

Smalltime Faust

TIME'S CORNER. By Nancy Wilson Ross. New York: Random House. 310 pp. \$3.50.

By WALTER HAVIGHURST

FOR her new novel Nancy Wilson Ross has chosen a smaller setting and a tighter situation than she has used in the past, and she has written a smaller story. "Time's Corner" is a clinical novel, beginning with an emotionally shattered woman's search for affirmation and moving on to the problem of drug-addiction with its transcendent release and its fearful captivity. It is an uneven book, at times poignant and arresting and as often forced and artificial.

The story finds Louisa Frazier, physically and spiritually exhausted after her lover has relinquished her for his wife and family, seeking sanctuary in an Anglican House of Retreat in a seashore Connecticut suburb. The daily rituals of the chapel, her walks in the fading autumn season, and her reading of the *Lives of the Saints* accomplish little for this unhappy woman. But when a teen-age girl, sodden with drugs, is found at the door of the Retreat, Louisa has something positive to be concerned with. Unconsciously, and at first somewhat against her will, she develops a sympathy for the homeless, hardened girl, and begins to escape the "anger, jealousies, ambitions, guilts, secrets" of her own burdened memory.

This new situation brings Louisa in contact with Doctor Frederick Jordan, whose own obsession with drugs gradually becomes known to her and at whose insistence Louisa discovers for herself the sense of "another space, another time" which drugs induce. This is the crucial matter of the novel, and its success depends upon the credibility of the fanatical doctor. He is quite preposterous and seems unworthy of this gifted author's attention. He is a small-time Doctor Faustus, obsessed with the power of drugs. "He dares too much. He seeks too far." But he never becomes convincing.

This novel shows a contest between negation of human experience and its affirmation. In the House of Retreat, Louisa found herself repeatedly nudged toward some affirmation that she could not grasp. Even the wretched girl, suffering the prolonged hangover of heroin, seemed more alive than she. Then came the puzzling doctor, her acquaintance with a grotesque man in the doctor's household, and her discovery of the fate of the doctor's insane wife—all of which lead to her final assertion.



Stuart Cloete—"the religion of life."



—Marcus Blechman.

Nancy Ross—"burdened memory."



Vasco Pratolini—"unusual comradeship."

Florentine Odors

THE NAKED STREETS. By Vasco Pratolini. New York: A. A. Wyn. 216 pp. \$3.

By HARVEY CURTIS WEBSTER

WHAT has distinguished Vasco Pratolini from the other gifted writers of his time and country has been his capacity for arousing and disappointing great expectations. In "A Hero for Our Times" and "A Tale of Poor Lovers," he starts excitingly and ends by disappointing. Though he knows the poor quite as well—perhaps even better—than Silone, Levi, Berto, and the unusual rest, though he certainly, by his concentration upon the working-class quarters of Florence, brings a portion of a country to life more successfully than any living Italian, his compulsion to make "propaganda" tends to destroy both his novels and their message. Still, one begins each Pratolini novel expecting it to be the one that persists on an even level of excellence.

"The Naked Streets," which preceded both of his novels published over here and came before the time of dogmatic vehemence, tells the story of a group of young Italians who live in that portion of Florence where "a child might count his marbles as he sat innocently on the steps of a brothel." Valerio, the narrator, Giorgio, Gino, Maria, Carlo, Marisa, and the others have grown through their teens in a section that heavily feels the weight of the Italian war in Abyssinia and reflects the poverty one can observe in the frescoes of Masaccio that rest in the nearby Church of the Carmine. Already in their youth, Pratolini tells us, their "blood carries a burden reflected in their movements." Filth, brutality, nauseous odors, and lust are the commonplaces of their lives; yet there is also an unusual sense of comradeship and of hope among them. They live in and know the worst while still trying for the better that may come when their ignorance disappears and they develop the intelligence necessary to cope with those who profit by poverty.

Pratolini's characters are not pleasant nor are their actions comforting to read about. Maria becomes pregnant before she marries, Gino is a homosexual and a murderer, Carlo's mother is a prostitute. But their immorality seems as natural as the filth that surrounds them. All of them hope for escape from sordidness through either collective action, individual heroism, or singularly rewarding depravity. Giorgio, the Socialist, wants all of them to share both guilt and praise;

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U. S. Refrigerators vs. U. S. Ideas

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following guest editorial is by Minoo R. Masani, distinguished Indian author and former Indian ambassador to Brazil, who is prominently identified in India as a friend of the United States. Mr. Masani is at present representing India on the U.N. Subcommittee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.*

ON my way to the United States from India, I had the opportunity to read the contribution of R. H. S. Crossman in the "New Fabian Essays." Alongside of much that is reasonable and humane, Mr. Crossman propounds a thesis that calls for analysis. Having made it clear that he regards totalitarian Communism as a reactionary force which the peoples of the Atlantic community must resist, Mr. Crossman proceeds to the assumption that, to quote his own words, "the coolie in Malaya, or for that matter the tribesman in Nigeria does not want either liberty, equality, and fraternity or the dictatorship of the proletariat. He is below the level of such political aspirations." He then asks his readers to join him in accepting "both intellectually and emotionally the fact that Communism outside Europe is still a liberative force." We are then brought to a remarkable conclusion. "The American isolationist," writes Mr. Crossman, "who reacts so violently against the gigantic bill for rearmament and foreign aid, is nearer the tradition of Americanism than the New Deal prophets of America's world-wide responsibilities." Americans should, therefore, be encouraged "to take the risk in Asia and Africa of leaving unfilled the 'political vacuum' left by the dismantling of the old

European empires." "We are opposed," writes Mr. Crossman, "to Russian expansion but also to American victory."

Whatever the motivation of this line of thought may be, its implications are unfortunately hard to mistake. First, that human values are different for the peoples of Western Europe and North America on the one hand and for the peoples of the underdeveloped countries of Asia and Africa on the other. Secondly, that the claims of bread and freedom are antithetical and should in the case of the underdeveloped countries be resolved in favor of bread. Thirdly, that the West should write off these countries and these peoples and do nothing to protect them from being taken over by Communist expansion and aggression.

Here then, from a leading spokesman of "left-wing" Socialism in the West comes a strange echo of Rudyard Kipling: "East is East and West is West." East of Suez "there ain't no Ten Commandments"; and what is reaction and tyranny for the European and American is liberation and progress for the "lesser breeds without the law."

Is there perchance any truth in this assertion that the masses of illiterate and underprivileged people in Asia and Africa are just empty stomachs and hungry mouths conscious of nothing but the clamant call for food? The facts testify precisely to the contrary. While it may be true that some "left-wing" intellectuals in India, as elsewhere, are obsessed with the desirability of Soviet-model Five Year Plans and of what Lewis Mumford has called "giantism," the common people in my country are much more attached to such things as their traditional way of life, their religions and

their places of worship, their families and their homes, their cattle and their farms. While the Communist Party of India has attracted a section of the English-speaking intelligentsia and is today more entrenched among its ranks than it is among classes less privileged, the Indian masses on the other hand have, by their unique response over three decades to Mahatma Gandhi, shown that the man who evokes a response in their hearts is the one who talks to them of non-material values like God, Love, Truth, Human Brotherhood, and the Equality of the untouchable Harijan and the proud Brahman.

GANDHI represents the complete antithesis to the Communist and has been recognized as such in the Moscow press and radio for over three decades. The Communist swears by dialectical materialism—matter is essence, the mind a by-product; Gandhi preaches the supremacy of spirit of mind over matter. To the Communist, the end justifies the means; to Gandhi, the means are everything—means and ends are like the seed and the tree; and so Gandhi pronounced Soviet Communism to be "repugnant to India." Stalin preaches the need to hate the class and national enemy; Gandhi the need to love all. Communism seeks to centralize and collectivize everything; Gandhi preaches the need to decentralize and to distribute power both politically and economically. The Communist glorifies the State; Gandhi, conscious of the distinction drawn by Reinhold Niebuhr between moral man and immoral society, stresses the individual as an end in himself. Identifying himself with the lowliest in the scale of caste—the Harijan or untouchable—Gandhi recalls the words of Him who said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Those who today work for the lowliest of our people cannot escape the spirit of Gandhi. Only last month, my good friend Jayaprakash Narayan, American-educated leader of India's democratic Socialist Party, wrote: "For many years I have worshiped at the shrine of the goddess Dialectical Materialism, which seemed to me intellectually more satisfying than any other philosophy. But while the main quest of philosophy remains unsatisfied, it has become patent to me that materialism of any sort robs man of the means to be truly human. . . . It is clearer today than ever that social reconstruction is impossible without human reconstruction. Only when materialism is transcended does individual man come into his own and become an end in himself." It is ob-