

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 Rhadamantus, 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.

Foreign Literature ♦ Points of View

A Letter from Italy

By SAMUEL PUTNAM

LOOKING back over the Italian literary year, 1932, the detached observer cannot but be impressed with the growing importance of the Genoan "renaissance." Milan, of course, has long been, if not the intellectual capital, one of the two intellectual capitals of the peninsula; while a lesser activity, and one, not infrequently more provincial in character, has prevailed at Florence, Venice, Bologna, Turin, and elsewhere. As for Rome, it has been in recent years, and continues more or less to be, the stronghold of the Marinetti Futurists and the Bontempelli Novecentisti—of those, in other words, who are concerned with a direct and immediate artistic embodiment of the Fascist urge (both Marinetti and Bontempelli being members of the Royal Academy). At Rome, too, are Signor G. B. Angioletti, who is interested in politics as well as in literature, and his organ, *L'Italia Letteraria*, which this chronicler persists in regarding as the best literary weekly in the world. But curiously enough, perhaps, with Italy's strong nationalization, the provinces appear to be coming to the fore again in the field of letters; and chief among them, Genoa.

It was inevitable that the exceedingly late political unification of the race should have left its traces; and one of these is to be found in literature, in the perduring problem of regionalism versus nationalism, quite as acute a one at times as that of nationalism versus Europeanism, which was reflected some years back, in the opposing movements, "*Strapaese*" and "*Straccità*." One hears little any more of either of these two last mentioned manifestations, and both may be said to be dead, or rather, to have been caught up into the political synthesis, Massimo Bontempelli, who once carried against Ardengo Soffici the banner of the "Supercitizens," and who even for a while published his review, *900*, in French, being now, next to Marinetti, the leading Fascist spokesman among the writers. In the same manner, within the national boundaries, the problem of regionalism has undergone a change, on the literary as well as the political side. If the political sentiment of Italy is represented, as it fairly well is, by such a group as the one about the Fascist review, *Anti-Europa*, the feeling on the cultural plane may be said to be of a similar sort—in favor, that is, of a powerful and essential nationalism. Yet it is altogether likely that the questions of regionalism or nationalism and nationalism or Europeanism will persist, at least under the surface, and that they will from time to time bob up again and take on new life. Neither of them, probably, will ever be solved, and it may be as well that they should not be, in accord with the nature of things as they are; but it is not safe for the student or critic of modern Italian literature to lose sight of either of them for very long.

In spite of the comparative smallness of the peninsula and modern means of communication, the province continues to leave its stamp, however subtly, upon the writer; and of this mark both he and his fellow-writers, his critics, and his readers are fully and often highly conscious. A case in point is the Lombard, Carlo Linati; and the same might be said of the Venetian story writer, Bonaventura Tecchi, or the Venetian poet, Diego Valeri, as of the Florentine Papini, the Sicilian Pirandello, the Sardinian Deledda, etc. This variety of provincialism, which is, rather, racialism, will doubtless remain; neither radio nor airplane can slay it, fortunately. The local theme lingers, too, as with Corrado Alvaro and his Aspromonte. And as hinted in the conclusion of the first paragraph above, there is visible today a renewed and general stir in cities other than Rome and Milan. At Florence, there is the young review, *Solaria*; at Bologna, there is Leo Longanesi's witty and satirical *L'Italiano*; while at Genoa, in addition to a young poetry group, disciples of Paul Valéry and "*poésie pure*," with their organ, *Circoli*, there is a most interesting critical and poetical coterie, the members of which have found

expression in a recently launched publication that bids fair to be a worthy successor of Vincenzo Cardarelli's *La Ronda*, which breathed its last in Rome some nine or ten years ago, but which made history while it lasted. The new monthly is called *Espero*, and is edited by Ferdinando Garibaldi, Aldo Capasso, and others. From this, it may be seen that there is much activity in what used to be known as the provinces (not to be forgotten are Filippo Burzio and a university group at Turin); but a close survey of the scene reveals the fact that this is not the old regionalism, but rather, a natural spreading of that impulse which a strong government, one which, whatever else may be said about it, knows where it is going, would seem to have communicated to the arts as to other departments of the national life.

With it all, with all the intense consciousness of roots, there is in the air, has been for some time in Italy, an almost equally intense cosmopolitan curiosity in literature, especially toward Soviet and pre-Soviet Russia. Enzo Ferrieri's Milanese magazine, *Il Convegno*, has been an illustrious precursor here, and its example is being followed by the Florentine *Solaria*. Longanesi's *L'Italiano*, while on the surface very, very Italian, is wide awake to what is going on in the world, and even quotes *The New Yorker*; and beneath its violent satirical attack upon the Italian bourgeoisie and the bourgeois spirit will be found, one suspects, a certain outside stimulus. And now, with *Circoli* printing Eliot's "*Wasteland*," as it recently did, and with *Il Convegno* printing excerpts from Joyce, comes the new *Espero* with a distinguished board of foreign editors, and with the obvious intention of printing much work from abroad and, what is more important, the work of younger and less well known writers. Closely associated with the venture is the former editor of *La Ronda*, Cardarelli, who, it may be recalled, once lined up with Soffici and Giuseppe Ungaretti against the foreign influence (Ungaretti, it is to be noted, making certain reservations). The animating spirit of *Espero* is Aldo Capasso, the peninsula's latest poet of looming proportions, who, before sharing the *Italia Letteraria* prize of a year ago with Eurialo de Michelis, for his first published volume of poetry, *Il Passo del Cigno*, had been widely known as the critic and translator of Gide, Valéry, Proust, and other modern Frenchmen. All in all, then, it would seem that any contemplated Chinese wall against "foreign influence," erected by the *Strapaese* adherents or others, had been by this time well battered in the breach.

Espero, nevertheless, like *Il Convegno*, which is, it may be, the most cosmopolitan of them all, is nothing if not Italian. It is here that the twentieth century Italian finds and solves his paradox; for the character of the Italian intellectual, at any rate, is almost if not quite as complex a one as the Frenchman's; he is not so conscious of it, does not talk so much about it, that is all. It has been stated that *Espero* seems likely to follow in the steps of *La Ronda*, which, incidentally, was as Italian as could be desired. The latter was started, in 1919, at a time when neo-classicism—in this case, a sometimes over-stylized neo-classicism—came as a shock: neo-classicism, classicism of any kind, on the morrow of the armistice! In the minds of many, the very name still connotes a certain preciousness and cult of the fragment. However this may be, *La Ronda* brought forth an impressive array of new talent; and as Signor Camillo Pellizzi, the historian of contemporary Italian letters ("*Lettere italiane del nostro secolo*") has observed, it is impossible not to be referring to it constantly in dealing with subsequent writing. That *Espero* is beginning with a consciousness of the time that has elapsed since its predecessor passed out, is indicated by a thorough threshing-out, in the second number, of the problem of *frammentismo*, with Capasso and Linati as the parties to the colloquy. From this discussion, it is evident that the "fragment," which has been the bane of the young European writer since the war, is to be given a new definition, a new meaning, one looking to a greater integrality, a more real content. It will be

of esthetic interest to wait and see what comes of this.

One of the new writers of impressive stature already revealed by *Espero*, in its second number, is the poet, Elpidio Jenco, whose "*Cenere Azzurra*" of last summer (1932) is now followed by "*Essenze*," the first volume in a "*Collezione degli Scrittori Nuovi*" which the indefatigable Capasso, in addition to his other labors, has just taken upon his shoulders, and which is likewise published from Genoa. Other authors to appear in the series are Burzio, Capasso himself, Linati, and Alfredo Garoglio.

"Cavalcade"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

SIR: Allow me to voice a protest against much of the last part of the article on Noel Coward written by John Corbin in your issue of February 25th. My chief quarrel with Mr. Corbin comes in his discussion of "*Cavalcade*." He says that "what was written as a play is reduced in America to the dimensions of a talkie." Again towards the end he says that "*Cavalcade*" "bids fair to exert a similar spell here (in America) in spite of the humbler medium in which it is cast."

Now, it is our honest opinion that "*Cavalcade*" should be and is a better movie than it is a play, for plays of this episodic type are more readily handled by, and are wonderfully suited to, the screen. It should be noted, too, that Mr. Coward has written a letter to the Fox Film Corporation indicating that he himself was more than merely satisfied with the picture. Even if this letter is used as box-office advertising, its existence, at least, cannot be denied.

In another place Mr. Corbin says that in "*Cavalcade*" we see "the fortunes of an English household traced from the climax of the Boer War through the World War into the present Depression." Now, neither in the text of Mr. Coward's play nor in the movie is there any mention of the "present Depression" (other than in the author's usual portrayal of the spiritual depression of the post-war era). As a matter of fact quite the contrary is indicated. The last night club shown is as expensive and grand and altogether awe-inspiring as a night club as only Hollywood can draw. And as for the Marryots being "financially with the rest of us," I utterly disclaim them. The last time we see the Marryots they are in a room with new curtains, a quite impressive butler—and drinking champagne! There is no mention in play or movie of economic distress.

Perhaps I should have noted at the beginning of the above paragraph that I believe "*Cavalcade*" was written *before* the "present Depression" had set in. So, at least, the publishers tell us.

In another place Mr. Corbin says, "At the close this mood is strangely altered. In the opinion of the producers at Hollywood, apparently, it has given way to despair. Again we must disagree. We saw no evidence of the mood having 'given way to despair,' in fact, quite the contrary. There was Jane Marryot's toast, triumphant in its tragic greatness. There was the friendly crowd singing 'Auld Lang's Syne' in the Square. And there was the final scene of the dome of St. Paul's crowned by the Cross, illuminated and glowing. In fact, that glowing Cross—symbol of peace and hope it must be—is the very last thing we see."

Continuing in the above tone, however, Mr. Corbin says: "From time to time a ghostly cavalcade flits across the silver screen, arrayed in medieval armor and with banners flying, yet always going down hill. Neither Mr. Coward's text nor the demeanor of the very able company warrants this symbolism." In the first place we don't remember that the cavalcade was always going down hill. Mr. Corbin, too, evidently failed to notice that that cavalcade was always singing a chorus, grand and triumphant, wonderfully moving in its uplifting quality. It was, I believe, the March from "*Tannhäuser*." And certainly the medieval armor and flying banners make one think immediately of Excelsior! and Romance! and Glory! If the cavalcade is symbolic, at

least we must doubt Mr. Corbin's interpretation.

And now we come to our final quarrel. Mr. Corbin quotes part of that last toast of Jane Marryot. That toast should never be quoted in part. It is sufficiently, in fact, remarkably brief. In its entirety it is a rare piece of emotional beauty. But that is the least of our worries, for Mr. Corbin has committed the last sin. He has misquoted. He has Mrs. Marryot hoping for "dignity and grace and peace again." Both the text of Mr. Coward's play and the scenario of the movie prefer the word "greatness" to "grace." And so do I.

DAVID A. DUDLEY.

1740 Massachusetts Avenue,
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Information Wanted

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

SIR: Has anyone in his possession a log book from an American clipper that lay in Leghorn harbor in 1822? It was then that Trelawny took Shelley aboard a Greek bombard to see what degenerate Hellenes had succeeded to the ancient Greeks (he was writing "*Hellas*") and afterward to a Yankee clipper, whose mate, "a smart specimen of Yankee," remarked that the Greek looked like "a bundle of chips going to hell to be burnt." On board he had his first and last drink of grog, heard that there was "dry rot in all the main timbers of the Old World, and none of you will be any good until you are docked, refitted, and annexed to the New," and wrote in the ship's log, not the noble lines he quoted of Washington, but some verses, presumably his own. "That graceful craft was designed by a man who had the poet's feeling for things beautiful," said Trelawny. "Let's get a model and build a boat like her." "Then I calculate you must go to Baltimore or Boston to get one," said the mate, "there is no one on this side of the water can do the job." Has anyone her log—and Shelley's verses? H.

Mr. Cabell's Review

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:

SIR: I have just read Mr. Branch Cabell's review of "*Pocahontas*" in your issue of February 18, 1933, and would venture to ask what an outburst of this kind is doing in a literary "fountainhead and repository of all knowledge," to which I have come to turn as one turns to a friend whose thoughts are profitable, stimulating, and pleasant to linger over.

Why all this heat? I haven't read the book, but it has been favorably reviewed elsewhere, so I infer that it doesn't wholly deserve the hard things Mr. Cabell has said about it; and if it does, why then I cannot help thinking that the gentle Princess herself, were she still alive, would be the first to remind her touchy kinsman that "privilege entails responsibility"—for poor Mr. Garnett, so far as I can gather, seems to be pilloried mainly for having taken it upon himself to write a book about her without first consulting Mr. Cabell—her cousin, and very anxious to impress us with the fact.

There may be just cause for Mr. Cabell's annoyance at the alleged liberties taken with historical accuracy, but wouldn't he have been wiser first to see to his own surely no-less-remarkable prose before venturing (without giving any instances) the *ex cathedra* statement that Mr. Garnett writes slipshod English? It is hard to imagine that Mr. Garnett's lapses can be any worse than some of the truly astonishing specimens to be found on page 436. Does Mr. Cabell, for example, really mean to rate "the primal Strachey" among "... other somewhat haphazard chroniclers" (oh, Sir!), and, *totidem verbis*, to make the none too complimentary assertion that we shall all enjoy reading "inferior diction, tediousness, and all prevalent inanity?" At any rate, the violent twist to the tail administered in the concluding paragraph is, to say the least, in questionable taste, and must seem gratuitous to those who, like myself, are unaware of the reason for it.

H. F. ANGOLD.

British Commonwealth Club,
N. Y. City.