



Richard Wright—letters.



Roger Baldwin—liberties.



Ignazio Silone—parties.

ject of bitter and sustained abuse.) Meanwhile, the witch-hunters and the racialists wage war on civil liberties. On the international front, the problem of fighting Communism without bolstering reaction or courting self-destruction puts the liberal conscience at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the so-called "realists," who know what they want and don't seem to care if it means suicide. On the economic front, inflation has affected artists and writers perhaps more than any other group. Rising living costs have forced many of them into the commercial treadmill, leaving them less opportunity for discussion and group action. Rising printing costs have drastically curtailed the output of noncommercial literature. In this context, "Art and Action" is by way of being the manifesto of a widely dispersed cultural resistance movement. It is cosmopolitan and humanist (therefore anti-Stalinist), informed, idealistic, and (in Sartre's phrase) socially "engaged" — an extremely stimulating and valuable compilation.

The book opens with the full text of Sartre's "The Respectful Prostitute," ably translated by Lionel Abel. Two letters by Richard Wright catch the "odd and vibrant spirit in Italy" and probe "that sodden hopelessness which seems to be bogging down the French." Stephen Spender's searching essay on "The Spiritual Future of Europe" makes the glib punditry of some of our high-priced correspondents sound like the prattle of bumptious, dimwitted children.

In the varied political material about Europe, a common denominator is apparent. Silone warns that it would be catastrophic for Italian politics to become polarized around a Russian and an American party. Richard Wright stresses that the crucial moral issue has nothing to do with the struggle between the extremes of Right and Left; both have the same yardstick of value—unbridled industrialism. Spender makes that issue more explicit:

For Europeans, the American system of freedoms, with the struggle for world markets, free enterprise, and so on . . . is simply a collection of all the nineteenth-century doctrines of individualism, which have led to the present European disasters. . . . The problem of Europe is of reconstructing liberal humanism within a social justice which answers the century-old challenge of Socialism that individualism means exploitation.

Of the literary critics, Simone de Beauvoir contributes a trenchant piece on metaphysics in the novel. (Ironically, her own fiction, with its rigid existentialist categories, violates the very cannons she underscores.)

An extract from Malraux's complex and brilliant "The Psychology of Art" explores what Ortega y Gasset termed "the dehumanization" of art. Most notable is the study of Dos Passos, the acutest I have seen, by the Swiss critic Claude Edmonde Magny.

Among the political documents are the Marshall Plan speech; the political program of Americans for Democratic Action; and the Preliminary Draft of a World Constitution. The section on civil liberties includes extracts from the filibuster against FEPC legislation; a report by Roger Baldwin on American liberties, 1947-48; the Draft of the International Declaration on Human Rights, and a lengthy extract from the hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, which forms a sinister pendant to an earlier item: the immensely moving last letters of Sacco and Vanzetti. The verbatim transcript of the hearings on the Hollywood writers is far more horrifying than the newspaper accounts. The quasi-moronic speech of some of the "friendly" witnesses, the interrogators' brazen use of "leading" questions, the brutal handling of the writers and their attorneys—together they have something of the nightmare impact of a Kafka novel.

An anthology of nearly 600 pages is bound to have its weak spots. Brecht's treatise on "Writing the Truth" (under Hitlerism) might have given place to something from postwar Germany, and the editors could profitably have made room for a sample of the vigorous fiction now being written in Italy. A certain number of items are too fragmentary to be of real interest. Yet "Art and Action" has been compiled with taste and wisdom. It richly justifies its title.

## Trapping Weather

By Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni

THE cloud is skinkled at the edges  
With red flashes.  
The bulldozer of thunder rumbles  
through it  
Crunching hail stones.  
Bats zig-zag crazily for cover.  
Wood-ticks tighten their hold on  
weed stems.  
Inside of a hollow log  
Rabbits pile each on each.  
Fur quivering, fear-blinded,  
Small creatures scamper confusedly  
Through the underbrush, seeking  
shelter.

At the edge of the forest an old man,  
Stooped on one knee,  
Carefully sets a trap.

*The Saturday Review*

# Persistent Obsession

VOYAGES TO THE MOON. By Marjorie Hope Nicolson. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1948. 297 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by BERGEN EVANS

SCARCELY a week passes in which some enthusiast does not make the headlines by assuring us that a journey to the moon is now feasible, and scarcely a day passes after this pronouncement before some savant makes the headlines by pointing out the difficulty, danger, and improbability of the attempt. And the astonishing thing is that each and every statement and counterstatement is regarded by the one making it and the papers publishing it as a new and startling conception. Plainly, as the ancients perceived, though our bodies are held within the earth's gravitational field, our minds are governed by the moon.

If Miss Nicolson's book did nothing else but document the antiquity and persistence of humanity's obsession with flying to the moon, it would be worth the reading. But there is much more. What whiffs and whimsies, what figmental fancies, what bold imaginings she has unearthed in her ten years' avocation! Her book would have delighted Burton, charmed Lamb, and exalted Lowes. There is Domingo Gonsales, borne aloft by shackled geese, Cyrano de Bergerac drawn up with the dew, and Pier Martello, rowed through space by a hundred apes in blue and yellow liveries. Some mount in dreams. Some are transported by angels. Some tie feathers on their arms and churn the air. Some use the loadstone, others vacuumed spheres of metal. Stout Murtagh McDermot designed to place himself "in the Middle of ten wooden Vessels, placed one within the other," the outermost widely hooped with iron, and then blow himself up with "7,000 Barrels of powder."

From Lucian to C. S. Lewis, she sweeps the field. It is amazing, when it is thus all brought together, to see how recurrent a theme these aerial fantasies are in literature. Miss Nicolson is at her best in her analyses of Swift's Flying Island and "Alice in Wonderland," the latter of which, she makes clear, belongs, really, more to the genre of the cosmic voyage than to that of the fairy tale.

Paradoxically, the cosmic voyage as a literary form began to decline from the time of the first balloon ascents, from the time, that is, when the dream began to show a possibility of realization. Fancy was subordinated to plausibility and plausibility's only

value is to enhance fancy. Until finally the comic books, in which interplanetary voyages are far more common than clothing, have achieved the sad miracle of making the fantastic pedestrian.

Miss Nicolson's erudition is immense but there's a hint of pedantry in her style. Quotations sometimes seem to be dragged in by force and held in place with synthetic gust. She loads every rift with ore and then takes a mallet and pounds in a little bit more. The conception of source-hunting as the great end of scholarship often gets the upper hand of her humor and genuine interest in absurdity for its own sake. Still, these are but trifles and they might be defended as being traditional and obligatory with this sort of a book.

There is a good bibliography, with comments, and a thorough index.

## Soviet Sampling

RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE THE REVOLUTION. Edited by Joshua Kunitz. New York: Boni & Gaer. 1948. 932 pp. \$6.

Reviewed by GEORGE FISCHER

NO earlier collection has offered as sizable a sampling of Soviet literature in English as this.

Works of forty-seven authors are featured: four novels (by Sholokhov, Fadeyev, Katayev, and Krimov), twenty short stories, nine excerpts from novels, twenty-two poems, and four essays (by Lenin, Stalin, Gorki, and Ehrenburg). Useful bibliographical appendices are also included.

Russian-born himself, Dr. Joshua Kunitz, editor of the anthology, has taught Russian literature and history at the City College of New York, Cornell University, and Middlebury College. For this anthology he has provided a short general introduction and a foreword to each of four chronological sections: (war Communism, NEP, five-year plans, war and post-war). Alongside with helpful literary data, Kunitz here enunciates, in Yankeeified terminology, the official Soviet view on literature and politics.

True to his exuberant espousal of Soviet life and letters, Kunitz states in the introduction that "even the most negative aspects of Soviet experience are shown up with extraordinary fidelity" in its literature. He believes, too, that "as long as Soviet art and literature are freely accessible, no reader of imagination and good will has cause to complain

about riddles . . . and iron curtains." What he does not mention anywhere is that the Soviet writer today can continue to be published only while conforming to the canons of the state, and that this thoroughly circumscribes his opinions and his choice of topic, style, and genre.

Already some twenty years ago the growing control of literature was institutionalized. Kunitz alludes to this—but, as elsewhere in his commentary, he omits important facts. For a "rigid literary dictatorship" was not then introduced because most "proletarian" and "neo-bourgeois" authors could not on their own fathom the New Soviet Man, nor kept up merely by "some hotheads," as Kunitz implies. Rather, that "literary dictatorship" was executed by RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) with the express backing of the Soviet Government, and formed a part of the further lessening of public heterodoxy at the time.

Since then government control has hardly lessened. Hence Kunitz might have been more specific in his statement that since World War II the official "Socialist Realism [has been] vigorously reasserted by the Soviet leaders." He may have added, for instance, that the highest authorities have censored authors (like the popular satirist Zoshchenko), that they discontinued literary journals as well as removed editors and the president of the central Union of Soviet Writers, and that Stalin's deputy, the late Andrei Zhdanov, has thundered public anathema at numerous sus-



—From "Voyages to the Moon."