which are part of the problem of understanding and cooperation. In doing this I wish that Snow could have provided his readers with some standard by which to determine the truth or the falsehood of the charges and countercharges which he describes. While his irony may explode a few myths, it may also reinforce for the ignorant a number of negative impressions.

In fact, both these books stress an old myth about the Soviet Union—its so-called "weakness." They seek to prove that for this reason it must be peace-minded. They do not note that peace is indigenous to the whole Soviet way of life. Unfortunately, the "weakness" myth provides a measure of argument to war-makers here who believe that *now* is the time to capitalize on that "weakness." It is not irrelevant for someone at this point to remind the war-makers what Hitler discovered when he took the "weakness" myth seriously. We do not want to make any such mistake. The way back from the Truman Doctrine to the Roosevelt orientation is going to be long and hard, but it must be found.

WILLIAM H. MELISH.

Realist Into Tory

THE SHOWMAN OF VANITY FAIR, by Lionel Stevenson. Scribner's. \$5.

THIS life of Thackeray is saturated with fact and document, yet written in sprightly and interesting style. A believable portrait of the writer emerges, and a description of the literary profession, or business, as it was practiced in the earlier days of Victoria's reign. Stevenson writes frankly of Thackeray's unhappy private life. He also describes the change that took



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place in the literary world, with the writer looking upon himself not as a prophet before an audience but a producer of acceptable goods for a market.

But such facts are not enough to explain this misshapen genius, who was at the same time a penetrating realist and a most compromising Victorian Tory apologist. Insights into truth and the fear of truth lie side by side in his novels, after the great achievement of *Vanity Fair*. Thackeray's failure to grow as an artist is directly due to his failure, like that of so many young liberals of the nineteenth century, to meet the challenge of 1848. After the mid-century it was no longer possible to preserve a sincere liberalism yet remain acceptable to the upper classes of English society. A man had to choose sides. Thackeray chose. Still calling himself a "Whig," like so many Whigs of the time he had only some vague humanitarian reservations to pure Toryism. He approved of slavery in America, approved of Louis Napoleon in France, would have no part of the English labor movement, became the most prudish of censoring editors. His powerful literary weapon, the exposure of "humbug," became blunted. He was a good part humbug himself, and his knowledge of this compromise made him as unhappy as his love for another man's wife. Stevenson accepts Thackeray's "liberalism" with a political innocence hardly believable in these times. He has brought together a number of facts, however, of value to any student of Thackeray, and has had the happy thought of including a liberal selection of the novelist's drawings. Not proficient or studied enough to be art of importance, they nevertheless have life and sparkle, something of the keen perception of human personality that the novels developed to a degree unequalled by almost any other English writer of the century.

S. FINKELSTEIN.

Dreamdust

FIELDS OF WONDER, by Langston Hughes.
Knopf. \$2.50.

EVER since poetry began, the plain, the solid, the monosyllabic (Keats: "And no birds sing"), the direct and everyday (Shakespeare's: "Pray you, undo this button"), the momentous because the common (Wordsworth's: "And never lifted up a single stone") have been the stuff that poetry is made

of. Langston Hughes follows this tradition.

In "Juliet," for example, the simple conventional words alone produce the starkness of the situation:

*There are wonder
And pain
And terror,
And sick silly songs
Of sorrow,
And the marrow
Of the bone
Of life
Smeared across
Her mouth.*

*The road
From Verona
To Mantova
Is dusty
With the drought.*

In "Trumpet Player: 52nd Street," which *Mainstream* has published, the poet has employed simple words still but has added to them the fierceness of the unconventional image without distortion of language. There is no ambidextrous word play in both poems cited. Realism is present, and the greater suggestiveness inherent in simplicity projects the meaning.

The suggestiveness of the direct symbol is also used by the poet with good effect, as the use of the symbol of the Red Star in the poem "When the Armies Passed."

However, side by side with a poem of this order are poems reminiscent of the Romantic era. Too often the poet's fields of wonder are only the silver rain, the moonlight night, the snake (pretty much as D. H. Lawrence saw him), dream-dust, snails, rainbows, trees, and the "half-shy young moon/ Veiling her face like a virgin/ Waiting for a lover." Stars and sun and moon, not felt with the passion that Hughes has for the social outrages of our time, can only produce the curious self-indulgence of "A House in Taos," in which "three smitten by beauty" fear the "windlessness" of their Taos home. When Hughes leaves the Taos atmosphere and with no romantic backwash reminds us that

*Walls have been known
To fall,
Dusk turn to dawn
And chains be gone!*

we are reassured that the poet's deep sense of reality will lead him to more passionate fields of wonder.

HARRIET HAMBARIN.