

PERSONAL HISTORY
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jealousies, his poetic exaltation of the family and the land and his self-reproach at his "bourgeois happiness" are a reflection of his inner struggle between realism and God.

Some of the Answers

ON BEING AN AUTHOR. By Vera Brittain. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 218 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by HERSCHEL BRICKELL

ANY honest book by a successful writer should inevitably be of some help to those who are determined to learn to put words on paper so chosen and arranged as to arouse the interest of other members of the human race, and Miss Brittain's, as might be expected, is an honest book.

Her small book, called "On Becoming a Writer in England," is made considerably more useful here by the editing of Dr. George Savage of the English Department of the University of Washington, who has given it the necessary American touches, and who introduces it in terms that seem somewhat extravagant in the light of its actual accomplishment.

This is not really a "manual for writers," as its blurb asserts, since it is a very personal book, which gives it its value. The author does not pre-

tend to know all the answers, or even very many of them, outside the fields she herself has cultivated: journalism, the novel, and the personal narrative. The truth is that no one person can cover all the branches of writing, even cursorily, unless he be either a hack without a conscience or a racketeer.

Speaking for herself, Miss Brittain confesses that she could not have been anything else except a writer. She declares that no matter how difficult it is to learn to write, as difficult for most people as to learn to play the piano or to paint well, the writer has the advantage of being able to rid himself of his sufferings by writing about his troubles, besides, if he is fortunate, winning fame and fortune.

As for how much can be taught about writing, she gives the only de-

cent answer there is: people with talent may be helped to learn to write, people without talent cannot. Her recipe for handling the awful task of disposing of unsolicited manuscripts, which haunts us all in this business, is to tell the truth, a drastic prescription, but the only serviceable one.

Dr. Savage adds a good deal of information about American prizes, fellowships, and other aids to writers, but neither his bibliography nor Miss Brittain's is selective or annotated, and therefore both are far less useful than they might have been. Bookshops are piled high with books on writing, most of them worthless, or worse, and a service might have been rendered by saying so, and listing the few good ones, with a line or so of description.

Table with 4 columns: Title and Author, Crime, Place, and Sleuth, Summing Up, and Verdict. It lists various books like 'THIS INWARD HORROR', 'SAVE A ROPE', 'SHADOW OF FU MANCHU', etc., with their authors and critical verdicts.

# THE FINE ARTS

## REPORT ON PARIS

**D**URING the winter of 1946-47, the Whitney Museum of American Art held an exhibition of paintings by the new generation of French artists. The show had been selected in Paris by a committee, and it was occasionally condemned as giving an inadequate report on what had been produced by younger French painters during the war period. I had this exhibition very much in mind while visiting Paris this summer. Indeed, the show was difficult to forget, since the artists and dealers who had been excluded from it were quick to say why, and not always in the elegant phrases of the Versailles court. Yet after four weeks in the Paris galleries, I came to the conclusion that the Whitney exhibition had supplied a pretty fair idea of what the new school of Paris is like—neither conspicuously better nor worse than at the Whitney.

I think of one or two exceptions to this statement, chief among them being the fact that the Whitney show contained no work by Balthus, perhaps the most decisive artistic personality to have emerged in Paris just before the war. Balthus's strength is even more apparent today, for he has resisted completely the tendency of his contemporaries to eat their Matisse and have their Picasso too. Balthus has always run counter to fashion. Thus in seeking a more mature technique, he chose to emulate André Derain; he did this at precisely the moment when the latter's place in modern art's high consulate (with Matisse and Picasso) was becoming glaringly insecure. Moreover, Balthus found his central inspiration in Gustave Courbet, whose mid-nineteenth-century doctrine of realism—"art in painting should consist only in the representation of objects that the artist can see and touch"—was anathema to the surrealists and other advanced painters of the 1920's and 1930's.

Balthus flew still more directly in the face of modern esthetic dogma by declaring: "I wish to do surrealism 'after' Courbet." His statement seemed absurd to a number of critics, for how could one reconcile Courbet's faith in "objects that the artist can see and touch" with surrealism's exploration of the subconscious mind, intangible and mainly unseen? But Balthus had understood that Courbet's art was sometimes replete with psychological

tensions that the swaggering, dropsical realist would have been the last to recognize as such. He had presumably looked at Courbet's extraordinary portrait of the Socialist P.-J. Proudhon and his family (see cut). In the awkward intensity of Proudhon's children, enclosed in their separate world of reverie and play, Balthus must have found a sympathetic model for his own angular depiction of adolescence's ecstasies, secrets, and gloom. The affinity is stylistic as well as emotional. In fact we may easily imagine that the Courbet infant with a pitcher has grown into the young girl who reads on the floor in the foreground of Balthus's painting "Le Salon." Yet Balthus's originality of vision is so decided that it seems only heightened by comparisons of this kind.

The children in Balthus's picture first appeared in one of a series of drawings he made to illustrate "Wuthering Heights" (like Charles Demuth's illustrations for "The Turn of the Screw," the drawings were not intended for publication, but as private interpretations of a revered literary work). It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Emily Brontë's novel has been a mainspring of Balthus's imaginative life. The painter's own personality has Heathcliffian elements; his respect for the macabre

vein in English literature has been immense. And at this point, perhaps, we can discover another reason for Balthus's vigor in relation to the current Parisian art scene—his capacity to nourish his expression on alien sources.

The French pictorial tradition has been powerful for so long, that we tend to forget how consistently it has been revitalized by other cultures. The sixteenth-century Fontainebleau mannerists outgrowing their provincialism through contact with Italian artists, Poussin raptly heeding the mythological echoes of Rome, David and Ingres exclaiming amid the monuments of Mediterranean antiquity. Watteau and the romantics looking north to Rubens a hundred years apart, Delacroix and the impressionists revaluing the English landscapist Constable, the post-impressionists excitedly collecting the prints of Japan—these all were signs of a chronic need for foreign excursion, in thought or fact, to keep the French stock hardy and fresh. The leading artists earlier in our own century journeyed spiritually even farther afield—to Africa and the South Pacific, to the Far East, to the Sumerian realm and Macedonia, to the quite denationalized territory wherein are created the images of children, primitives, and the insane.

Perhaps it is unfair to say so on the basis of a month's survey, but it seems to me that the present generation in French art, on the contrary, is imprisoned in its parental home, that the new school of Paris's great weakness is that it has become too Parisian. The school includes many gifted artists. Yet I cannot think of one whose work has the unmistakable



Portrait of P.-J. Proudhon by Gustave Courbet.