

# In the Grand Manner

**THE FILIBUSTER:** *The Career of William Walker.* By Laurence Greene. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1937. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM O. SCROGGS

**F**EW Americans today have even heard of William Walker. Yet when his adventures came to a tragic end in 1860, he had probably received as much attention in the newspapers of this country as any other American of his time. He had given many unpleasant hours to politicians who keep their ears close to the ground; he had caused intense annoyance to the dominant powers in Wall Street; and for five years he had been a thorn in the side of statesmen and diplomats on three continents. A few months after Walker met his death before a Honduran firing squad, the United States plunged into a great Civil War, and in the midst of its epic events the exploits of the greatest of the filibusters were quickly forgotten. Most historians since then have merely mentioned Walker in passing.

Some twenty years ago this reviewer published a laborious volume in which he sought to tell the true story about Walker. But another Great War was then raging, and its epic events again made the filibuster's activities seem trivial. The time is now ripe for another book on Walker, and let us hope that no new war will again arise and spoil the story as



WILLIAM WALKER

Mr. Greene tells it. This reviewer feels flattered that Mr. Greene has accepted the results of his labors of two decades ago and has recognized them in a special note at the end of the volume; but under such circumstances detached criticism may prove a bit difficult.

Just how a homely, shy little man, weighing not much more than a hundred pounds, who had failed successively in

the practice of medicine, law, and journalism, could suddenly appear in Central America as a favored soldier of fortune, seize the Presidency of Nicaragua, obtain recognition of its government by the United States and the endorsement of his enterprise by the Democratic Party in its national platform of 1856, is hard to understand unless one is fairly familiar with the political, economic, and social conditions in the United States and the Caribbean area in the 1850's. Mr. Greene writes entertainingly and at length of the filibuster's personal achievements and blunders. One can only wish that he had analyzed more fully the milieu which made possible such an amazing career. One wishes also that the author had not followed the example of the new-school biographers by attempting to psychoanalyze his character. He gives his work the supreme Freudian touch by describing Walker, whose morals were irreproachable, as "quite possibly the victim of a sexual disorder," and he pictures him repeatedly as eating his heart out for a sweetheart long dead. This is overstepping the limits of the historic. The plain bare facts of Walker's life are romantic enough in themselves.

I myself agree in large measure with the author's estimate of William Walker, but I cannot accept Mr. Greene's characterization of the filibuster as "treacherous." And having conversed many years ago with people who once knew Walker and with one of the filibuster's soldiers, I am convinced that Mr. Greene hardly does justice to Walker's rank and file when he describes them as "a rabble."

## Royal Romance

**CATHERINE AND POTEMKIN.** *An Imperial Romance.* By Jerome Dreifuss. New York: Covici-Friede. 1937. \$3.

Reviewed by KATHARINE ANTHONY

**F**OR our essentially practical age the romantic life of Catherine the Great seems to have a strong and never-failing attraction. It opens a page of history which, though perfectly true and authentic, is as picturesque, strange, and extravagant as any mystery story. In fact, the more documented it is, the more extraordinary does it become. Mr. Dreifuss's book, based on a newly discovered correspondence between the Empress and her Taurian Prince, only adds color and drama to the existing history.

To some it may sound sentimental to call the Russians a "dark" people; but it is a word which Russians in Russia apply in ordinary speech frequently to them-

selves. The quality, if one doubts its existence, may be found well exemplified in the character of Gregory Alexandrovich Potemkin (called by the Russians "Potiomkin"), who played an important part in the life and foreign policies of Catherine the Great. Prominent as he was in history, Potemkin has always remained an elusive and challenging figure. Prince de Ligne, who fought with him in the Russian-Turkish Wars, wrote a brief

account of his character, but it was made up chiefly of anecdotes and marvels. No one has ever yet succeeded in capturing and impaling his strange personality. Indeed, it is doubtful whether any one except Dostoevsky ever could have told the story of Potemkin.

One of Catherine the Great's lovers, he came the nearest to being also a friend. They had no children but they shared a glorious dream—the dream of a Russian Em-

pire which should extend through Turkey on into the Orient. The wrecking of that dream was the end of their relationship, and the end of their relationship was the end of Potemkin's life. "Without her he was lost . . . dead." He actually died of a malarial fever, contracted in the southern swamps, and so in a certain sense he did give up his life as a sacrifice for his great dream.

Mr. Dreifuss's book tells the whole of Catherine the Great's life, before and after Potemkin, but the greater part of it is devoted to Potemkin's period. His chief authority is the series of notes and letters discovered by the Soviet government in the Russian Archives and brought to this country by Mr. Karl Bickel and the United Feature Syndicate. There is no doubt that the letters are genuine. They have supplied the author with a great many interesting facts about the amazing lovers and enabled him to do some picturesque writing about Russia. His characterization of Potemkin, however, still leaves most of the questions about him unanswered. Mr. Dreifuss over-simplifies the Potemkin of the Russian-Turkish Wars, the Potemkin of Catherine the Great's boudoir, and the Potemkin of the heart of Russia. The result is a conception derived entirely from the new anti-imperialistic point of view of that country, and, like any over-drawn portrait, it does not convince.

One of the most interesting revelations of the letters quoted in this book is the fact that the Empress sometimes addressed Potemkin as "My husband." No one has hitherto suspected a marriage between the two. The possibility of a secret marriage is a wholly new idea, dramatic in its possibilities, suggested for the first time in this book.



CATHERINE THE GREAT

# English '37

## The Novelist and the Reader: XI

THE modern novel demands of the writer a severe discipline and an expert skill. We must not forget that it also makes formidable demands on the reader. Much of the best fiction of the age can be understood only by an unremitting application of the reader's full intelligence. If his attention lapses for as much as a page he may miss something on which his understanding of the whole book is designed to hinge. A single sentence in the text, unemphasized or even deliberately muffled, may close a circuit where, without it, the potential that has been built up would not be discharged. The novel may be so written that nine-tenths of it is left unwritten. The reader is confronted with action or emotion which would be quite aberrant except in relation to the entire development preceding it, most of which may be suggested rather than expressed. He finds himself thrust into scenes whose relevance to what has gone before depends entirely on his inference; and he may have to identify not only their function in relation to the rest but even their time, place, and characters. He must bring to bear on the page before him a considerable general knowledge, a focussed attention, a memory amounting to total recall, and a rapidly working logical analysis; he must assimilate formal and psychological symbols, he must complete curves only small arcs of which have been given him, and he must follow simultaneously several complex movements which may be made additionally intricate by the novelist's deliberate deception.

Thus the modulation of thematic material in "Point Counter Point" has a dynamic meaning in the novel, and the process by which the image of Leopold Bloom's dead son comes to affect the life of Stephen Dedalus is of the greatest importance in "Ulysses." Yet either could be missed by an intelligent reader if he devoted less than his full intelligence to the book. And the modern reader must be prepared to deal not only with such subtleties which are integral in the novel's equilibrium, but even with gratuitous ambiguities which have nothing to do with it but are supplied from without. No one ever separated the various ages of the idiot in Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury," for instance, or even realized that different ages were being presented, without going back and untangling a calculated and quite unnecessary confusion; no one ever realized, until he had been systematically compelled to misunderstand a good many pages, that Quentin was not one person but two, of different sexes and different generations. All the values of the characters,

their relationships, and the situation in which they exist could have been served without this mystification, which might properly be called illegitimate except that by means of it Faulkner achieves an effect which it is clearly his privilege to prefer above such values. But though criticism must grant him that privilege, clearly the reader is under no obligation to do so, and a resentment of trickery in Faulkner may broaden into the rejection of such unintelligibility as that of "Work in Progress." If, as he is reported to have said, Joyce will treat with his readers only when they have mastered his method as they would master a foreign language, then his art has ceased to be the art of fiction.

But one need not deal with the extremes or eccentricities of modern fiction in order to perceive the change that has come into it. Neither John Dos Passos nor Virginia Woolf is an extremist, but the reader of "The Big Money" and "Mrs. Dalloway" is required to do many things he is not called upon to do in, say, "David Copperfield" and "Adam Bede." We need not ask whether "The Big Money" is a better novel than "David Copperfield" or a worse one; they are incommensurable. Yet the measure of their disparity is not what criticism is apt to decide it is. "The Big Money" has an enormous canvas and many characters, but so has "David Copperfield." Its lines of force move intricately, but so do those of "David Copperfield," which, in fact, has one of the most intricate and mutually dependent situations ever put into fiction. If Dos Passos manipulates large masses to suggest social implications, so does Dickens. If "The Big Money" is a long novel, "David Copperfield" is even longer. The difference is quite simple: "David Copperfield" is far easier to read.

That is an immensely important fact, whose corollaries we could not even outline here without writing another series. There is no implication that Dickens was a shallower or more superficial novelist, that he knew less about mankind or felt less passionately, that he was in any respect the inferior; the contrary of all those propositions could be the more persuasively argued. But also the fact that "David Copperfield" is easier to read does not imply that it is the better novel, nor that it gives more pleasure or final satisfaction to the reader. The difference is not of degree but of kind.

The modern novel has more mass and, in particular, it has a greater tension. We cannot follow that fact very far without getting into arbitrary generalizations about the modern consciousness, a phrase which has little useful meaning. But fiction today produces an engagement be-

tween the novel and the reader which rests on an active coöperation not required in Dickens's time. "Mrs. Dalloway" is in no sense a more profound novel than "Adam Bede," or a wiser or more knowing or more moving one. But in reading it one must give oneself up to it far more completely. In order to stay aboard it at all, one must exercise all his attention and all his balance. As a result, the immediate moment, the immediate scene, has a momentary illusion of being, if not more real, at least far more important—it has a higher potential.

The mass and tension of modern fiction have opened up areas of experience, states of consciousness, and a variety of themes if not of emotions that the novel did not deal with before. This development has been achieved only by an immense sophistication of technique, and the reader's adjustment to it has accelerated the process. The more habituated to technical sophistication the modern audience becomes, the more technique may try to accomplish; the more habitually and completely the reader coöperates with the novelist, the greater mass and tension fiction may acquire. But the development has also brought about other conditions that must be taken into account.

Notably it has produced a specialization of audiences. "David Copperfield" can be enjoyed by anyone who reads novels at all and the finest intelligence is not superior to it, but Joyce's selective audience is anesthetic to, say, Hugh Walpole, and intelligence is not only uncomfortable but downright anguished in the presence of "Gone With the Wind." Dickens could reach any audience, but Miss Mitchell cannot reach the large one which has been habituated to the interests and methods—especially the methods—of the best modern fiction.

Yet the astronomical sale of such a book does not mean merely that a million people like the clichés of sentiment and of melodrama. It means also that the large audience which accepts the best modern fiction sometimes finds the bur-

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## The Saturday Review of LITERATURE

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THE SATURDAY REVIEW is indexed in the "Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature."

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