

# Plays of Protest

**THE BEST SHORT PLAYS OF THE SOCIAL THEATRE.** Edited by William Kozlenko. New York: Random House. 1939. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

**T**HEATRICAL preoccupations change rapidly, if not always very sensibly. Mr. Kozlenko has wasted little time in incorporating recent short, Leftist plays in this volume; the plays themselves were, as such matters go, written only yesterday. The conditions against which they are, in general, pointed remain unmodified; the questions they would answer remain as immediate as they were a season or two ago, when hardly a curtain raised on a drama of importance which did not also rise on a protest against things as they are, under capitalism. Yet already Mr. Odets's "Waiting for Lefty," Mr. Irwin Shaw's "Bury the Dead," and Mr. Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock" acquire a faintly historical tinge.

The observation, while true enough, is obviously a little random. The validity of drama is not affected by fad; if we are now hymning on half our stages the superior virtues of American democracy, the plays which basically contest the sufficiency of that democracy may still be important plays. Several of these, I think, are, although it would be hard to find any of them in which the author's purpose is fully realized. Not even, I think on reading it over again, "Waiting for Lefty," which seems to me by a considerable margin the best of them. The scenes are uneven and, as was several times the case in the first year or two of Mr. Odets's interesting career, the ending comes uncomfortably close to trickery. A properly lighted group of actors chanting "strike! strike! strike!" has theatrical effectiveness, certainly. So does the American flag on a coffin. So does, for that matter, a good deal of the earlier part of Mr. Shaw's "Bury the Dead."

Mr. Odets has, of course, infinitely more than a crafty knowledge of what will rouse 'em. He has, above any of the other playwrights included in this volume, an ability to write dialogue that is pungent and revealing. And, even more important, what he wants to reveal about the people of his plays is true about all people, including those not in his plays; including those whose idiom of thought and speech is superficially quite different. That abil-

ity, among other things, makes him the most interesting of the younger American playwrights.

Mr. Shaw's play remains, to my mind, good theater up to a point, and startlingly effective in original idea. And it still seems a pity that his men who would not let themselves be buried had no more to say for themselves than ordinary, living, baffled men. It is probably a personal allergy of some sort which bars me

from any appreciation whatever of "The Cradle Will Rock." Paul Green's "Hymn to the Rising Sun" is, on the page as on the stage, a bitter, tonic picture.

Mr. Kozlenko's own "This Earth Is Ours" scatters a bit, but retains a large measure of vitality; "Plant in the Sun," by Ben Bengal, remains in the "promising" class; and the Siftons' "Give All thy Terrors

to the Wind" is effective, but minor. Mr. Kozlenko has included "The Dog Beneath the Skin," by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, which is certainly pretty long for a short play. It also seems to me pretty undergraduate; another example of allergy, no doubt.

Richard Lockridge is the dramatic critic of the New York Sun.

## Fake Authors

(Continued from page 4)

script under my name, while he of course got the money that accrued and at the same time saved his family from disgrace.

My indignant classmates (not in collusion, because they'd run into the "real Booth Tarkington" separately) asked immediate authority from me to expose the impostor. (They'd been protesting, but the girls wouldn't listen.) I wired them both, instantly: "Please, please do not disturb the gentleman if he is signing books and giving them away because he naturally has to buy them and I get twenty-five cents royalty per copy. Let him alone."

In those days I was young and avicious.

Obviously an author who actually does write under a pseudonym offers a shining target for this sort of imposture. Consider the experiences of Ray Stannard Baker. As everybody who is conversant with current literature knows, Mr. Baker not only is the biographer of Woodrow Wilson and a noted writer on public affairs under his own name, but has written many books about the contentment of country life, under the name of David Grayson. For nearly twenty-four years

Mr. Baker has been intermittently amused and annoyed by the fact that there have been spurious "David Graysons" at large.

It began back in 1915, when he learned that a certain David R. Grayson was in Denver, claiming to be the author of "Hempfield," a David Grayson serial which was then running in the *American Magazine*. Mr. Baker wired that the man was an impostor; whereupon two Denver newspaper men cross-examined this David R. Grayson. Under pressure, he admitted that he had not actually written the David Grayson stories, but argued that he had sent so many letters to the man who was writing them that he felt he "had a share in them." Later he embroidered this theme somewhat: "Baker has been writing the published versions of David Grayson," he said; "I have been living them." He actually wired to Baker: "Folks here insist on confusing me with you. . . . I am neither affirming nor denying. Only for your sake I am preaching the gospel of contentment. . . . I claim nothing, only want to carry your policy." He also identified himself more fully as Selwyn David Grayson-Ramsay, thirty-nine years old, born in Rangoon, educated in the West Indies, in England, and at the University of Chicago; he said he was a former correspondent of the *Illustrated London News* and a nephew of Sir William Ramsay, the great chemist. A month or two later Grayson-Ramsay's bride confessed that she had married him under the impression that he was the David Grayson who was writing for the *American Magazine*.

Years went by and Mr. Baker heard no more. But in 1924 a "David Grayson" showed up in Pugh, Arkansas, visited a family for a week, made himself very agreeable, cashed a bad check on a St. Louis bank, and disappeared. At about the same time there was a "David Grayson" in Portland, Tennessee. And in 1935 one appeared in various Indiana villages, whose ingenuity was exceeded only by his charm.

This man was dark and slender, with iron gray hair, and gave his age as forty-nine. When he became involved in an automobile accident (in a borrowed car), he blithely informed the insurance company's investigator that his home address was Sunset Avenue, Amherst, Massachusetts (Mr. Baker's own address), and that his Massachusetts driving license—which he had mislaid—was in the name of Ray S. Baker. He also claimed to be related to Admiral Cary Grayson and loved to tell, with an air of proprietorship, all about My Own, Admiral Grayson's famous race-horse. And once, when he was visiting the postmaster in a small Indiana town, and heard that the postmaster was afraid of losing his job, "Mr. Grayson" magnanimously declared that although he had never in his life asked a political favor, he must do what he could for a friend: he would wire the Admiral and ask him to use his great in-



Clifford Odets

fluence in Washington. That evening he reported happily that the answer had come. It was brief: "O. K.—Cary."

For some time thereafter Mr. Baker's correspondence contained echoes of this gentleman's Indiana sojournings. "It seems like a dream now that you spent August, 1933, here in our village, and actually gave the impression that you were thoroughly enjoying yourself," said one letter. "My husband loves to tell the story about the old Indian that you told while making a brief address at the Old Settlers' celebration. . . . We were not aware when you were here that David Grayson was only your pen-name and that we were entertaining no less a person than the celebrated Ray Stannard Baker." And only last summer an Indiana family arrived by automobile at Amherst, drew up at Mr. Baker's house, and were somewhat dismayed at not meeting their dear old friend.

Is there, perhaps, something reminiscent of the Denver impostor in the fact that to some questioners this Indiana wanderer of 1933 claimed only that "he did the traveling and tramping around" while Baker "did the writing up"?

In 1936 a "David Grayson" arrived hatless and without funds at an inn in southern Tennessee, stayed for a time, charmed everybody at the inn, and left, with a hat and with funds, for Nashville—where, he said, he had left his car and chauffeur, and was scheduled to speak before a literary club. Early in May, 1938, Mr. Baker, in Amherst, received a board-bill from Tazewell, Tennessee. A little later there came a letter from another Tennessee town beginning, "We are enjoying a thoroughly wet day, which reminds us of the exceedingly wet Easter Sabbath when you worshipped with us." And a Tennessee lady forwarded to Amherst a handwritten manuscript which "David Grayson" had left behind in his ramblings. This manuscript Mr. Baker immediately recognized as a verbatim copy of something he had written himself, long before: it was Chapter IV of "The Friendly Road," by David Grayson, published in 1913.

More charming than ever, "Grayson" arrived last summer at Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Though he appeared without money or toothbrush, or more than one shirt—explaining, this time, that he had left his car and chauffeur at Asheville, in order to ramble unimpeded in search of material—so persuasive was he that he was soon established in one of the finest guest bedrooms in the local summer colony. He was much lionized, and impressed the elect of Blowing Rock as a "brilliant gentleman."

Distinguished in public address as in private conversation, he was prevailed upon to say a few helpful words to the Sunday school at a neighboring village, and wrote in a girl's autograph album:

We all lead double lives;  
One life is ours alone;  
The other all can see.

In Blowing Rock he let it be known that his real name was Ray Stannard Baker; and once he called for a Grayson book and read a chapter with the tears streaming down his cheeks.

A man of parts, it would seem. If you should meet him, from all accounts you will like him. But be assured that the Grayson books were written with no help from him whatsoever.

Few impostors thus make a career of it; most of them seem to operate more briefly. There was, for instance, the "Thornton Wilder" who was the life of the ship's company on a trans-Pacific voyage and particularly generous in the bar. There was the "Sinclair Lewis" who appeared in a Pennsylvania town—when the real Mr. Lewis was in Europe—and scolded the local reporters for not knowing his books better. There was the "Editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*" who cashed checks in the South—until the *Atlantic* printed an item to the effect that anybody south of Mason and Dixon's line who contemplated lending money to the Editor might well communicate with Boston first. There was the "Gertrude Atherton" who not only gave interviews but had the brilliant notion of sending photographs of herself to the newspapers—as the real Mrs. Atherton discovered when she began to receive clippings in which a face quite strange to her appeared over her name. And there was the "Rockwell Kent" who traveled across the country on the bounty of a series of groups of art-lovers—and who turned out to be none other than Mike Romanoff, that impostor-in-chief who usually passed himself off as a prince of the former ruling house of Russia. Mike had been befriended by the real Kent, and had been able, while visiting him, to equip himself handily with Kent family photographs. On the journey west, Mike would arrive in a town, proceed to the local bookstore, browse a bit, casually make himself known as Rockwell Kent, permit himself to be fêted by the resident connoisseurs of art and letters, cash a check or two (never on Kent's bank), and depart.

Hervey Allen has never, so far as he knows, been impersonated on the lecture platform, but since the success of "Anthony Adverse" he has been so troubled by people charging goods to his account that he has been forced to install a careful accounting system, to use a special order-blank when ordering goods, and to instruct all the firms with which his family deals to fill orders only when this blank is used and signed. Incidentally, his mail—including many crank effusions and an occasional threat, along with more agreeable letters—runs to some three hundred to five hundred pieces a week. And as for Margaret Mitchell, not only is she beset by cranks but she has been so often impersonated that a number of Southern newspapers have standing instructions to telephone her house and re-

verse the charges whenever a claimant to the authorship of "Gone with the Wind" appears in their vicinity. Thus does the public—or at least the irresponsible or crooked or psychopathic fringe of the public—reward its favorites.

These are only a few of the reported cases of literary impersonation. How many undetected and therefore unreported cases there may have been is anybody's guess. Often a writer suspects that he may have been impersonated but cannot be sure. Louis Bromfield, for example, frequently meets some one who says to him, "Of course I feel that I almost know you, you're such a good friend of Mr. Blank's and he's such a good friend of mine," or who refers to the time when he was in Erie or Cedar Rapids. Although Mr. Bromfield has never, so far as he is aware, laid eyes upon Mr. Blank, nor set foot in Erie or Cedar Rapids, it seems easier to him, and certainly is more gracious, to behave as if Mr. Blank were indeed an old friend and Erie an old stamping-ground of his; and thus he cannot be sure whether or not a pseudo-Bromfield has been at large. Even when a woman once said to him, "You aren't at all like the picture that a friend of mine has of you; it was taken with him and a girl friend and you had black hair and a mustache," how could Mr. Bromfield be positive that there was anything more here than somebody's pathetic attempt to gain prestige by pretending to an intimate acquaintance with prominent people?

To those readers who live in towns remote from the literary centers, and to lecture-organizers generally (except those who deal with recognized lecture-bureaus), I suggest, as the best protection against having their legs pulled, a reasonable skepticism. It may be well to remind them that most writers' photographs—usually libelous, to be sure, but helpful for purposes of identification—appear in the advertisements of their books. (Here at last is a real justification for a publishing practice which has always seemed to me curious—as if the entertainment value or instructiveness of a book could be gauged by a glance at the features of the author.) I suggest that they be particularly leery of anybody who claims to be writing popular books under a pseudonym. I suggest, in short, a constant awareness that there are fake authors abroad.

If, as a comparatively humble member of the writing craft, I shortly find myself in, let us say, a Pullman smoking car, and hear, by chance, some mention of this article, and admit to having written it, and if I thereupon see glassy eyes of suspicion turned upon me, then—and only then—will I be content, knowing that my warning has taken effect.

Frederick Lewis Allen, an editor of Harper's Magazine, is the author of "Only Yesterday." Reprint rights in the foregoing article are reserved.

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## A Character in the Florentine Drama

ALESSO BALDOVINETTI. By Ruth Wedgwood Kennedy. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1938. \$15.

Reviewed by G. HAYDN HUNTLEY

THIS book is probably the most beautiful of the year; certainly it sets a new standard for American publications on art. The splendid make-up of the volume introduces some novelties, such as the use of large numbers for notes, and running titles at the head of each page. A happy combination of superb photographs, excellent engravings, and perfect paper seems to have solved the difficult question of illustrating this kind of book. The number of illustrations is prodigal.

Mrs. Kennedy follows the historical, biographical method of reconstructing the personality of Alesso Baldovinetti, a minor Florentine painter of the *quattrocento*, who was much cited but little known. For the first time he appears as a complete and fairly important character in the exciting drama that Florence was producing in the fifteenth century under the guidance of great artists and great patrons. It was a century of innovations, and Baldovinetti made some contributions

in landscape, composition, and technique, although the author puts little emphasis on the last, which she regards as the "mere cookery" of painting—perhaps because Alesso's experiments, like Leonardo's, were most unfortunate. His designs for tarsia and terra-cotta decorations (a new attribution) as well as his work in mosaic and painted glass are illustrated and analyzed with as much care and insight as his paintings.

The book is far more than a recapitulation of known facts; it is, in truth, a fresh presentation of Florentine painting during one of its most inspired periods. Gentile de Fabriano, Masolino, Fra Angelico, Castagno, Pollaiuolo, and the Ghirlandaios are seen in a new light through their relationship to Baldovinetti. Despite the author's reliance on documents, chronicles, and all possible source material, the book is by no means dry. The writing is lucid and filled with apt phrases and illuminating comparisons with modern painters. While the book is scholarly in every sense of the word, it might well interest the layman in its exposition of the art historian's methods, which are more than a little akin to those of the writer of scientific detective stories. It would be well if the American public had more books of this quality.

G. Haydn Huntley is assistant professor of art at the University of Chicago.

## Cyril Clemens on Samuel L. Clemens

MY COUSIN MARK TWAIN. By Cyril Clemens. With an Introduction by Booth Tarkington. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: The Rodale Press. 1939. \$2.

Reviewed by BERNARD DeVOTO

THE fact that he was writing about a humorist seems to have laid on Mr. Clemens an obligation to be funny, and he begins fulfilling it with his title-page. Unhappily, he doesn't let the reader in on all his jokes. Thus you will miss the whimsy of his title unless you understand the degree of cousinship involved: Mr. Clemens's great-grandfather was, I believe, a cousin of Mark Twain's father. Again, the dedication is one of the most amusing ever written, but Mr. Clemens is unfair to his own humor for he neglects to inform the reader that he didn't write it, that in fact his second cousin twice removed wrote it for the 1867 edition of "The Jumping Frog." The insertion of an Introduction by Booth Tarkington is even subtler stuff. It is dated November 10, 1938 and it is presented as an Introduction to this book. But it is an exact transcription of the last three-quarters of the Introduction which Mr. Tarkington wrote for the Limited Editions Club 1933 edition of "Huckleberry Finn." Mr. Clemens takes his fun where he finds it.

"The Jumping Frog" is no longer protected by copyright, of course, but Albert Bigelow Paine's "Biography" is. Nevertheless, Mr. Clemens appears to feel an honest admiration for it: in fact, Part I of his book, the first 161 pages, rests on it almost exclusively. He repudiates Mr. Paine's arrangement and frequently garbles his information, but likes his style. I counted up to two hundred passages (and then stopped counting) whose phraseology is so closely modeled on Mr. Paine's that tact would have suggested putting them in quotation marks. Mr. Clemens does not improve on his source; his method, an injudicious one in my opinion, is to omit the biography while retaining the anecdotes. Sometimes he tries to improve on the anecdotes but seldom, I think, succeeds. The passages of Part I that do not rest on Mr. Paine are usually irrelevant.

Part II of the book has no clear relationship to Part I but harmonizes with it in being dull. It consists of anecdotes told to Mr. Clemens by various people who either did or did not know Mark Twain and complimentary remarks about Mark and his books which Mr. Clemens has obtained from various celebrities who either did or did not know what they were talking about. None of the anecdotes are very good and most of the compliments are vapid.

The book is disorderly; it has no arrangement, sequence, discrimination, or documentary support; it is not a biography and is devoid of criticism; practically all of its material is familiar and what isn't familiar is unimportant. I could learn to live without it but I suppose collectors will have to have it. It is a Mark Twain item and, at a guess, it is going to be a rare one.

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
MURDER MASKS MIAMI Rufus King (Crime Club: \$2.)	Aconite and strangling does for two women in Miami. Lt. Valcour, vacationing, picks up thread, and lures killer to trap.	Told in machine-gun dialogue; filled with garish characters—wealthy wasters, usually boiled, moving at top speed to fiery finish.	Beaut
CRIME TO MUSIC Peter Drax (Appleton-Century: \$2.)	Wastrel English officer steals pearls, pawns 'em, murders pawnbroker. Insp. Thompson takes up case from scratch.	London underworld life described with color and realism. Steps in weakling killer's descent to Avernus thrillingly traced.	En-gross-ing
SECRET SCEPTRE Francis Gerard (Dutton: \$2.)	London jewel robbery starts sleuth Meredith on sanguinary trail of armored killers, leading to secret castle in wild Wales.	The Holy Grail, a wild Irishman, an American villain who talks cockney, medieval mumbo-jumbo, and plentiful excitement.	Thriller
THE EMERALD MURDER CASE Dennis Dean (Phoenix: \$2.)	Aged N. Y. spinster sniffs poison, perishes, and her jewels vanish. Detective Wycherly investigates and comes to odd conclusion.	Cleverly worked out affair, despite some all-fired long narrating and surprise ending that cracks mystery code of ethics.	Good
THE NIGHT BEFORE MURDER Steve Fisher (Hillman-Curl: \$2.)	Chromium - fluoride kills aging actress in Mamaroneck mansion. Two other unfortunates die before "hick cop" West cracks case.	Extremely wacky lot of theatrical folk rant, rave, and emote through yarn with clever murder-device — and not much else.	Fustian
MURDER IN A SHELL Maurice Beam and Sumner Britton (Messner: \$2.)	Coxswain of Gotham Univ. crew slain by cyanide as race ends. Poisoned gin kills another. Lieut. Whitehall unriddles it.	Descriptions of "great big lovable animals" in action, love, and fist-cuffs hold interest. Sleuthing is adequate.	Pour le sport