

## Surrealists and Neo-Romantics

AFTER PICASSO. By James Thrall Soby.  
New York: Dodd Mead & Co. Hartford:  
Edwin Valentine Mitchell. 1935. \$3.

Reviewed by ALFRED H. BARR, JR.

IN Paris before the war the advance guard of painting moved from the decorative violence of Matisse and his companions through the various periods of Cubism to an ever narrower concentration upon the esthetics of formal design. The experience of looking at a painting was often reduced to tasting the arrangement of quasi-geometrical patterns. Subject matter and its associations were sometimes entirely eliminated.

The puritanical tradition of the Cubists and their even purer successors is by no means dead. Painters of the 1930s, both old and young, still paint squares and circles with an air of virtue and discovery in spite of the fact that excellent squares and circles were painted twenty years ago. But to the advance guard of today such painting even as a *reductio ad absurdum* is no longer interesting.

Boredom with esthetic purity and "plastic values" expressed itself during the war in the aggressive anarchy of Dadaism. After the war, the Dadaists, both painters and writers, converged on Paris from Switzerland and Germany. Out of Dada with Freud as midwife sprang Surrealism. A little later than Surrealism but far less conspicuous another movement emerged which has recently been called Neo-Romanticism.

"After Picasso" is an account of these two Parisian movements—their common rejection of Cubist esthetics; their frequent dependence upon so-called "literary" qualities of sentiment, anecdote,

mood; their insistence in short upon the validity and interest of subject matter. Mr. Soby is especially interested in the Neo-Romantics. He demonstrates their admiration for the pathos of Picasso's early work and the melancholy of Chirico's colonnades and monuments. Bérard, Tchelitchev, Berman, Tonny, and Léonide are each given several pages of criticism which is far from unmixed eulogy. Mr. Soby sees clearly the flimsiness of some of their paintings and their frequent sentimentality, spiritual lassitude, and dejection. An excess of bone and sinew is not, after all, to be expected in a movement generated by "nostalgia."

The Surrealist painters are introduced by a long and apposite chapter on the literary aspects of the movement's pursuit of the marvellous and anti-rational. Then follow analyses of the principal Surrealist artists, the painters Ernst, Masson, Miro, Pierre Roy, Tanguy, Picasso, and Dali, the sculptor Giacometti, and the photographer Man Ray. Of them Dali is the most conspicuous and the most popular. He lavishes upon his little pictures of "paranoiac obsessions," psychoanalytic jokes, and Freudian atrocities a technique as beautifully precise as that with which fifteenth century Flemings painted angels and holy (though sometimes Surrealist) miracles.

It is noteworthy how few of the Neo-Romantics and Surrealists are French. Paris maintains its precarious position as the center of the art world through her tradition of tolerant hospitality rather than through the leadership of French artists, at least so far the younger generation is concerned.

Mr. Soby's method is more scholarly than that of the usual writer on modern art; facts form a sound scaffolding for the brief examination of philosophical, moral, psychological, social as well as artistic



values. The illustrations are admirably, sometimes brilliantly, selected and they are almost all referred to in the text.

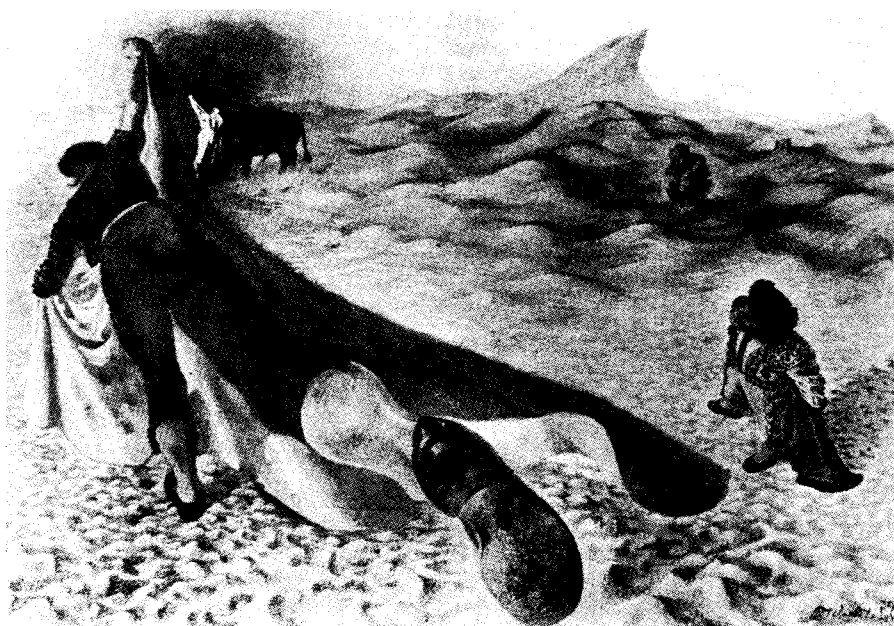
In drawing conclusions Mr. Soby avoids general comparisons with other post-War movements though with the courage of enthusiasm he believes Dali, Berman, and Bérard to be the finest young contemporary artists. Many critics and collectors will contest these valuations, but all should be grateful to Mr. Soby for a lucid, interesting, and much needed book.

Alfred H. Barr, Jr., is head of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

## Two Miles High

LIVING HIGH: *At Home in the Far Andes.* By Alicia O'Reardon Overbeck. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company. 1935. \$3.

MRS. OVERBECK'S chronicle constitutes a study in adaptability. She and her family lived and kept house in the Bolivian Andes at an elevation of some 12,000 feet, and in the face of many inconveniences and a thorough isolation from her own kind she preserved not only her balance but an incorrigible sense of humor. Their home was a tent-house, fortunately with adequate bathroom facilities, and their neighbors, with few exceptions, were natives. The book is largely a record of the ordinary folk with whom this family came in contact and of the inconsequential events that took place; and because it is forthright and understanding and spicily set down, it is all vastly entertaining. Dozens of real people move through its pages, including Bolivians of varying stations, English and American visitors, and a rather tragic group of professional ladies. The descriptions are always graphic, frequently amusing, and occasionally they carry a poignant note. Mrs. Overbeck has achieved the result of making the reader wish he had been one of the family.



THE BULL FIGHT, By TCHELITCHEW

This painting and the German photograph above reproduced from "After Picasso"

# Polishing the Brass Check

*FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.* By George Seldes. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company. 1935. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ALEXANDER L. CROSBY

**N**EWSPAPER readers who like to believe that the Associated Press is unbiased, who accept the *New York Times* as infallible, and who doubt that the American press generally is corrupted by advertising and business should avoid Mr. Seldes's book—or brace themselves for a rough ride.

The author, after working as a newspaperman for a quarter-century, has turned back to investigate a shameful history of felonies and misdemeanors committed against newspaper readers. He admits that in his salad days he was an accessory. Bringing his evidence well up into the year 1935 he has put together the most substantial and startling appraisal of the modern newspaper ever published. It is better than Sinclair's "The Brass Check" because the writer knows his subject from the inside.

Mr. Seldes has a broad background, which explains why the book is crowded—perhaps overcrowded—with documentation. He began his newspaper career in Pittsburgh, went to France as war correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, and remained abroad to write the news from Moscow and Rome until he was asked to leave both capitals. His book shows that he has been collecting material from the day he began as a cub, but the volume is not a personal history.

The press is guilty, Mr. Seldes believes, of consistent and venal betrayal of its readers. He points to the stubborn optimism of the newspapers as the depression neared and finally arrived. He does not permit the publishers and editors to excuse themselves by pleading ignorance of economic law. "The press," he argues, "which spends millions of dollars on a Snyder-Gray or a Hauptmann case, could have hired for a few hundred dollars the best unbiased economic brains in America; it could have investigated unemployment instead of publishing the figures of interested parties; it could have investigated the reports of living conditions, of discontent among farmers, of the unrest of labor." None of these things was done, he concludes, because "Big Business is the great Sacred Golden Bull of the entire press."

Domination of the newspapers by business interests is the theme of the book. Mr. Seldes cites large sums spent by railroads, bankers, packers, and utility companies to buy editorial opinion. He tells what newspapers sold out, and to whom. He shows how news is suppressed and how propaganda poisons the reader's opinions. He names the newspapers

owned by the Montana copper companies and, by contrast, pictures the *Butte Daily Bulletin*, a free paper published for many years "in an editorial room in which stood six loaded Winchester rifles and where revolvers lay alongside the typewriters of the reporters." A businessman's boycott killed the paper in 1930. Mr. Seldes believes that if every paper equalled the *Bulletin's* independence the country could escape war and depression.

Two of the strongest chapters are devoted to the *New York Times* and the Associated Press. Recalling the blunders of the *Times* correspondence on Russia during the counter-revolution (which resulted in Walter Duranty's assignment to Moscow), Mr. Seldes asserts that the paper is equally culpable today for employing a fascist as its Rome correspondent. He rounds up the scattered assaults on the integrity of the Associated Press, particularly on the count of anti-labor bias, and concludes:

The Associated Press, in short, seems always on the side of authority; it appears to make no difference to this great organization whether authority is a great president or a crooked secretary of the interior, a bloodthirsty dictator or a mild constitutional ruler, a city policeman or a steel company's hired thug. If the Associated Press had reported the Boston Tea Party it would probably have been an indignant story of Reds defying authority and destroying private property.

Even less kind are his discussions of the strikebreaking agency maintained by the American Newspaper Publishers' Association, and of the same association's fight against the child labor amendment. An excellent account of the admitted responsibility of the San Francisco publishers for crushing the general strike is given.

The cry of "Muckraker!" may be one answer to "Freedom of the Press." Arithmetically it would be justified. Mr. Seldes has devoted eighteen chapters to the sins of the press and only one to the shining exceptions. Such a gifted writer as Walter B. Pitkin could easily reverse the ratio and prove that the reader's best friend is

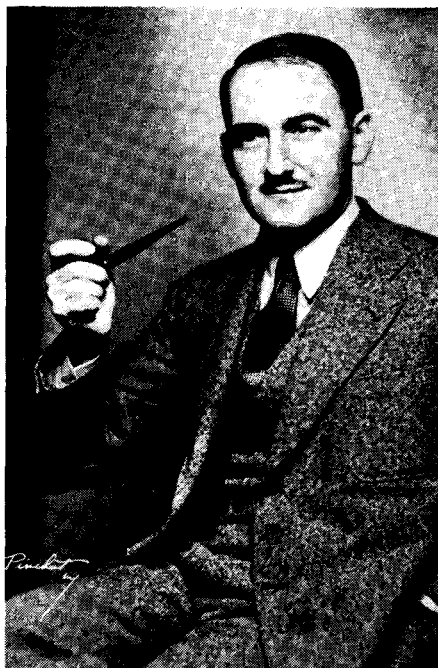
his newspaper. But it would be hard to deny that publishers have invited attack by claiming special privilege, and that one privilege has been to perfume with piety whatever muck exists. If the canons of the American Society of Newspaper Editors were universally observed, Mr. Seldes suggests, there would be no need for his book. The canons are reprinted and the reader is invited to judge for himself.

For good deeds, the book singles out the *New York Post*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the Scripps-Howard papers, and others. How to elevate the entire press to rigid standards of public service is a problem that Mr. Seldes does not pretend to solve. He shows warm

enthusiasm for the two-year-old American Newspaper Guild, however, and seems to feel that if the publishers would "let real newspapermen run the newspapers," most evils would be cured. The real newspapermen would consider that just dandy; it is no exaggeration to say that thousands of them have grown gray with frustration. But the publishers aver that their chief quarrel with the Newspaper Guild stems from a conviction that the Guild aims to do just what Mr. Seldes suggests.

Whatever the solution, its arrival could be hastened if every one of the 36,709,010 newspaper buyers in this country read and pondered "Freedom of the Press." There are a few tedious spots toward the end where the text is overloaded with names, and the author sometimes travels from one episode to another with more speed than cohesion. But Mr. Seldes knows how to tell a story and he has presented one that is too important to be missed. No matter how vigorously some readers may dissent from his conclusions, there is no loophole for the charge of malice or triviality. He has worked carefully and dispassionately to prove that there is no free press. The accusation cannot be ignored.

Alexander L. Crosby has been working for several months, in collaboration with Heywood Broun, on a book "appraising the integrity and motivation of American newspapers and press associations." Mr. Broun is president of the Newspaper Guild (see page 12).



GEORGE SELDES