

rescued millions of Jews from extermination by the Nazis. As a matter of fact, the Jewish population of the Western territories was not aware of the mortal danger implied in the German advance; evacuation of the civilian population to the East was made almost impossible. What is more, the Soviet authorities tried to conceal from the population the fact that the Nazi atrocities were directed mainly against the Jews; for propaganda purposes official Soviet announcements and documents spoke of systematic mass extermination of "Soviet citizens" in general. Mr. Schwarz offers abundant evidence that on the eve of the Nazi occupation large numbers of Jews decided to stay where they had lived, and fell prey to Hitler's extermination squads.

The end of the war did not improve the legal and moral situation of the Jewish minority. The growth of a new Russian nationalism, proclaimed by Stalin in his speech of May 24, 1945, was accompanied by a new wave of governmental anti-Semitism, and this new trend soon bore rich fruit. The last Jewish newspaper, *Einigkeit*, was closed down in December 1948; a vociferous campaign against the "cosmopolites" was unleashed in 1949. The number of Jewish schools decreased rapidly, and admittance of Jews to certain institutions was made impossible.

The tragic story of the so-called Jewish Autonomous Area of Birobidjan belongs to the most interesting chapters of the book. The creation of this Jewish semi-state, hailed as a significant step toward the solution of the Jewish question, was actually motivated by the turn of Soviet-Japanese relations and by the growing tension in the Far East. Despite the fact that abundant funds were donated by Jewish organizations of the West, Birobidjan's economy did not progress, and the flight of new migrants soon reached unbelievable proportions. Birobidjan did not fulfill the expectations of either Western Jewish groups or the Soviet Government. Finally, a few weeks after this book was published, the "Jewish Autonomous Territory of Birobidjan" was dissolved and the area incorporated into the large, purely Russian Khabarovsk province of the Far East.

Drawing his conclusions from Mr. Schwarz's work, Alvin Johnson rightly observes in the foreword to the book: "Under despotism all citizens suffer the loss of freedom; but the members of minority groups suffer doubly, both individually and collectively. This truth is again confirmed by the careful analysis of the fate of Jews under totalitarian Communism."



Interviews in the Orient

THE VOICE OF ASIA. By James A. Michener. New York: Random House. 338 pp. \$3.50.

By JOHN FREDERICK MUEHL

ONE of the most dangerous things that an author can do, if he is planning to write a book on an Asian subject, is to announce his intentions among that alcoholic crowd which goes as the "International Set" in the large cities of the Far East. In the parlance of the Bombay cocktail parties there is something known as "another book about Asia," and it is only the youthful, or those far gone with drink, who will lay themselves open to the charge of planning one.

In the main, the antagonism of Old Asia Hands can be written off as a suspicion of any fresh approach, but as with most folk sayings and clichés of thought there is at least a grain of truth along with the acrimony. For it is true that there is something about the Asian scene which betrays even the best men into oversimplifications, something which makes enthusiasm and raw goodwill seem like adequate substitutes for knowledge and spade-work. It is precisely this problem which is raised by the appraisal of James Michener's newest book, "The Voice of Asia," for if there are two things which particularly characterize this work, they are the soundness of its instinct and the unsoundness of its method.

In its simplest terms "The Voice of Asia" is a report on an extensive tour by its author covering almost the whole of Southeast Asia and presented as a series of reconstructed interviews. Beginning with a discussion of the occupation of Japan the focus of the book proceeds both geographically and logically, westward across the periphery of the continent and forward from occupation, through colonialism, to freedom. Throughout the journey there is a sharp awareness of time which gives the book most of the power that it possesses, and an

equally sharp sense of reality arising out of the quotations, direct in more ways than one. The real message of the book, for it has a message, is that the West must recognize the integrity of Asia, that we must stop trying to maneuver the backing of governments and must begin making our appeal to the real needs of the people. In defining these needs Mr. Michener is often vague, but the truth of his thesis is no less valid for that; the conclusions he draws seem both accurate and courageous in an age that suffers from both hysteria and McCarthy.

But unfortunately, at some point in the reading of "The Voice of Asia," one inevitably begins to ask the question whether Michener is actually drawing conclusions from experience or ordering his experiences to prove certain conclusions. The feeling is inescapable, and there is evidence to support it, that James Michener, as of last year, was not naive about Asia; yet the pretense of the book is that at the beginning of his travels the author's mind was a virtual *tabula rasa*. Be that as it may be, the fact remains that the very experiences which Michener relates simply do not speak loudly enough to the average reader to justify the complex conclusions which are drawn from them. The author confesses in an admirably frank foreword that he was usually at the mercy of local interpreters and he points out, though here he seems to do it with some pride, that his experiences were confined to "120 Asians." Moreover, these interviews were truly random, convenience and availability determining the selection; Michener points out in his foreword that the book contains contradictory statements which he has not sought to reconcile.

Some amazing errors result from all this. In his section on India the

(Continued on page 28)

John Frederick Muehl is the author of "American Sahib" and "Interview with India."

Ambassador A-1 for the U.S.

ROCHELLE GIRSON

YUKIO MISHIMA is a pleasant young man whose sixteen books are not only well liked in Japan's best literary circles but have prospered him sufficiently to provide "a vagabond's trip around the world." Two weeks ago, having—and needing—no other friends in New York, he was being squired around town by the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, a big-brotherhood of the International Congress for Cultural Freedom whose purpose is to create closer bonds with citizens of other countries on as personal basis as possible. Now, having secured Sesame for Mishima to a number of hit musicals and operas, introduced him to the local intelligentsia, as well as plain, everyday Americans and the press, the Committee is confident that the twenty-seven-year-old novelist-essayist-playwright is going to be an ambassador A-1 for the U.S. An ambassador of some persuasion, too, because Yukio will be reporting his travels for Japan's largest newspaper, *Asahi*.

"The Occupation's effect on Japanese literature has been extremely beneficial," Mr. Mishima told us. "It eliminated censorship—formal and informal—so that today, for instance, any kind of erotic literature is acceptable. As a result 300,000 copies of 'Lady Chatterly's Lover' have been sold in Japan, and the book is the subject of enormous controversy. Then, with the postwar psychological readjustment writers have tended to become more liberal and released from convention. The consequence has been a greater interest in the social novel than the traditional, so-called 'private' or 'personal' novel, which is based on the individual's experiences."

"But democratization has brought difficulties in other areas. In the labor movement, in order to restore it to a sound condition and hold back the Communist influence, there have been problems of suppression. And in land reform the lack of understanding of Japanese life has led Americans to a number of mistakes. Particularly with the inheritance of property, which formerly went entirely to the oldest son. Now, by dividing property equally among survivors no one is able to make a living from it, because of the smallness of the land involved."

The writer's place in the Japanese social structure, however, has risen

considerably since the war, Mr. Mishima said. "People used to say, 'Don't let your daughter marry a writer!' But because of the inflation, and from the tax point of view, writers are relatively better off than other people. So they are very respectable nowadays. . . . In what may be termed the middle- and low-brow areas there is no problem for them in making a living—not on the exalted level of the American writer, of course [American writers, take note], but they can get along very comfortably. The tendency lately has been to get away from the potboiler and concentrate on what they call 'pure literature.'"

"As far as I am concerned," Mr. Mishima continued, "there is a very delicate problem of balance, because I write no low-brow literature. The extent of my concession would be to write middle-brow from time to time."

Mr. Mishima was born in Tokyo, the son of a bureau chief in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. At the age of thirteen he began writing for the students' magazine at Peer School, and in 1944 he entered Tokyo Imperial University in the Department of Jurisprudence, from which he was subsequently graduated. In 1944 he also published his first novel, which netted him 1,200 yen, and two years later he was de facto on the literary stage when PEN Club President Kawabata Yasanari wrote an essay about him.

He is not associated with any school of writing in Japan, where he is regarded as unconventional because he

derives his major inspiration from the pre-Meiji novelists of 150 years ago, when fiction was diffuse and lacking real construction. That is the principal difference between the American novel and his, he said. Mishima writes almost entirely about modern life and love—omitting war stories, because he's too young to have had any war experience. "My love stories are not romantic," he noted. "I regard myself as a psychological novelist. Although Freud had a period of popularity in Japan, I don't think that he or any of the scientific psychologists have influenced me at all. The principal influences on my own writing have been the psychological novelists of France."

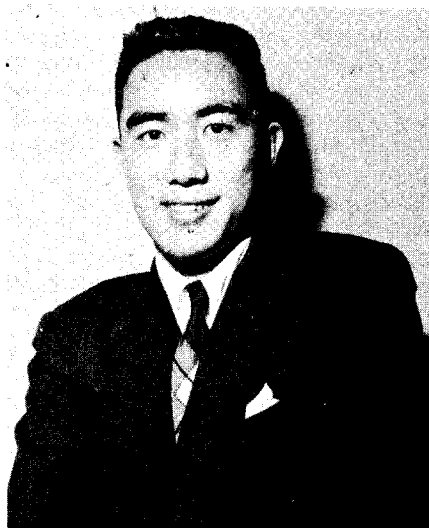
French literature is extraordinarily popular in Japan, Mishima said, with translations available of the complete works of Mauriac and Gide. Of American writers, Faulkner is way out front—at least among educated people—while a recent translation of "Moby-Dick" is selling like rice cakes. "Gone with the Wind" is the favorite among historical novels, which in general have the appeal there, he said, of cowboy stories here—as adventure tales. "But in Japan," Mishima said, "the historical novel doesn't seem to require so much sex."

O THERWISE, it is just like in the U.S.: Sex sells books for many of the 200 to 300 professional novelists in the country. There are no Nipponese book clubs, but techniques of advertising and promotion have been highly developed for a long time. Excluding pocket books, Mr. Mishima estimated that the regular edition of a best seller would be 150,000 to 200,000.

Poetry, however, doesn't sell at all, despite there being more high-level literary magazines in Japan than America. One, in fact, on an intellectual plane somewhere between the *Atlantic* and *Partisan Review*, has a circulation of 400,000.

A movie based on one of Mishima's books is currently running in Tokyo, and he has, besides, written three plays, all of which have been produced in the experimental theatre, which in Japan is somewhat less circumscribed than ours. They are adaptations of the traditional Noh play, whose entire action takes place in one act, and he intends to do more. He has also done the story, as well as some of the critical points of action, for two ballets—one for geishas—but has yet to see any American, French, or Russian ballet.

"Most authors are unusual," Mishima remarked. "If they weren't unusual, they wouldn't be writers. But as one I think I am representative . . . I'm lucky. I write smoothly. No trouble."



Yukio Mishima—"unconventional."