

it would take him no longer than twelve minutes to make his purchase, but after he parked in front of a meter he discovered that the only change he had in his pocket was a nickel. Now the average person making four thousand dollars a week and finding himself in a similar predicament might throw caution to the winds and put the nickel in the slot. But not father. He walked a whole block in the broiling sun—we were having a heat wave at the time—to get the nickel changed, then walked back to the meter to put the penny in, and then walked another block to the tobacco store.”

You also learn that:

“My father has never been a very gregarious fellow. Beneath his confident and caustic exterior lurks an enormous inferiority complex, largely born of his limited formal education. He has many close friends, most of whom are writers, but he prefers to see them individually or in small groups. And sometimes he prefers not to see them at all, or even his family.”

Throughout, Marx himself does his best to be entertaining when he isn't quoting Groucho, and he does fairly well, too. However, “Life with Groucho” might have been even funnier if Groucho's life had been written by someone with a true comic flair. Groucho is a lot funnier than the book.

A Voice

By Laura Benet

WHY was the voice that came
Over the telephone and wholly
strange,
Singularly the same
As one his childhood heard
With mounting joy like a familiar
bird

Whose utterance did not change,
Better than news of fame
Or praise from a great name?

The new voice was not young,
Yet love of life breathed in its every
note.

Its healing must have sprung
From some perpetual country of
delight

That never knew the night,
Where from each creature's throat
In many a piteous tongue,
Golden words were sung.

Like this in soothing kind
Another's tones had been
Skilful a wound to bind.
The tired man emerged from his dark
wood,

Feeling that voice's mood
Gave space where he might lean,
Spelled refuge for his mind
Bewildered and long blind.

Smoke Gets in the Song

“103 Lyrics of Cole Porter,”
selected by Fred Lounsberry (Random House, 224 pp. \$3.50), offers some of the words, but not the music, of one of the most clever writers of popular songs. Here it is reviewed by Sandy Wilson, author-composer of “The Boy Friend,” a musical comedy characteristic of the Twenties now playing on Broadway.

By Sandy Wilson

OF ALL American songwriters Cole Porter has the most distinctive style in his words and music, so that one almost invariably recognizes any of his numbers after the first phrase or line. Moreover, he has retained this characteristic style of his for a quarter of a century, refusing, either in his tunes or his lyrics, to alter his identity or borrow from anybody else, with the result that, to me at any rate, a Cole Porter number immediately summons up a vision of his most triumphant decade, the Thirties. Play me a Cole Porter song and there it all is once again—the plucked eyebrows under a picture hat, poised above a dry martini, with a background of top-hats and gardenias, all bathed in the mauve glow of that streamlined *Weltschmerz* which finally exploded in 1939.

This undoubtedly confusing vision is my own reaction to the work of Cole Porter, and by his work I mean his words and music as they strike the ear. My reaction to “103 Lyrics of Cole Porter,” and more particularly to the introduction and commentary which accompany them, is very different. Fred Lounsberry, who has attacked his job with all the zeal one associates with German professors annotating the Georgics, has taken care to apologize in his preface for publishing Porter lyrics without Porter music. And it is very right and proper that he should. In fact, it seems to me to be an actual disservice to Cole Porter to allow anyone to read some of his love lyrics in cold print, especially if one doesn't happen to know or remember the music which should accompany them. For example:

“I love you,” hums the April
breeze,
“I love you,” echo the hills,

“I love you,” the golden dawn
agrees
As once more she sees
Daffodils.

But Mr. Lounsberry thinks we should read and digest this—preferably twice—and also points out to us, in case we hadn't noticed it, that this particular lyric “trickily reuses the greatest statement in the language by having it appear as something hummed, echoed, and so on by the breeze, the hills, and the golden dawn, each of which gives advance notice of the eventual and romantically appropriate mention of spring.” Well, to quote Mr. Porter, did you evah?

The humorous numbers are of course a different matter, and one is grateful to Mr. Lounsberry for the opportunity to read the full lyrics of such songs as “Let's Do It” and “You're the Top.” The dexterity of the rhyming and the variety of the imagery are still delightfully apparent, even without the tunes. But I could well do without Mr. Lounsberry's fulsome analysis of Cole Porter's sociological, ethical, religious, and political significance as a humorist and his industrious cataloguing of all the qualities (sentiment, mentality, intelligence, historical knowledge, etc., etc.) which go to make up a Cole Porter lyric. It would, to my mind, have been far more entertaining—and Mr. Lounsberry avows that he wishes to entertain us—if he had slipped in a few notes about who performed the numbers in what shows and how some of them came to be written in the first place (I don't mean that in a derogatory way). Such facts, after all, are part of the history of show business and seem to me to be as inseparable from Cole Porter as were his songs from the shows they were heard in.

AND there, I feel, one has it in a nutshell. Even Noel Coward, Porter's only peer in the realm of old-fashioned sophistication, was desperately apologetic to his readers when he published his first volume of lyrics and sketches. And whoever was responsible for publishing the greatest lyrics of all made sure that Lorenz Hart's words were accompanied by Richard Rodgers's music. So to anyone who intends to read this book my final word of advice would be: Keep within reach of your phonograph.

In Pursuit of Thalia



"The Theatre in Our Times," by John Gassner (Crown, 609 pp. \$5), is a collection of essays and reviews that supplement his "Masters of the Drama." Here it is reviewed by the well-known Broadway director Lee Strasberg.

By Lee Strasberg

THE function of a theatre critic differs from that of a critic of any of the other arts. He cannot be merely an observer or intelligent reviewer. The ephemeral nature of most of what makes up the theatre product, the fact that all that remains for future judgment is the printed script—often the most important but still only the libretto of the performance—the need for immediate response that cannot as in the other arts wait for future reconsideration—all this demands that the critic in the theatre be a much more active participant. He must propagate the things he believes in, he must exhort public and profession, he must analyze the present and educate for the future. Critics have often played this exacting role. Shaw, Otto Brahm, Copeau, Nemerovitch-Danchenko, Granville-Barker, and others come to mind. The conflict that exists today between theatre people and the critic derives from the feeling that critics today usually parade their personal taste as considered judgments.

John Gassner is a critic in the classic tradition. To his "Masters of the Drama," the best one-volume comment on the history, he now adds a companion volume, "The Theatre in Our Times." It is written with the same urbanity, judgment, and knowledge, but breathes an air of greater involvement. The book is a collection of essays and reviews, some new, but others previously printed yet now much revised. I must confess to an odd personal experience. In their original form they sometimes struck me as "cool," "objective," perceptive, and intelligent, but slightly remote. It is now apparent that this is because Mr. Gassner sees the immediate object of his observation in terms of the larger significance. Collected they appear more unified, coherent, provocative; part of a definite, personal attitude towards the theatre, its very ambivalences a record of a search, a refusal to dogmatize—somehow oddly more

pertinent and immediate than in their original appearance. It becomes the record of one man's search for a relationship to a variegated enterprise that has taken the author into the fields of dramatic criticism, professional stage production, experimental ventures, and education, "the endeavor to make some sense out of the contemporary theatre."

Basic to the author's attitude—and certainly representative of an important section of theatre people—is his conviction that "the theatre, for all the waywardness that has characterized its efforts in our century, is a proper subject for analysis, argument, and evaluations. It started out in Ibsen's time as a venture of the modern intellect and spirit, and it is still that, despite the bane of humdrum 'commercialism' and equally humdrum 'amateurism'." He doesn't expect all good drama to be literature, but he is certainly gratified when it is. He likes to be entertained as much as anybody else, but prefers to be stimulated. He favors excitement, but prefers to be excited into some recognition or to some purpose.

THE author's search has led him to some important conclusions with

which this reviewer heartily concurs. "Rarely in the history of the stage was imagination as abundantly present . . . The twentieth century became a notable medium for intellectual discussion, psychological analysis, social conflict, and experimentation in theatrical and dramatic art . . . Never before did the theatre bring forth so many intellectually respectable and intensely realized plays."

Mr. Gassner is, however, no optimist. He notes that "the impetus for growth and discovery on any large scale seems to have run out." He fails to find indication "that the advances noted during the first half of our century will continue unabated in the second half." The reasons for this he seeks in "the climate of ideas and the trends of our social and political life." Perhaps he is right. But it seems to this reviewer that Mr. Gassner's search for logical progression betrays him, despite his profession that logic is not the sole criterion of art. "The actor is the playwright's partner." But nowhere in the book do we find any systematic essay to characterize this creative partnership. Because of this lack Mr. Gassner's journey appears at times, in his own words, "casual." The critic must also be a battler.



"Indian-givers!"