

The New Michael Arlen

MAN'S MORTALITY. By MICHAEL ARLEN. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HENRY TRACY

EARLY in 1924, with the publication of "These Charming People," Mr. Michael Arlen became fashionable. Later in the same year, with the appearance of "The Green Hat," he became popular. The first was bad enough, but when the second mishap overtook him serious-minded readers gave him up. Another promising young writer had been lost. It would take more than cleverness to struggle out from under this double nemesis. So they reasoned and, within the limits of human probability, they were justified in their reasoning. But this young author who, as an English critic put it, "has no equal in the dandysme of the soul," has done the improbable. With the publication of "Man's Mortality" he has become important and both he and his book have to be taken seriously.

I am taking the man first. I find the dedication significant. This book is inscribed to the memory of Sarkis Kouyoumjian, Merchant, of Manchester, by his youngest son. A work of cleverness and of superficial intent would not have been so inscribed. And I sense a respect for the genius of a race that is Armenian. That genius has not hitherto found expression (or none that is adequate) in a literature of the West, as we know it. The spirit of that race is not frivolous; condescends to flippancy only for a purpose. A young writer, Armenian by birth, could saturate himself in the atmosphere of Mayfair, of Paris, of Monte Carlo, of Biskra, so completely that the false light of a glamorous sophistication suffused all his pages. He could do that for a considerable time . . . if it paid him. But he had not begun to write. He was, as he himself told an interviewer, "playing scales in public." And he had the grit to destroy what, at the age of twenty-three, he had hoped would be his big novel, "The Dark Angel." Ten years have passed since then. He has begun to write. The first chapter of the new book is consonant with the genius of the Armenian race. It dramatizes the integrity of an individual human being, as human, in conflict with the collective impersonality of a commercial organization for world management. Later on in the story, nationalism is brought in on the side of individualism; described as a power that is primitive, but to be reckoned with. Both individualism and nationalism are deeply, hotly imbedded in the Armenian psychic constitution. But what is even more to my point, its fabric, like the fabric of "Man's Mortality," is moral. It is moral with the organic morality of an old and rugged oak, well anchored, contemptuous of flurries.

Arlen living in Mayfair and writing fashionable stories about loose or frail or clever or decayed sophisticates was an anomaly, or else a deliberate impersonation; a clever one. Also he was idling . . . in a world of idlers. But even then it was said of him (in *The New Statesman*) that he wrote "with the truculence of a Mohawk and the suavity of a Beau Nash." The new Michael Arlen has by no means abandoned any of the skill he acquired in pleasing his earlier public. He has diminished the tricks. Nothing, now, diverts attention from the point he wishes to

make. There is a drive here, and depth. The man is writing.

He is not writing a novel. "Man's Mortality," at least, is not one. The publishers wisely describe it as "a story by Michael Arlen." It is a good one; requires no stimulants to carry one through it at a sitting. Briefly summarized, the book is a story of the future of internationalism conceived as a mechanical control of world affairs in the interests of an unscrupulous combine (International Aircraft and Airways) enforcing the *pax aeronautica* for its own advantage. Date, 1987. I. A. & A. overreaches itself and is broken in the final catastrophe that ends a cycle and paves the way for the first faint beginnings of a first World State. There is novelty in the adumbration of that State as "something between a workhouse, a sanitarium, and an asylum." There is not the slightest romanticism in Arlen's conception either of historic reality or a future Utopia. No time is wasted on imbecilities of prognostication irrelevant to the story, which is well plotted and stripped for action. There are, it is true, breath-taking inventions, but they are strictly necessary to the narrative. And a touch of mysticism—that is necessary too, because it floats an underlying philosophy without which "Man's Mortality" would be only what Mr. Wells says it is, "a big, worthwhile gesture of the imagination."

It is that, and a little more; which ex-

An Amorphous World

YE DRUNKEN DAMOZEL. By SIMON JESTY. New York: Harrison Smith & Robert Haas. 1933. \$2.

THE drunken damozel skips a very light fantastic through a complexity of audacious and gallant phantasmagoria. Her tale is told in epigrams to the accompaniment of periodic Pan-piping. Her world is amorphous; they that dwell therein possess a wisdom never to be found on highways or in churches; the damozel, herself, does not even inhabit a single personality, but flits from slum-sprite to *artiste* and back again without serious loss to her equilibrium.

Mr. Jesty's style is piquant and poetic, and though reminiscent of the major moderns, is as elusive as his characters. He makes frequent but distinctive use of the traditional literary devices, and, for reasons best known to himself, never leaves the present tense. The erudition of the author is unobjectionable; Debussy, Greek mythology, the Bible, and the second scherzo of Chopin contribute to an atmosphere of intellectual voluptuousness.

Each character, if analyzed, is really Mr. Jesty in a different mood. There is scarcely any attempt to differentiate the



MICHAEL ARLEN.

plains why one cares to go back—after yielding to a tale as well packed with drama and suspense as any tale needs to be—to go back and ponder a little. And some things remain with one. The engaging inconclusiveness of Mr. Craddock, the "President of Great Britain," runs all through the narrative and furnishes its only clue to an ultimate solution of the social problem. Mr. Craddock is very human. His presence in the book gives it a saving sanity that was wanting in the tone of Aldous Huxley's caustically imagined Utopia, "Brave New World." But the two are alike in one thing. Both envisage, as a last resort for intelligent folk, some sort of an asylum. Huxley names Iceland. Arlen does not specify, but hints that his island of sanity will be a nucleus for some far distant world order.

speech of the various personages. From the damozel to the Negro waiter, all utter Jesty's facile witticisms, and in his own vocabulary. As an example of G. B. S. outdone in the matter of portraying educated rabble, there is a steward who comments, "Phantasms of the dusk are not infrequent in the tropics, especially during the last hours at sea." Also, a waiter who volunteers, "Your voice has delusions in it, Sir."

Objectively considered, "Ye Drunken Damozel" is an "escape" novel. The story itself escapes both reality and memory. The attempted chronology is often interrupted by interludes that retard it.

With a nonchalant disregard for verisimilitude the hero, Jonah Upcott, spills his elaborate tale. It all begins in the wharf district of London where Jonah relates his meeting with Marion Tudor, the innkeeper's daughter, who of course is the acme of feminine beauty, singing naughty French songs, cleverly using her amber eyes. The feud between their families is no serious obstacle, indeed gives incident to Upcott's romancing, as well as zest. While Jonah continues studying, no matter what, for the reader can never find out, Marion skims through a succession of professions, until, probably because her father has been jailed on any of a number of charges, she suffers amnesia and turns up in Rio as none other than the illustrious Stella Vanessa, a specialist at playing Debussy. Marion in the meantime has got married to an aristocratic cripple with the soul of a Christian martyr and the manners of Petronius, finally committing suicide so that the original

lovers may stage their nuptial reunion. Jonah, also meantime, has been through the war, and coincidentally happens into Rio for the final clinch after beating off his three principal rivals, not including Marion's husband, and after other complications, as for instance when Stella remembers that she is not Stella, but Marion.

The charm of the book lies not in the story but in Mr. Jesty's literary and fantastical whimsicality. "Ye Drunken Damozel" is a reverie of nymphs, fauns, hamadryads, and a nice assortment of unhumans, all enough to amuse and entertain any twentieth century industrial slave provided he is spending a summer day under an apple tree.

A Full-Length Portrait

SING BEFORE BREAKFAST. By VINCENT MCHUGH. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1933. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ALVAH C. BESSIE

"LET'S GO HEMINGWAY," Genoa said. "I'll ask you questions." For the three hundred and seventeen pages of his second novel, Mr. McHugh allows his characters to go Hemingway, and if he has read his master a bit too sedulously, no reader will be able to complain that he has adulterated the original product. To the contrary, he has added an ingredient Hemingway's work does not possess, though it has been vastly and surprisingly overpraised for possessing it—a concentration of valid emotion that, in this instance, could have done very well without the hard-boiled mask he has chosen to apply to it.

Carey Halloran was the type of artist one rarely meets in life—he worked hard, was prodigiously improvident, light-hearted, and witty. A large man physically, his appetites were proportionately great, and though his wife Julie loved him with his own passion, she was geared to the practical, irremediable aspects of life—the necessity for food, clothing, and shelter. Sharing to some extent his own inexhaustible gusto for life, she could not share the potentiality he possessed for triumphing over hunger and even death, that comes from rare singleness of purpose. Their married life was a generally peaceful summer shot with brilliant electric storms. Into this already surcharged atmosphere there dropped Genoa Lamport, spoiled daughter of the rich—an archetype of the genus: over-sexed, emotionally unbalanced, as sharp of tongue and as witty as Carey Halloran. Though she may originally have wanted him, she took Pardon Gomez, a fisherman of the Island fleet, and the subsequent conflict of equally powerful and equally violent personalities Mr. McHugh has resolved with an easy talent that will serve as foundation for still better fiction.

At times his facility runs away with him, at others he writes in a manner both self-conscious and violently strained. There are sentences, paragraphs, and chapters of this book that are stilted and artificial, where the light-hearted humor breaks down and becomes almost pathetically ingenuous. There are as many sections managed with an economy of word, phrase, and emotion, that reveals clear insight, wide understanding, and ready sympathy. Stemming from the inverted sentimentalism of the hard-boiled school, this author has invariably transcended it, for he possesses more than a camera eye, more than a dictaphonic ear, more than a bag of tricks. He will drop the tricks and tap the rich well of unmistakable emotion that is amply manifest in this frequently imperfect but generally entertaining novel.

A new magazine called *Europa* will be placed on sale on April 10th and published quarterly thereafter, for the dissemination of material concerning Europe. It contains articles pertaining to art, music, politics, architecture, literature, cinema, drama, and the dance, written by European authors and artists. It is to be edited by William Kozlenko.

The Saturday Review Recommends

This Group of Current Books:

MAN'S MORTALITY. By MICHAEL ARLEN. Doubleday, Doran. The author of "The Green Hat" in utterly different mood.

MIKE FINK. By WALTER BLAIR and F. C. MEINE. Holt. Tales of the legendary king of the Mississippi keelboatmen.

BERMUDA, PAST AND PRESENT. By WALTER B. HAYWARD. Dodd, Mead. A new edition of a standard work.

This Less Recent Book:

"JENNIFER LORN." By ELINOR WYLIE. Knopf.

A brilliant tour-de-force by the gifted writer who in it first proved herself a novelist as well as poet.

The Rule of Might

COUP D'ÉTAT. By CURZIO MALAPARTE. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1932. \$2.50.

THE TERROR IN EUROPE. By H. HESSEL TILTMAN. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co. 1932. \$3.75.

Reviewed by W. Y. ELLIOTT

"I SHOULD like to propose a toast," M. Claudel, the French Ambassador at Washington is reported to have said, after M. Laval's visit there: "Here's to the little pause between the crisis and the catastrophe." Whether his remarks were apropos of any situation more specific than the general succession of crises under which the world labors is irrelevant. In this surcharged atmosphere, preoccupied with questions not only of the survival of régimes but of whole types of civilization there is some danger that the significance of these two remarkable books may be lost. Or perhaps there is an equal danger that the brilliant cynicism of the first may obscure the relation it bears to the second. At the outset one ought to say that here are two books, each in its own way equally essential to anyone who would understand his times.

Curzio Malaparte is, though an Austrian (Suckert) by birth, a thoroughgoing Fascist by spiritual option and by experience. His role as prefect of Florence and his part in the Fascist coup d'état was a considerable one. His "Italia Barbara" was full of the odd mixture of deliberately conceived mysticism and sang froid that characterizes the mythology of Fascism. He professes in "Coup d'État" to analyze the problem of how power in the modern state may be captured and defended as a pure exercise in technique—a technique perfected as to revolution by Trotsky and as to counter-revolution by Stalin. In spite of the fact that this was "more or less the subject treated by Machiavelli," the author's preface modestly disclaims the obvious comparison. "This book is in no sense an imitation of 'The Prince'—not even a modern imitation, which would be something necessarily remote from Machiavelli." But the reason which he advances for his disclaimer is left more than doubtful after the evidence of Mr. Tiltman is all in: "In the age from which Machiavelli drew his arguments," says Signor Malaparte, "his examples and the matter for his reflections, public and private liberties, civic dignity, and the self-respect of men had fallen so low that I should fear to be insulting my readers in applying any of the teachings of the famous book to the urgent problems of modern Europe."

Mr. Tiltman, nurtured on the *Manchester Guardian* and the author of a standard life of J. Ramsay MacDonald, is certainly a modern "anti-Machiavel." Yet he shows a state of terror in the larger part of Europe that not Renaissance Italy could have surpassed. He is horrified at the cruelties, the sadisms, the political nightmare, that he exposes. But he amply proves that Signor Malaparte's master, Mussolini, does not think Machiavelli inapplicable—and *Il Duce* has taken pains so to put himself on record.

For that matter it becomes apparent that Signor Malaparte's disclaimer is either disingenuous (in the usual Fascist manner) or ironical. He thinks that morals play in politics an even smaller role than did the Florentine who once tried to win back the favor of the Medici. The epilogue is a most unconvincing, and, for a Fascist, damning profession of admiration for the régimes founded on coups-d'état: "It is this anxiety, so natural in a lover of freedom, which gave birth to my desire to show how a modern State can be overthrown, and how it can be defended." One is grateful for the profession of intent and of faith. There is not a word in this extraordinary, superficially brilliant, and perversely fascinating book to indicate it, unless it be the condemnation of Hitler's "slavish" discipline—a condemnation heretical in the mouth of a Fascist.

Even Machiavelli had an end in view for his "Prince": a greater Italy, united and powerful. Fascism claims the same

end today. But "Coup d'État" is a pseudo-scientific study of means which professes that ends are irrelevant. He puts into the mouth of the present Pope, Pius XI, then Monsigneur Ratti, Papal Nuncio to Warsaw, an unwitting defence of Trotsky's "modern" theory of revolutions as a sheer matter of technique: seizing the nerve centers of modern industrial capitals. And he attributes to the Pope also an argument with Sir Horace Rumbold in which the then Monsigneur Ratti "persisted that revolution was just as possible in a civilized country, strongly organized and policed, like England, as in a country overrun with anarchists, shaken by opposing political factions and invaded by a hostile army, as Poland was at that time." (It was during the darkest days of the Bolshevik invasion, when Budyonni's cavalry was knocking thunderously at the very gates of Warsaw.)

Now it may be that the Pope is correctly quoted—though the rest of the book shows Signor Malaparte to be even more a poet than a journalist or historian. But if His Holiness is correctly reported, he has far less the inwardness of the matter in his Italian subtlety than had Foch—to whom all things, war included, were first matters of morale (or myths), and second, matters of technique. England is not good ground for the most carefully planned coup d'état in the Trotsky manner, even if such a seizure of power could be organized technically. For England is nourished on a myth as yet more powerful than that of communism. Terror does not thrive there

nor régimes built upon it. A mere coup d'état would be abortive.

It is this failure to consider the motive power behind men and revolutions, as well as the conditions which Marx himself, after the days of the Paris commune admitted to be necessary, that makes "Coup d'État" a brilliant tour de force of simplification rather than a profound study of politics—a modern "Prince."

The examples—Russian, Polish, Spanish, Italian, German, with a cursory and squinting historical glance or two back to Sulla, Catiline, Caesar and Napoleon—are treated in the most Procrustean manner of the true continental ideologue: Napoleon was the first modern, among dictators, but he sinned as a technician by too great respect for "legality." Almost he failed there; all the rest of the modern crop save Trotsky and Mussolini repeat this bourgeois error. And why should Mussolini be exempted? He took power under a constitutional régime, and from the hands of the King.

The fact is that coups d'état are only possible on carefully prepared ground, where force can masquerade as the savior of "law and order"—or where force can create such a régime out of anarchy and political confusion. Disciplined shock troops to seize the sources of transport, light, heat, communication, water supply, etc., are not enough, unless supported by an élite large enough to improvise a state, army, and police, and by a considerable backing of opinion indoctrinated in a myth. Trotsky found that out in his struggle with Stalin. It was the capture of a party—turned anti-Semitic—at which he

had failed. And that, rather than mere technical failure, brought Von Kapp low. Against a purely technical coup d'état even perfectly organized, the general strike is a completely adequate weapon.

There is small doubt that the technique of revolution and of counter defense has much to learn from the Marxians, more indeed than Signor Malaparte has learned. For he has, like an initiate of the lower orders, learned only the lesson that the vulnerable centers are those, first of all, that control the nerves of a great industrial organism. The Marxians themselves have learned that the ground must be prepared and the moment ripe.

Mr. Tiltman's elaborately compiled picture of the methods by which coups d'état are maintained in power is appropriately called "The Terror in Europe." One would think after the persuasions of Signor Malaparte, that revolutions had entered an entirely new phase in which police and army, control of press and associations, and through them of elections, education, and opinion, had become matters of secondary importance. This picture of all terror at work shows the persistence of all the old state machinery of breaking up centers of resistance. It shows that Stalin has merely perfected the technique of Czarism with a more devoted and disciplined body of inquisitors and defenders. The real



THE PUPIL WHO OUTDID HIS MASTERS. Pilsudski, Mussolini, and Bethlen taunting Hitler for his mildness. A cartoon, published some months ago, by Notenkraaken, Amsterdam.

merely one régime for another in meaningless action and reaction until the wisdom of constitutional liberties again returns to stabilize Europe.

The revolting details of Mr. Tiltman's picture are little known even taken, country by country, piecemeal. The "Martyrdom of the Ukraine" under Polish rule is perhaps the least known to outside opinion. The almost unprintable barbarities recorded of Pilsudski's reign there are worthy of Sienkiewicz's talent for horrors. The effects are in the main, however, those of piling up details to form an enormous mosaic of political oppression, done with some thoroughness for the whole of Europe, probably for the first time and definitively. Terror, Red, Black, White, and Green, is painted over the whole of eastern and of southern Europe with lurid strokes.

The inner meaning of this breakdown of the Rechtsstaat, with all the unleashing of savagery that it entails, does not primarily interest either of the two who have, from such curiously different angles, surveyed the new régimes of European absolutism. But it must interest those who, like Aristotle, look deeper than did the Florentine ambassador into the causes of revolution. No doubt the causes here lie very deep, deeper even than the exhaustion and bitterness of the war, than nationalistic perversion of the capitalist system, or its own inherent weaknesses. But it is to the study of the myths of politics, their rise, their decay, their conflicts, and their relations to the economic context of a madly changing world that one must turn if any way out of the nightmare land

of European relapse into terror is to be found. Recitals of terror do not move men intent on survival itself; nor does a mere capture of the state solve its problems. Class and nation must be brought under the rule of law if political terror is to be banished.

The foregoing review was written before Hitler had succeeded in securing complete power in Germany. Mr. Elliott is professor of government and political theory at Harvard University.

Special to Mr. Cabell

SPECIAL DELIVERY. By BRANCH CABELL.

New York: Robert M. McBride & Co. 1933. \$2.50.

MY dear Mr. Cabell:

Your friends, my dear sir, will call your book wise and beautiful and wholly delightful, avowing that you alone could have written "Special Delivery." Your enemies, if they avow anything, will equally assert that you alone could have written this book, and will ignore it as perfectly unimportant.

How ingenious, some will say, of an author to select ten letters from his correspondence, those ten most typical and most troublesome of all he receives, and to make a book of his replies, setting first the answers actually written, and then the ones he was tempted to write. It is charming that he begins with the schoolgirl requesting "particulars" of his life, and finishes with the double-chinned matron who was once, quite inexplicably, his love. How ironically he answers the others, one may say: the young woman who seeks an interview in private (with promises "not to have a baby"), the autograph hunter, the begetter of symposia, and those others, even Rhadamanthus, the reviewer of books. We are grateful, your friends will tell you, for these intimate glimpses of yourself, and if this book should lack readers, it can only be that wisdom and beauty are uncommonly at a discount.

Your enemies, my dear sir, for the most part are silent, with a silence both cruel and ominous, could your enemies be considered in any sense authorities. Only the lesser among them will denounce your lack of "social consciousness," predicting hotly of the Storisende Edition of your works that it cannot survive the Revolution, unless there be emigrés so misguided as to include it in their baggage.

But consider the others, those who mix sympathy with their aversion, who mingle a kind of awful pity with their judgment of you as "finally unimportant." To them, dear sir, you seem, rather sadly, an American who has wished to write beautiful prose, and who has only succeeded in writing prose that is hopelessly artificial and overornamented and self-conscious; in the manner of Poe, who would have liked to write beautiful prose, or in the manner of Henry James, about whose prose there are several opinions. To their finding, my dear sir, your honeyed rhythms, your novelties, and inversions are a cause for real sadness.

And even far beyond your own affirming, they affirm the flimsiness of your materials, calling them the negligible fancies of a man who plays at art for art's sake. No artist, they would have it, assures his readers again and yet again that art is less important than the "realities" which, in this book, you mention as indeed more important than art; but he will pursue these realities against every temptation to spend his career polishing "platitudes flavored with gratitude," however wonderfully and rarely he might polish them. The platitudes he attains in the end will have been hard-won. He will not have begun with them.

In this wise, my dear sir, will your enemies dispose of the wisdom and beauty of your book, and of those others, perhaps, except "Jurgen." You will, I conceive, shrug at these unconscionable persons. You will say, I suspect, that you have answered them sufficiently, in the eighteen volumes of the Storisende Edition.

But however this may be, I remain, sir,

Your humble servant,

RHADAMANTUS ROBERT MULLEN.