

## Heine, the Doppelgänger

THAT MAN HEINE. By LEWIS BROWNE (in collaboration with Elsa Wiehl). The Macmillan Company. 1927.

Reviewed by LOUIS UNTERMEYER

MR. LEWIS BROWNE, ably seconded by the researches of Elsa Wiehl, must be congratulated upon presenting to an English-reading audience a most interesting life of Heinrich Heine. Unfortunately, it is not *the* life of Heine. Errors in proportion and a certain casual (even slapdash) method of appraisal keep it from attaining the detachment, the deliberate refusal to simplify the man and his motives which is the quality of such biographies as Karpeles's and Wolff's. Mr. Browne has made his résumé not only easy but exciting to read. Yet, in his desire to speed up or enliven his narrative, he is guilty of lowering its tone. There are occasional hints of the "wise-cracking" which marred, to some at least, Dr. Durant's "The Story of Philosophy." Speaking of Heine's father, Mr. Browne writes: "He forgot the inviting actresses . . . slept dutifully at home—and in course of time became the father of four children." One waits for the vaudeville titter.

More serious is the very essence of the biographer's motive. Mr. Browne, too often, is a man with a thesis and, in order to give unity to sometimes disintegrated facts, he makes use of a leading theme. In "This Believing World" Mr. Browne simplified the varied and frequently contradictory aspects of comparative religion by underlining a theory that the base of all worship and exaltation is *fear*. Mr. Browne used this "fear motif" as regularly as the refrain of a ballad. In "That Man Heine" the mechanism is retained, taking the form "he did not belong." This dominating phrase occurs with a punctuality that would be convincing were it not quite so simple.

For, though it is true that much of Heine's unhappiness came from an inability to adjust his unstable self to a fluctuating environment, it was not that which characterizes and sets him apart from the poets. The lists are crowded with artists who "did not belong." Heine's central "difference" is no more to be ascertained by the peregrinations of his body, the shifting of places and professions, the exile in France, than Villon's or Keats'. The secret of the paradox lies in his attitude to his work; it can be found defensively in his poetry, offensively in his prose. The man who was a hack, a black-mailer, a braggart, a *schmorrer*, a cad, a *boulevardier*, a hitter-below-the-belt, and one of the three greatest lyricists who ever lived, can be explained only in his own terms. And such an explanation is forthcoming only after a detailed intimacy with *all* his kaleidoscopic writing. Even so lively a summary of it as Mr. Browne's fails to give although it suggests) the play of sentiment and scorn, the continual clash of sensitive pity and coarse humor, the incredible combination of ecstasy, impudence, grace, crudity, pathos, and spleen which was the flickering, self-tortured spirit of Heine. There was a dichotomy in the poet apparent to his earliest biographers, in fact to every one except the woman he lived with more than twenty years. His physical life, with its exaggerations of promiscuity, possessiveness, and arrogance, moved in the limbo of a fictional romanticism; it was only in his writing that he projected himself into reality.

Here was a man whose "Buch der Liebe" became a lover's text-book and to whom love was a poison; a man whom it was dangerous to have for an enemy and (as in the shameful episode of Ludwig Börne) ten times more perilous to have for a friend, a man who, time and again, would sell his birthright for sensation and his tender idealism for a cruel epigram. And, nevertheless, a man of such personal charm that the insulted and the injured capitulated to his mere presence. Clearly such an emanation cannot be disposed of as an escapist's fear or (as Mr. Browne implies when he reaches the "mattress grave" period that marked the eight years' slow death) that Heine was the battleground in which Mephisto was finally routed by the Nazarene. It is too pat, too smooth a cadence. Thus the death-scene: "His exile was ended, he was at home at last—he belonged." No; Heine who suffered much without complaint, would scarcely forgive that!

For all this reviewer's dislike of Mr. Browne's misleading *leit motif*, his story *qua* story fascinates. It moves with a minimum of creaking; the facts

are established without burying the reader in dust; the chief *dramatis personae* enter and exit with a novelist's dispatch. And the tale is salted with enough badinage to keep the lightest commuter amused. Many of Heine's keenest epigrams are here and, among the most famous sallies, are several which, though rarely quoted, rank among his best. "I have become a regular Christian," he informed his friend Moser, "I dine in the homes of rich Jews!" When he was near his end, so ill that his diet was restricted to greens (which led him to speak of himself as Nebuchadnezzar the Second) a friend asked, "Are you really incurable?" "No," Heine replied, "I shall die some day." His sojourn in London brought forth what must be counted his most playful and yet most self-revealing witticism:

An Englishman loves liberty as he loves his lawfully wedded wife: he regards her as a possession, and though he may not treat her with especial tenderness, he knows how to defend her if need be. A Frenchman loves liberty as he does his beloved bride: he will commit a thousand follies for her sake. But a German loves liberty as he does his old grandmother. . . . Yet one can never tell how things may turn out in the end. The grumpy Englishman, in an ill temper with his wife, is capable of some day putting a rope around her neck. The fickle Frenchman may become unfaithful to his adored one, and be seen fluttering about in the Palais Royal in pursuit of another. But the German will never quite abandon his old grandmother. He will always keep a nook by the chimney-corner for her, where she can tell fairy-tales to the listening children.

As a whole, the documentation is excellent. There are minor inaccuracies. *Schmerzen* is spelled *Schmerzzen* throughout. Among the composers who have put Heine's poems to music, Mr. Browne mentions Wagner who, unless Mr. Browne knows of some unpublished manuscript, never set one of Heine's lyrics), but not a reference to Robert Franz, who set sixty of the Lieder, or Brahms or Strauss or Liszt or Jensen or Hugo Wolff. And, once in a while, Mr. Browne allows himself such un-English equivalents as "grandness" instead of "grandeur" and "temeritous," which seems a rather stilted way of saying "intrepid." But the speech is usually as fluent as the tale it tells. And that, as has been maintained in the course of this somewhat grudging review, is Mr. Browne's chief concern—as it will be his reader's.

## The Negro in Drama

PLAYS OF NEGRO LIFE. Edited by ALAIN LOCKE and MONTGOMERY GREGORY with a Chronology and Bibliography of Negro Drama. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1927. \$5.

Reviewed by DuBOISE HEYWARD

Author of "Porgy"

LATE in 1925 a volume of far-reaching significance was published. That volume was "The New Negro" and was the direct result of brilliant and creative editorship on the part of Alain Locke. Standing as an exhibit of accomplishment by the Negro race in America, it had the entire field of literary and artistic endeavor from which to draw. Within the space of a single tightly packed volume was included the dynamic prose of Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, the mordant style of Walter White, the artistic detachment of James Weldon Johnson, and, in addition to much other interesting material, the most signal literary achievement of the new Negro in America in the group of young poets, Cullen, Hughes, McKay, and others.

In that volume of significance and scope there was also a section devoted to the Negro in Drama. Now comes a book of substantial proportions which is the logical offspring of the earlier volume, and which essays to treat exhaustively the specialized field of drama. Mr. Locke, working in this instance with the collaboration of Professor Montgomery Gregory, former instructor in dramatics at Howard University, has again acquitted himself brilliantly. With rare discretion the editors of "Plays of Negro Life" have shifted the stress from the Negro *writer* (as in the former book) to the Negro *Race* as a subject for dramatic art. In the first place this gives them the work of white dramatists who have approached the subject seriously, upon which to draw. In the second place it lifts the material treated to a plane of pure art, available to the American dramatist, white or Negro, as native subject matter; thus freeing it from the imputation of race propaganda. This far-visions viewpoint is the keynote of the brief but comprehensive introductory note. As a reviewer, on the

one hand, and a writer upon the Negro, on the other, I find it both a gracious and a peculiarly disarming gesture.

The contents of a volume that includes examples of the best work of Eugene O'Neill, Paul Green, and Ridgley Torrence, as well as some promising, but sophomoric, playwriting by the group at Howard University, is certain to be extremely uneven in quality. And yet, in spite of the ineptitudes of some of the young playwrights in this most exacting medium, there is a sincerity, a feeling for rhythm, and a new zeal for the humble origins of their own race that hold high promise for the future.

✱ ✱ ✱

In a brief review of "Plays of Negro Life" it would be futile as well as misleading to attempt comment on each of the twenty-three plays that are included. It is not as a collection of separate examples that the book attains its undeniable importance, but as a closely knit, permanent record of the initial phase of the Negro Theatre in America. So rapid has been the development of this department of our national drama that one is surprised to find that it was as recently as 1917 that the three plays, "Granny Maumee," "The Rider of Dreams," and "Simon the Cyrenian," written by Ridgley Torrence and presented at the Garden Theatre, ushered in the new movement. The first two of these plays are included in the book. Eugene O'Neill is represented by "The Dreamy Kid" and "The Emperor Jones." Ernest Howard Culbertson, the author of "Goat Alley," is spoken for by a shorter play, "Rackey." John William Rodgers, Jr., has contributed his one-act drama, "Judge Lynch," with which the Dallas Little Theatre captured the Belasco Cup in 1924. And Paul Green has given "The No 'Count Boy" with which the Texas players again won the National Little Theatre prize in 1925. "White Dresses," and "In Abraham's Bosom," the one-act play from which his nine-scene biography was later elaborated, to capture the Pulitzer Prize of last year. The student of drama will find a comparison of this short version with the longer one, as presented at the Provincetown Playhouse, an unusually interesting experience. It is one of those rare instances in which a one-act play has been improved by expansion.

✱ ✱ ✱

A potent influence in the development of the Negro playwright has been the annual contests conducted by *Opportunity*, *A Journal of Negro Life*. As an evidence of the success of these contests, the winning plays, which are included in the volume, are, taken as a group, the best work by members of the race concerned. These plays are "Sugar Cane," by Frank H. Wilson; "Cruiter," by John Mathews; "The Starter," by Eulalie Spence, and "Plumes," by Georgia Douglas Johnson. Of these prizewinners, I feel that "Sugar Cane" has attained to a higher degree than the others the indispensable and elusive element of suspense. The explanation of this is obvious: Frank H. Wilson has been familiar with the stage from his boyhood. His play contrasts interestingly with "Balo," by Jean Toomer, which possesses a fine, simple folk quality, but lacks the conflict which is needed to make it a play.

The volume is interestingly illustrated with portraits and scenes from the plays and with decorations by Aaron Douglas. A Chronology of the Negro Theatre, by Montgomery Gregory, and a Bibliography of Negro Drama complete the rich source-book for anyone who is interested in its sub-contents and make the volume an indispensable ject.

### The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY . . . . . Editor  
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT . . . . . Associate Editor  
AMY LOVEMAN . . . . . Associate Editor  
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY . . . . . Contributing Editor  
NOBLE A. CATHCART . . . . . Publisher

Published weekly by The Saturday Review Co., Inc., Henry S. Canby, President, Roy E. Larsen, Vice-President, Noble A. Cathcart, Secretary-Treasurer, 25 West 45th Street, New York. Subscription rates, per year: postpaid: in the U. S. and Mexico, \$3.50; in Canada, \$4; in Great Britain 18 shillings; elsewhere, \$4.50. All business communications should be addressed to 25 West 45th Street, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 1, 1879. Vol. IV. No. 19.

Copyright, 1927, by The Saturday Review Co., Inc.



## A Group of Noble Dames

CALAMITY JANE AND THE LADY WILDCATS. By DUNCAN AIKMAN. New York: Henry Holt & Company. 1927. \$3.

Reviewed by THOMAS BEER

Author of "The Mauve Decade"

TO go collecting raw materials in American history is to learn that Americans are a set of humorless prigs, but the pursuit is wholesome and necessary. Our history, a kind of postage stamp affixed to an unwieldy parcel indistinctly addressed, is still anecdotal, an affair of the foreground, a few impulses and beliefs flooding among small groups and personalities. Mr. Lewis Mumford has done what a fine talent can to trace the rhythms and to mark out some trifles of distinguished thinking in this muddle, and others have gayly or furiously lumped together notes which will be used, one day, by somebody who might perhaps begin to shave in the year 2027. Mr. Duncan Aikman comes in with the newest baggage of disillusioned anecdotes and offers a hard, plausible theory. He has never been a credulous person and is now, probably, vitrified against legend. And he has not been obliged to agonize while pursuing the virtuous through the reports of their friends, for his amusing book deals with hussies.

But the lady wildcats are not particularly bad women. They seem to have been under an influence of the Concord philosophers. Calamity Jane spent much of her infancy in strictest Thoreauvian contacts with nature. She had no "smug arts with which to please the Bostonians" and her famous witticism, "Who's the distinguished dirty dog you're feedin' that nice chow to?" was pitched at a graduate of Harvard. She had no "pact with smoothness, ease, or evasive dissimulation" and she was always willing to attack some great decorum, some fetich or policeman. Cattle Kate, a weaker nature, gave all to love—his name was Averell—and did her best with Emerson's injunction about refusing nothing—fame, credit, plans, and the rest of the quotation. She was lynched with her paramour in the days when the half gods of the frontier were going and the gods of the cinema had not yet arrived. In Belle Starr, whose prose style prophesies the moving sweetness of Mr. Santayana's early method, one perceives a misunderstanding of eclecticism and a derailment of the will to power, straightened out finally by the lout who shot her from the saddle and filled her with bullets as she lay on the dust. But in Bridget Grant, who provided sailors for ships bound out from Portland and Astoria, you see the model of Bronson Alcott's womanhood, a fanatic on education, a teetotaler, a mother above all things, and one "framed rather for domestic sentiment than for the gaze and heartlessness of what is falsely called society." Mr. Aikman, here, corrects a wrong impression of Portland's queen of the shanghai gangs. I had known that Mrs. Grant had merits but her false reputation had obscured some of them. She died, immensely respected, in 1923 at the age of ninety-two. This seems just, as we see justice, and it tastes well at the end of Mr. Aikman's book, because his other loud women suffered indecently, considering their fine qualities and their general harmlessness. For I can see not much difference between the lady wildcats and eminences whose names we are invited to respect. If it is not right to sell men to sea captains for a small fee, it is not right to infect men, through printed books, with the ideational syphilis of low egotism and self pity, at two dollars the volume. Madame Moustache, polite and modest in her gambling hells, never undertook to be the public rhapsodist of a faked medical discovery. Calamity Jane in her cups was given to lying about her own valors, but Mr. Aikman does not tell us that she ever promoted international discord by prophesying that France was about to overwhelm Europe with negroid battalions recruited in Africa or altered the history of American education, *pour*

*le bon motif*, by expelling William Graham Sumner from Yale. Belle Starr, prudishly inspected, was a thief and a virago. I prefer her, at that, to a man who will capitalize the legend of Jesus Christ for another "arraignment of society," and sell the serial rights to the most profitable of American monthlies. Pearl Hart had not the intelligence of a chambermaid, but at least she had loyalty and generosity to recommend her to one's sentiment. Now, in Washington. . . . But it does not matter.

Calamity Jane—Martha Jane Canary—has the longest sketch in Mr. Aikman's gay dissertation on the pioneer legend, but not the best. He is obliged to spend too many paragraphs discounting the buncombe in which Calam' and her friends wrapped her amusing character and his theme gets clumsy, now and then. It appears that her tendency to the profane was rather by way of heredity and not a personal acquirement. My sedate grandfather used to recite the beginnings of her streaming oburgations and then sketch in the climax and the conclusion by rapid movements of a thumb. We swear so dully in these times that a few more elaborate quotations from Calamity would have helped out our younger dramatists and novelists. Mr. Aikman leaves to Calam' her reputations as a hard drinker and swearer but explodes her pretensions as the rescuer of stage coaches, the mistress of Wild Bill, the slayer of Crazy Horse, the daring scout and railroad builder. She was a natural product of environments, the drifting daughter of a tough



One of the numerous illustrations in Duncan Aikman's "Calamity Jane"

woman and a shiftless man, born in rude Missouri and matured in the mad Virginia City of the '60s, the town in which hung, over the bar of a lewd dance hall, our one famous American epitaph:

Here lies the body of Charlotte McGinnity,  
To the age of sixteen years she kept her virginity,  
Damned good record for this vicinity.

Martha Jane Canary just about equaled the record and then became a heterodox, noisy friend to the lonesome. Her fame, Mr. Aikman determines, is largely due to the fact that nobody killed her and she had time to become a legend and to enjoy that legend. She died, more or less drunk, in 1903 and was buried in Deadwood by the Methodists. She meant nothing, but she seems to have deserved the plea raised by Miss Brice for the Lady of the Camellias: she was good company.

The Californian adventure of Lola Montez gives Mr. Aikman something more definite to examine and record. I hope his book will travel far enough to stop any more novelists and manufacturers of the moving picture from solemnly posing Lola as a wronged woman on whom a group of devotees wanted to confer an imperial crown of California. Mr. Minnigerode sniffed at this myth some time since without killing it. The Montez, as a fact, was the pioneer of all those ladies in the nineteenth century and our own incredible period who would be at once reckless, outrageous, and yet somehow "pure." She was an ordinary exhibitionist. Her two famous dances were described in liberal Paris as "simulations of a public orgasm." She was beautiful, humorless, and crude. Arriving in California, her brainless vanity made her offensive after a few months even in a sexually starved community. Mr. Aikman's description is painful. She goes to sulk in the country, aware that she has become a joke, and her mania for public notice makes

her ridiculous to the roughs of a tiny settlement. She goes back to dance again and tries to hitch her tarnished star to the Know Nothing agitation, calling her critics Jesuits and in "league with corrupt powers," and "mercenary." People were always wronging Lola. It got to be tedious. Spiritualism, charities, and belated assertions of chastity filled up her last years. The comet extinguished itself in the dreary, familiar way. She was, I feel, a "publicity pig" of the exasperating kind, unable to conserve sensibly what her eighteen months in Bavaria and her vogue in Paris got for her. Yet, pragmatically considered, she was a useful citizen. Her horsewhips, her tame bear, her inessential marriages, and her bragging of noble aims all showed girls of the next generations how these things are done, and her soul goes marching on.

Mr. Aikman comes back in half a dozen episodes to his theory. The women of the pioneer epoch—say, from 1840 to 1890—had their feet planted on a resonant drum of man's sexual necessity. They could choose the measure of the dance and the amount of noise to be exacted from creatures in a state of animal tension. Wifehood, polyandry, and an excused rapacity were open to the shrewd. But the consequences were odd and not so funny. ". . . in the long run," says Mr. Aikman, "the atmosphere of adulation and constant curiosity in which women lived in the west as a sex made it almost as difficult for a good woman to restrain her goodness as for Calamity Jane to content herself with being innocently hoydenish. . . ." In his

note on Carrie Nation he concludes: "Symbolizing in herself and her spectacular conduct the release of so many popular urges and demi-urges, she was automatically carried onward and upward to prominence, the lecture platform, and eventually into paresis." (Like that of the destructive European philosopher so distrusted by American moralists, Mrs. Nation's career had a spirochetic inflection at its end). "Yet, as a frontier woman exercising a frontier woman's peculiar prerogatives, she essentially created that destiny herself. . . . Or should one not say that the frontier created it for her by its astonishing fiction that a lady, whether a

strumpet in delirium tremens or a virago in a fit of moral hysteria, could do no wrong?" Beyond this he might run to an analysis of the virtuous Western woman's revolt in the '80s and '90s when vice was still memorably public on the plains and any good woman knew plentifully that sluts in the dance halls down the street or six miles from the hot kitchen of the farmhouse were having a roaring good time of it. She knew this, coarsely and emphatically, and her method of changing the situation was what environment had taught her. When she took to campaigns for righteousness she lied—and taught her Eastern cousins how to lie—as rankly as ever did Calam' and Kitty the Schemer. But I don't suppose that the white-haired, charming lady who, some six months back, announced herself before a legislative committee as the "delegate of a million American mothers and a million homes" ever thought of herself as a sister to the soiled harriidan drawling out nonsense in Billings and Gilt Edge thirty years ago. It is not important, but how we idealists suffer in discovering that man, this "species of ape afflicted by megalomania" is descended from a mother as well as a father.

There is no such thing as a "man's world." Some whimpering invert must have made the battered phrase. Certainly the old West was not a man's world. The companions of these "men of desperate fortunes and wild ambitions"—thanks, Mr. Gibbon—had their chances and their successes, too. Mr. Aikman's comedy in baroque has the merit of telling what did happen, in preference to what might have happened or what—in the manner of so many American social studies—never has happened. His cheerful revelations may hurt the few romantics left in criticism but, after all, he is just displaying a group of human beings who, if you think, seem no more ignoble than the rest of us.