

from unknown lips it blows at me
—the great chill comes.

My sun stood hot over me at noon—
be welcome that you come,
you sudden winds,
you chilly spirits of afternoon!

The air moves strange and pure.
Does not with warped
seductive eyes
night leer at me?
Stay strong, courageous heart!
Do not ask: why?

—Kurt F. Reinhardt

Young Man in Chains. By François Mauriac. Translated by Gerard Hopkins. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 124 pp. \$3.75.

THIS ENGLISH translation of the great French writer's first novel, written between 1909 and 1912, completes the English edition of Mauriac's narrative works, begun shortly after the liberation of France by Gerard Hopkins. Mauriac's novelistic *oeuvre* spans more than half a century. *Young Man in Chains* (*L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*) though lacking the spiritual depth of some of the author's more mature works, such as *A Woman of the Pharisees*, *Thérèse*, and especially the masterful psychological character portrayals of *Vipers' Tangle*—is nonetheless a genuine documentation of Mauriac's genius as a novelist.

Generally speaking, Mauriac has never claimed to be either a theologian or a philosopher. Each of his novels expresses a view of life and reality distinctly his own, born of unmistakable personal experience; and each of them accentuates one specific facet of his total *Weltanschauung* as well as a highly personalist reaction to some unique existential situation. Perhaps the one all-pervasive theme, providing a sort of *leitmotif*, is the experience of loneliness with its concomitant mood of profound melancholy.

When seen in historical perspective, Mauriac's novelistic *oeuvre* is marked by a decisive conquest of certain aspects of reality which by and large had remained *terra incognita* to the traditional and conventional Catholic novel, aspects and dimensions which were fractionally embodied in the works of Zola, Flaubert, Stendhal, Gide, and Proust, wholly incarnate perhaps only in the religious experience of Pascal, with whose thinking Mauriac was already thoroughly familiar during the formative years he spent at the *lycée*. What was missing, however, in the works of the French naturalists and symbolists alike was the dimension of *the eternal*.

Notwithstanding the fact that Mauriac realized and emphasized the vital significance of the massive influences of environment and heredity, he was convinced

that what was needed to counteract and counterbalance these determining factors was *une sur-naturalisme* which alone could eventually break down the prison walls erected by biological and social determinants and could thus aid the individual in his struggle for self-determination, liberation, and salvation. In other words, Mauriac fought his way through to the clear visualisation of the nature of *grace*: only divine grace could resolve the otherwise hopeless entanglement of man in the thickets of depravity and perversion. And Mauriac came to regard it as the appointed task of the Christian writer to unveil the divine image in sinful man—a task which could be fulfilled only if the writer refrained from sentimental idealization and adhered to the strictest kind of natural-supernatural “realism.”

“The giving of one's self,” Mauriac wrote in an essay dealing with the art form of the novel, “the taste of purity and perfection, the hunger and thirst for justice, these too are part of the patrimony of man; and we novelists must bear witness to it. . . . We must dedicate ourselves to the discovery of the inner life, and we are not permitted to hide any of our discoveries.” Mauriac has stated furthermore that the true cornerstone of his work is “the physical presence of grace.” The simple and profound meaning of this phrase is—in the words of Bernanos and Graham Greene—that “grace is everywhere,” regardless of whether the individual human being chooses to acknowledge or to ignore this omnipresence.

As is the case with several of Mauriac's novels, *Young Man in Chains* is in part autobiographical. Like the young Mauriac, Jean-Paul Johanet, the protagonist of the novel, is alone with himself as a student in Paris, feasting intellectually on the exultation deriving from his indulgence in the literary masterpieces of the *fin de siècle* (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, etc.). This is the kind of life of which Mauriac speaks in his *Mémoires Intérieurs* (1960): “All that I write today had its beginnings fifty years ago in that little club room of the Bordeaux *Sillon*. . . . I was filled with intellectual pride, as a young man so often is who has led an isolated existence in a remote countryside.”

Jean-Paul is one of the idle “rich” whom nothing and nobody compels to look for a gainful occupation. Yet Jean-Paul is profoundly nauseated by an acute sense of personal failure and uselessness. The scenes which he encounters on his annual expensive travels are “powerless to console him” or to mitigate the painful experience of being and remaining an “outsider”: “All cities look alike,” and “the little world which I carry within myself never changes.” Jean-Paul's relationship to his fellow-students is decidedly a-social and non-existential, although he enjoys watching them live their lives, giving them advice, even acting as their director: “He turned their feet from the primrose path by telling them of his own struggles of conscience . . . and of the orgies in

which he had participated before his conversion. . . . In this circle of young Catholics, Jean-Paul turned theologian. He spiced his talk with a grain of modernism," and his familiarity with Kantian philosophy "allowed him to demonstrate that St. Thomas Aquinas was no longer enough. He spoke with irony of the Encyclical *Pascendi* . . . and declared that the time had come to revert to the great mystical tradition."

Jean-Paul's chance meeting with Vincent Hiéron, a former schoolmate, leads to a temporary affiliation with the members of *Amour et Foi*, a religious-social movement that is trying to foster the idea of "Christian democracy" and that is fanned by the fanatical zeal of Jérôme Servat, its "leader." Here again the autobiographical element of the novel is fairly transparent: the reference points to the short-lived *Sillon* movement which was founded in 1893 by Marc Sangnier, to bring about a solution of the crucial "social question," in line with "Christian-democratic" principles, but which died an untimely death after its condemnation by the Church (1910) because of its pronounced "liberalistic" tendencies.

Aside from such occasional references to historical events and constellations and frequent personal-introspective meditations of tortuous complexity, the plot of the novel is of almost lapidary simplicity. What there is of a "love-story" concerns the relationship of Jean-Paul, the sophisticated "amateur of souls," to Marthe Balzon, his cousin. Her love for Jean-Paul is an unquestioning self-giving which in its pristine purity makes it an unfailing medium of existential communication. Despite the physical frailty of the earthly vessel, this kind of love is capable of building bridges from soul to soul. It is a love as yet untainted by the gloom of the later Mauriac who, in referring to Pascal's relationship to his sister Jacqueline, could say: "In brotherly love, as in any other kind of love, the one wounds, and the other is wounded." In Mauriac's first novel, this ordinary and therefore all the more luminous love is capable of breaking the "chains"—forged by heredity, environment, education, and temperament—of Jean-Paul, the "young man" with his sad "pleasures" and his melancholy ecstasies.

—Kurt F. Reinhardt

Against The American Grain: Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture. By Dwight Macdonald. New York: Random House. 427 pp. \$6.50.

DWIGHT MACDONALD is surely right to deprecate the "automatic friendliness" of many reviewers toward books which "deal with some big central issue," "take [themselves] very seriously," and "have the air of boldly stating some positive solution." Since that is the sort of book that he has produced himself, it will there-

fore be best to note at the outset that much of what he says about the cultural situation in America today is important and true, and then get on to the reasons why the book he says it in is unimportant and sometimes false.

It is a collection of articles and reviews in which he has been making certain points for some years now, and this fact causes some of the trouble. There is more here than a consistent point of view; there is a limited set of points made over and over. Judicious cutting might have made for the sustained development of an argument, but there has apparently been none at all. The same generalizations are often attached to the same illustrations, so that, since the book takes no notice of the repetitions, the reader can sometimes suspect that he has lost his place. Macdonald presumably believes that what he has to say is important, but he has not made his book say it concisely. Off hand, I would say that it is twice as long as it need have been.

This lack of rewriting may partly explain why the long first essay, which defines the general theme, isn't more effective. The first version of it was published in 1944, though another appeared in 1953 and there may have been further changes. Since those years there has been much discussion of its subject, and now, at least, it makes stale reading. Macdonald is at pains to describe "Midcult," a stratum which lies between "Masscult" (defined at length as Hollywood, television, popular fiction and so forth) and "High Culture" (no more clearly defined than usual, but involving thought and art which is truly serious and original). Midcult is really produced by formula, based on standards of popularity rather than of merit, and it really panders to its audience rather than challenging it, but it pretends to be High Culture, thus blurring standards and causing general confusion. I'm not sure whether in 1944 such a cultural geology could properly be offered as a thesis rather than an assumption, but announcing it today is like wondering if anyone has noticed that there's a lot of violence on television.

No reader, though, will be convinced that this familiarity is entirely the result of Macdonald's failure to revise. Throughout the book he displays what he calls "considerable tolerance for the obvious" when he discovers it in the "How-To" books:

We are an active, ingenious, pragmatic race, concerned with production rather than enjoyment, with practicality rather than contemplation, with efficiency rather than understanding, and with information rather than wisdom.

Acceptance can be worse for a writer than rejection. There is, indeed, something alarming in the craving of contemporary Americans for reassuring, soothing messages.

The consensus was that [The Outsider] is important because of what it says, apart from how it says it. I