

from acknowledged works of art only when the esthetic is already compartmentalized, or only when works of art are set in a niche apart instead of being celebrations, recognized as such, of the things of ordinary experience. Even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of esthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience. Following this clue we can discover how the work of art develops and accentuates what is characteristically valuable in things of everyday enjoyment. The art product will then be seen to issue from the latter, when the full meaning of ordinary experience is expressed, as dyes come out of coal tar products when they receive special treatment. . . .

The comparison of the emergence of works of art out of ordinary experiences to the refining of raw materials into valuable products may seem to some unworthy, if not an actual attempt to reduce works of art to the status of articles manufactured for commercial purposes. The point, however, is that no amount of ecstatic eulogy of finished works can of itself assist the understanding or the generation of such works. Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be understood without taking just these interactions into account—and theory is a matter of understanding. Theory is concerned with discovering the nature of the production of works of art and of their enjoyment in perception. How is it that the everyday making of things grows into that form of making which is genuinely artistic? How is it that our everyday enjoyment of scenes and situations develops into the peculiar satisfaction that attends the experience which is emphatically esthetic? These are the questions theory must answer. The answers cannot be found, unless we are willing to find the germs and roots in matters of experience that we do not currently regard as esthetic. Having discovered these active seeds, we may follow the course of their growth into the highest forms of finished art.

Hard-Boiled Jellyfish

THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE. By James M. Cain. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

YOU read about such people as those in this novel almost every day in the newspapers. They are chiefly stupid, slightly pathetic, capable of rape, arson, or murder in a sort of dumb, driven way. They have glimmers of decency, passions that overcome them, and are chiefly selfish, and morally composed of gelatine while being big, husky brutes to outward view. They commit most of the crimes one reads about—though they are not of the smart crooks or in with the gangsters. They are simply commonplace people trying to get along honestly; but they haven't intelligence enough to derive true happiness from life. Drink and fornication are about as near as they get.

Mr. Cain is to be congratulated upon making his exciting and disagreeable novel carry conviction. His style is like the metal of an automatic. You can't lay his story down, for all its brutality and ugliness. He is good at dialogue, too. In the hard-boiled school of today here is a new student of considerable promise.

It is a question whether we can go much farther in the way of stories concerning the semi-morons that hitherto have had few spokesmen. But so long as writers can tell their stories as well as Mr. Cain does, and make a murder almost as deeply shocking as the Ruth Snyder-Judd Grey affair so vivid in detail, we will continue to read them.

This novel derives from the sensationalism of America fostered by the daily press. But it may also be the work of a novelist who will go as far as he who wrote "McTeague." Time alone can tell. Certainly there is a place in literature for brutal realism. Mr. Cain has had newspaper training. In the city room one becomes inured to a great many things. But also, that is the place in which to learn compact writing. Mr. Cain has learned it.

A Shot in the Dark

LENIN: A Biography. By Ralph Fox. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1934. \$2.

Reviewed by SIDNEY HOOK

THIS biography of the great leader of the Russian revolution violates every historical principle for which he stood. Lenin was a critical Marxist who, admitting the important role of personality and leadership in history, sought to explain the relationship between the great individual and the historic period in which he lived, the classes within which he worked, and the political party which implements the class will. Mr. Fox's account mentions all the important events in Lenin's life and times but fails to integrate them into a dynamic pattern. There is no clear analysis of the historic significance of Lenin's personal qualities, his conception of democratically centralized party organization, and the timeliness of his revolutionary programs. Instead of a rich and penetrating character study of Lenin as a revolutionary philosopher, statesman, and man of action, Mr. Fox presents a conventional and extremely dull portrait of

piece. Speaking of the first meeting between Lenin and Trotsky, he writes, "His [Lenin's] virtue was that he was quickly able to correct himself if he were deceived in his judgment, and no false sentiment ever kept him tied to a person after once he had found him out. He was nearly a year finding Trotsky out." This not only makes it a mystery, over which Mr. Fox uneasily glides, why Lenin again and again reposed absolute confidence in Trotsky, especially in 1917 when he entrusted the organization of the insurrection to him; it also flatly contradicts the written avowal of Lenin's widow, which Fox suppresses, of Lenin's confession of faith in, and admiration for, his great revolutionary co-worker. Mr. Fox carries his war against Trotsky to a point where it becomes both ridiculous and amusing. He insinuates that Lenin's illness in 1921, which was followed a year later by a stroke, was in part brought on by a discussion with Trotsky who at that time was advocating a plan "approaching the Fascist idea of corporations." (!) Like all official party Communists, without so



DETAIL OF DIEGO RIVERA'S LENIN FRESCO

(Courtesy of the New Workers' School, 51 W. 14th St., New York.) Recently destroyed at Rockefeller Center, this will be one of the works reproduced in Rivera's "Portrait of America," to be published in May by Covici-Friede.

Lenin as a rather colorless and pedestrian "hero" who spoke and commanded his way to power against the arguments and machinations of the enemies of the working-class. One closes the book without knowing what distinctive qualities of thought made Lenin an historically pre-eminent figure.

This biography is heralded as the final result of many years of research based "on a study of all the available printed materials, such as the thirty volumes of Lenin's works, the twenty volumes of documents in the Lenin miscellany, his letters to his relatives, his wife's memoirs, the four volumes of reminiscences of various comrades, the Soviet Press, and the various histories of the Communist Party and of the Revolution." The truth is that it does not contain a single important item of information concerning Lenin and the history of the Russian Revolution which is not already available in existing accounts in English. What is much more significant, Mr. Fox has suppressed all mention of many important documents (e.g., Lenin's testament which prophesied with uncanny accuracy the future developments of the Communist Party) and of events like the vacillations of the party leadership (Stalin and others) in their attitude towards Kerensky before Lenin returned from abroad. It is these suppressions together with the peculiar interpretations of the materials treated which reveal the actual animus of this biography.

Simply put, Mr. Fox, who is an official party Communist, believes that one of the chief proofs of Lenin's greatness may be found in his lifelong struggle against the "anti-Bolshevik" Trotsky whose unreliable character he discerned as far back as 1902. Mr. Fox goes to incredible lengths in painting Trotsky as the villain of the

much as stopping to get rid of embarrassing evidence to the contrary, he coolly hands over to Stalin the historic credit for organizing the revolution and the military defence against intervention which, until now, has been universally attributed to Trotsky. Stalin's own declarations of the heroic role of Trotsky in the defence of Petrograd against Yudenich, Fox deftly suppresses.

Mr. Fox is imposing upon his publishers and his readers. This is not a genuine biography of Lenin and is not intended as such. It is merely another shot in the battle being waged by the followers of Stalin against the principles, the character, and historical achievements of Trotsky. That is the measure of its design and performance. One need not be a follower of Trotsky or agree with any of his views, to cry, "Shame!"

Sidney Hook, a member of the department of philosophy of New York University, is the author of "Toward the Understanding of Karl Marx."

The New Ecclesiastes

(Continued from first page)

what may bring them true happiness. The moral of the play is, in Shaw's own words, "to illustrate that our capitalistic system, with its golden exceptions of idle richness and its leaden rule of anxious poverty is a desperate failure from the point of view of the rich as well as of the poor." The gentleman burglar, Aubrey Bagot, who is the chief actor in this drama of irony, is the son of an atheist father. He has, unknown to his father, gone into Holy Orders and has as fine a gift for preaching as has his creator, and the play affords him fulfilling opportunities for the exercise of his

gift. He has the last words in it and they are filled with regenerative implications.

Our souls go forth in rags now, [he cries] and the young are spying through the holes and getting glimpses of the reality that was hidden. And they are not horrified; they exult in having found us out: they expose their own souls; and when we, their elders, desperately try to patch our torn clothes with scraps of the old material the young lay violent hands on us and tear from us even the rags that were left to us. . . . I am by nature and destiny a preacher, I am the new Ecclesiastes. But I have no Bible, no creed: the war has shot both out of my hands. . . . I have lost my nerve and am intimidated: all I know is that I must find the way of life, for myself and all of us, or we shall surely perish.

"On the Rocks" is a "political comedy." It sets forth the problem of the unemployed under the capitalistic system in the persons of an English Prime Minister and his advisers, who are faced with its solution under a system which admits of no rational one—only a method of force by subjugation or extermination. The Prime Minister is distracted and cannot bring himself to follow the brutal advice of Basham, the Chief of Scotland Yard. In reality he is not a leader of men; he attained his position through the power of his oratory, so that he is unable to cope with the real situation which faces him. Luckily he has a wife who knows him and through her he places himself under the care of a woman doctor in a country sanatorium. When he returns after his rest cure he is a changed man, for now consciously realizing his deficiencies as a statesman, he is man enough to retire. As he looks through the window of his Downing Street residence he hears the unemployed again in tumult, and singing as they march Carpenter's "England, Arise!" "Suppose England really did arise!" he says to his wife as the curtain falls.

Turning from the play to its preface we find that Shaw has taken for his text the suggestion, made in the play by Basham the Police Chief, of the political necessity for killing people. Shaw enters into a detailed examination of this necessity, from executions of single murderers to the slaughter of millions of innocent persons by means of war, methods whitewashed for us under the names of justice and patriotism. But as these are childish evasions of the reality, he devotes his thesis to a thorough examination of this important matter. His examination leads to reaffirmation of the necessity for the extermination of undesirables, but in a civilized society this must be done without cruelty. Perhaps the best way to do it is by the slow method of education, after we have reconstructed our society on an equalitarian basis. In the course of his exposition he refers to the methods employed in Russia and his information is truly enlightening. If a humane reader should have a prejudice against the author for his seeming unemotional treatment of so moving a subject let him read the concluding part of this remarkable preface where Shaw dramatizes the situation in which Pilate was placed when he was compelled to acquiesce in the "liquidation" of Jesus. But, indeed, this entire preface is a masterly piece of Shavian literature. "On the Rocks" is to be produced in New York. But the reader of these plays and prefaces can be assured that he will be interested, amused, and even edified provided he reads them with an unprejudiced mind, and provided also that he is not afraid of the adventure—for reading Shaw is really an enterprise. He should remember that Shaw holds "all Art and Literature is propaganda." Reading Shaw is therefore an adventure in rationalism, and as we are all rationalizers now this should not deter us. Shaw is not the poet taking upon himself the mystery of things and acting as one of God's spies in the Shakespearean sense. He is a mental nutcracker trying to find a nourishing kernel in the fruit offered us for our consumption. If the kernels he lays before us disagree with us they may, perhaps, turn out to be wholesome cathartics. Perhaps, indeed, that is what Shaw thinks we are needing—to cleanse our systems of what he calls "Crosstianity," on which we have fed so long, preparatory to a diet of Christianity.

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The Socialists Are Crushed

The European crisis proceeds by a series of explosions, one of which has spread death, suffering, and defeat through Austria and France these past weeks. Its cause may be economic, but its nature reveals itself more and more as political, with the theory of persuasion versus achievement by violence as the central issue. For the moment Americans, unlike the natives of continental Europe, are not forced by inescapable circumstance to take an active part in this controversy, but they would be well advised, and may soon be required, to take a position, and this means for every individual clearer thinking than has lately been evident in both radical and conservative publications and in street and house talk everywhere. For the failure of democratic liberalism to prevail in a Europe starved, broken, and disorganized by war and depression, has led here to a frequent bitterness and a still more frequent defeatism wherever peace, war, prosperity, poverty, government, and misgovernment are discussed. Those who believe that the present world muddle is due to the failure of democracy and liberalism are more and more inclined to attack the objectives of democracy and liberalism, as if there were, or had been, something poisonous and corrupting in these objectives. Their disgust with failure is so poignant that they carry over their denunciation from the imperfect means to the ends which the idealists of the nineteenth century hoped to achieve. It is the old story of the bird that fouls its own nest.

Too many welcome violence (like the German Nazis) not as an unhappy necessity in a society muddled beyond the powers of persuasion, but as a philosophy, a principle, a cure-all. They go back step by step in their thinking on that bloody and unhappy road over which history has so painfully evolved ideals of social justice, international coöperation, and conquest by the idea rather than by the sword, until they are ready to wipe out centuries of achievement:—to adopt principles of action that have always been disastrous for the mass of humanity, and to relinquish gains in human freedom which have been secured by infinite struggle. It is not a question with them of how much has to be yielded to necessity; they throw all away—tolerance, reason, personal liberty, independence of thought—like a frightened soldier in retreat. It may be sentimental to proclaim in the world of 1934 that all problems can be settled by the principles of freedom and equality, and foolish to suppose that we can at last, and especially now, put aside all resort to force and trust to human nature, but it is still more weak and absurd to expect of violence what persuasion was unable to accomplish, or to stop wanting a free spirit or social justice because our so-called democracy has not yet guaranteed either.

The most vital distinction in the West today is not between those who believe in a classless society and those who do not: it is not between German and French or Japanese and American; it is between those who, accepting the rising flood of violence everywhere as a setback to human aspirations, hope some day to control it, and to see the currents of mass murder,

tyranny, and fanaticism again subsiding,—and these others who stupidly believe that there is some mysterious health in a recurrence of barbarism which of itself will make the world over. In every serious utterance in every civilized language one sees this contrast subtly or openly expressed.

The unhappy Socialists of Austria, for example, are being taunted for a failure to resort to violence in time—despised for their naive trust in methods of peaceful evolution, when prompt and ruthless revolution was their only chance. The taunters may be right, but their thinking is shallow if they stop with the conclusion that an ineffective socialism has been crushed forever because it trusted to the perfectibility of man. This may have happened; but it is also true that the ruthless suppression of social democracy in Germany, followed by this bloody Austrian civil war, has converted millions of socialists inside and outside of Austria into communists, and taught them to rely upon violence and violent revolution as the only weapons that will serve. Thus violence begets violence, which begets violence in its turn. And two million men may die in the future because the honest Catholic peasant Dollfuss could not find a formula which would enable socialist Austrians to work with nationalists of the same country and race. Already the most intelligent and successful attempt to solve the housing problem which could be found anywhere in Europe or America, has been battered to pieces with its inhabitants,—a symbol of the end toward which this defeat of values inevitably leads.

This distinction between a schooling by necessity which may lead to vital changes in methods of government or economics not sacred in themselves, and a fatalistic yielding to that old, unhappy remedy for social disorder, force to the uttermost, has been clearly preserved in literature, which since the nineties of the last century has been more and more deeply concerned with the themes of violence and persuasion. And be it said in praise of literature that in the great modern languages—even in the war years and even now—it is necessary to go out of the field of pure art into pseudo-history and pseudo-philosophy and pseudo-science to find these issues as confused as they have been and are in the popular mind. Literary art has been acutely aware of the coming struggle for power by violence. It has been sensitive from Kipling on to new types of ruthlessness. It has been acutely sensitive to the horror of the simple man dragged by forces beyond his control into conflicts where death and mutilation were no more agonizing than his sense of useless sacrifice. It has been sensitive to the new spiritual menace of a kind of war which is not a glamour, a glory, and a dangerous life, but a fatalism that grips and then deadens the imagination. But no poem, no play, no novel of first-rate quality has been so stupidly insensitive to the human qualities that we have so laboriously built since the end of the Dark Ages, as to celebrate violence as an end in itself. Only politicians, fanatics, sadists, neurotics, and a stupidly impressionable populace are capable of that sin against the Holy Ghost.

According to recent reports from London H. G. Wells is about to embark upon his first film. He is planning a portrayal of civilization a century and a half from the present when the machine will be supreme, and gigantic forces will be released at the turn of a switch. He has taken as a tentative title, "Whither Mankind?"



"IT'S THE INQUIRING REPORTER."

To the Editor: *Rebuttal on the Liberal Critics*

From Bernard Smith

SIR: It would be absurd for me even to attempt to reply, in the space allowed me for a letter, to Mr. J. Donald Adams's long article and your editorial on my piece, "The Liberals Grow Old." But I cannot resist the temptation to explain why I feel that my analysis of liberal criticism has not only not been answered but has in fact been confirmed.

My essay had just one purpose and one point: the purpose was to picture the melancholy state of liberal criticism, the point to indicate that American literature will be neither guided nor inspired by liberal criticism in the future. I made no prophecies, I offered no substitutes, I recommended no programs.

In your editorial you practically admitted that my portrait of the liberals was substantially correct, but you went on to say that I am wrong in what I would have them do. I submit that I said nothing about what I would have them do. And if you are really convinced that skepticism is a virtue beneficial to American literature in its present condition, I cannot argue with you. I can only say that I disagree. I must add this: you attack "Marxists" by accusing them of making various ridiculous statements about Poe, Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, and Miss Cather; I know of no Marxist who made such statements, and certainly I did not make them.

Mr. Adams's article was, of course, a masterpiece of irrelevancy. Only half a column out of his seven columns dealt with my own essay. It is ironical that in half of that half a column he argued that I was wrong about Ludwig Lewisohn, while only two pages away was a letter from Mr. Lewisohn which amply justified my position. Mr. Lewisohn confessed that once he was a liberal and that liberalism is rootless, but since he has given all that up, said he, and has gone back to an orthodox religion—the religion of his fathers—it is not true that he is bitter and alone. I submit that for a man like Mr. Lewisohn to return to his fathers is an act out of bitterness and loneliness. What has Mr. Adams to say to that and to Mr. Lewisohn's repudiation of liberalism?

In that other half a column Mr. Adams said I was right about Van Wyck Brooks but for the wrong reason. That is Jesuitry. . . . However, although it is entirely beside the point, I am not unwilling to enter into a discussion with you or Mr. Adams about Marxism, communism, liberty, or individualism. But not now. I should like you

and Mr. Adams first to consider a few questions, so that we may have equivalent understandings of certain primary facts.

You challenge the Marxists by announcing that "man is more than a formula." Who conceived man as a formula—the bourgeois economists and philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or Marx and Lenin?

Mr. Adams quotes a passage by Lunarcharsky as an accepted principle of Marxist criticism. Has he never been told that Lunarcharsky spoke for himself only and that most Soviet critics disagreed with him and attacked him?

Mr. Adams sneers at the communist striving for universal material security and suggests that it is the chief ideal of the movement. Those whose eyes and hearts have been open these past few years need not comment on such a sneer—but has Mr. Adams never heard that communist philosophers are interested in material security simply because it releases man for the enjoyment of leisure, love, nature, and art?

Mr. Adams declares triumphantly that literary criticism is concerned with character and morals as well as sociology. What Marxist has denied it?

Mr. Adams defends individualism. Is he talking about economics or personality? Has he never encountered a communist attack upon regimentation—such as that produced by American life?

Mr. Adams's peroration is a plea for courage. Courage for what?

I could go on endlessly. Let me end by assuring Mr. Adams that his wild and unconsidered remark about communism being negative and cowardly is unworthy of him; that his remark about character being more often the product of heredity than environment will be astonishing news to the great geneticists (Professors T. H. Morgan, H. Muller, Laucelot Hogben, and J. B. S. Haldane); and that his hint that science is no longer materialistic will be, to most scientists, the repetition of a familiar and annoying fallacy. Mr. Adams should remember that when Millikan, Edington, and Jeans write on philosophy they write as private citizens and not as scientists. Mr. Adams, read tomorrow Professor H. Levy's "The Universe of Science."

It has all been very edifying, and amusing.

BERNARD SMITH.

New York City.

From J. Donald Adams

SIR: In the article in which I replied to Mr. Smith I took the trouble, before explaining my objections to his thesis, to reproduce its substance as accurately as I could. It is unfortunate that in his references to Dr. Canby and myself, Mr. Smith has not exercised a similar caution.

Mr. Smith now argues that I wrote irrelevantly to his contention. What could be more relevant than to demonstrate that the whole drift of that contention was beside the point so far as literature and literary criticism are concerned? That was what my article undertook to do.

So far as Mr. Lewisohn is concerned, whatever may have happened to his liberalism has no bearing upon my article. I referred to him and to Mr. Brooks only

(Continued on page 515)

The Saturday Review recommends

This Group of Current Books:

COME IN AT THE DOOR. By WILLIAM MARCH. *Smith & Haas.* How an early experience in horror shadows a boy's life shown in a novel of the South.

THE IDEA OF NATIONAL INTEREST. By CHARLES A. BEARD. *Macmillan.* A study of America's foreign relations.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN. By SIGNE TØGSGVIG. *Harcourt, Brace.* The biography of an ugly duckling.

This Less Recent Book:

PORTRAIT OF A DIPLOMATIST. By HAROLD NICOLSON. *Houghton Mifflin.* A delightful biography of the author's father.