

Beyond Fashion

"Modern Italian Stories," selected and edited by W. J. Strachan (Philosophical Library, 304 pp. \$4.75), is a representative collection by writers from the late nineteenth century to the present. P. M. Passinetti, who reviews it here, is a native of Venice and now teaches at the University of California at Los Angeles.

By P. M. Passinetti

W. J. STRACHAN'S anthology of "Modern Italian Stories" is significant because it manages to present authors many of whom had never been known in this country before, and because it does so without having to assemble the kind of writing loosely known as avant-garde or experimental. Some of these are writers who have been known in Italy a very long time indeed. One can be almost regarded as a minor classic (Emilio De Marchi, 1851-1901); better known "classics" are Pirandello (1867-1936) and Papini, who is still living (a heroic invalid who in spite of practically complete paralysis and blindness manages to keep alive also on the literary scene by dictating to the only person, a devoted granddaughter, capable of interpreting his arduous speech).

Some of the writers who belong to the generation now over sixty (Bonempelli, Baldini, and the younger Alvaro and Comisso) had hardly ever been touched by English translators. The same is true of some of the writers of approximately Moravia's age, such as Bilenchì. Due tribute is paid to the two Italian narrators who are best known in the English-speaking world, Moravia and Silone. The two women represented in the collection, Elsa Morante and Vera Cacciarre, are both excellent. The book is as a whole representative and highly readable. It goes beyond the well-advertised surfaces of the Italianogue, and in doing so seems to have hit on surprisingly solid ground. In the history of that vogue, now ten years old, it may well record the transition from fashionableness to ability.

The literary ground we hit is of a quality compounded of new and old; going with a sense of novelty there is a deep feeling of an Italian narrative tradition. This is singularly apparent to a reader of this anthology who has known the authors in the original; even in some of those who were accused of empty formalism he



Kazantzakis—"the Proteus of novel-writing."

is struck by the good quick tempo, the concrete narrative gusto. *Novella* is related, after all, to news; the narrator comes up pretending that he has news for you, with which he rightfully claims your attention. It is an invention presented with authority. This may be a superficial way of looking at it, but I think a good place where you can watch for that ability is the opening of a story, the establishment of the situation, the initial piece of news. Here are some examples from the Strachan anthology:

- "That diabolical writer of anonymous letters who had kept the peaceful city of Pois in continual agitation for two and a half years was a dear cousin of mine who combined the offices of needlework mistress and vice-principal in the Girls' School there. It was my fault that she was sent to prison." (Baldini).

- "In the small fishing village with which we are concerned, life was subjected to the same vicissitudes as the sea." (Comisso).

In their various ways, all these bear the sign of that indefinable narrative gift, the gift for the authoritative opening. One trusts at once the story to do its job well.

This Italian fiction presents neither the mannerisms of experimentation nor those of the recently advertised neo-realism, whatever that, in writing or films, meant. It is also rather untouched by that European version of the American Manner which seems now confined in Italy to some of the illustrated weeklies when they ape the tabloids.

The interest in modern Italian arts and letters suffered from two causes: first it was neglect, then it was fashionableness. This attractive book belongs to a time when a deep "second look" is cast at the Italian picture; it thus augurs, beyond the vogue, a state of balance and permanence.

Homeric Throng

"Freedom or Death," by Nikos Kazantzakis (translated by Jonathan Griffin, Simon & Schuster, 433 pp. \$4.50), is the story of a group of late nineteenth-century Greeks dreaming of and working for the union of their native Crete with Greece.

By Ben Ray Redman

CRETE has mothered many heroes but few novelists, and of the latter only Nikos Kazantzakis, so far as I know, has won recognition in the English-reading world. Translations of "The Greek Passion" and "Zorba the Greek" made him known to us as a writer of stature; Jonathan Griffin's spirited translation of "Freedom or Death" will enhance his reputation among us, and will confirm A. Den Doolaard's dictum that he is "the Proteus of contemporary novel writing."

The setting of "Freedom or Death" is the author's homeland, Crete as it was in 1889, groaning under Turkish rule, dreaming of liberation and union with Greece—even as Cyprus now dreams of liberation and Hellenic union. The action takes place in the port city of Megalokastro, the village of Petrokefalo, and the mountains on which the Cretan captains raise their standards of rebellion. In the forefront of the action are Captain Michales, a "wild beast" of a man, obsessed by patriotism and consumed by pride; Nuri Bey, the chivalrous Turk, Michales's sworn blood brother and sworn enemy; Captain Polyxigis, a brave *palikar* in war and a gallant ladies' man in peace; Eminé, Nuri's beautiful Circassian wife, who brings Michales to the verge of self-betrayal; Effendi Pasha, good natured and lazy, who curses the day he was sent to enforce Turkish rule in mad Megalokastro; the Metropolitan, spiritual and political head of the Greek Christian community; and Sefakas, the hundred-year-old patriarch, veteran of the great rising of 1821, who lives in ancient style in his village of Petrokefalo, adored by his children and his children's children.

These are in the forefront, but surrounding them is a throng of characters such as you have never met before in fiction, many of them grotesque enough to have been painted by Hieronymus Bosch. Indeed, the author lavishes so much time and talent on his freaks, eccentrics, and grotesques, that in the opening chapters they threaten to steal away the

(Continued on page 28)



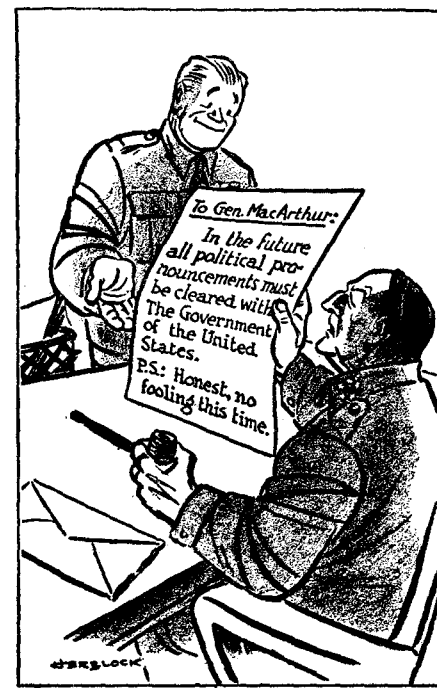
—Kuekes in The Cleveland Plain Dealer (1951).

“Headquarters Speaking.”



—Green in The Providence Journal (1952).

“I’ve Got a Secret.”



—Herblock in The Washington Post (1951)

“File This One with the Others.”

The Commander’s Case: Aide’s-Eye View

“MacArthur: His Rendezvous With History,” by Major General Courtney Whitney (Alfred A. Knopf, 547 pp. \$6.75), is a presentation by his aide, of the former U. S. Far Eastern commander’s view of developments in that theatre from the conquest of the Philippines to the present. Our reviewer is Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall, chief historian of the European theatre in World War II and operations analyst of the Eighth Army during the Korean hostilities.

By S. L. A. Marshall

SOMETHING about Major General Courtney Whitney’s book “MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History” reminds me of the lines from Lewis Carroll:

“I couldn’t afford to learn it,” said the Mock Turtle with a sigh. “I only took the regular course.”

“What was that?” inquired Alice.

“Reeling and writhing, of course, to begin with,” the Mock Turtle replied; “and then the different branches of Arithmetic—Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.”

The regular course it was for General Whitney. His attempt at a definitive study of Douglas MacArthur’s greatest years, instead of being an

objective, factual, and human study of a great general contending against the terrible odds which are in the nature of war and chaos in its ruck, is but another gospel done for members of the one true religion. It is laden with worship and with hate. There is one hero, one valiant, clair-sentient, and selfless spirit. Apart from those who follow immediately in his train, the Republic is served by varmints, nitwits, and marplots.

And this is a pity, really, for Whitney had a vast opportunity. During the closing years, he enjoyed a greater share of MacArthur’s confidence than any other man. Cherished friend, legal adviser, and chief of a main staff section, he seemed to exercise greater influence over policy than his nominal position would well warrant.

Whitney’s highly advantageous position on the inside is in some measure reflected in this lengthy work. In preparing his biased pleading of the MacArthur case—for that is the true nature of this book—Whitney had access to the secret correspondence between GHQ, the Joint Chiefs, the White House, and other pivots of policy. Many of these documents are herein quoted for the first time. Beyond cloaking the work with seeming authority, they also comprise its chief value. Its revelation of the extent to which timidity and defeatism gripped our Government for almost two

months following the defeat in North Korea should shock every American.

That inexcusable wavering in crisis was sensed and resented by everyone in Korea at the time, as was the fact that GHQ remained conspicuously silent during those dark weeks when shattered regiments needed to be to that they would be sustained and the battle would be won.

Apart from the fact that the Whitney book is a fuller exposure of our worst hour of weakness than any other, it differs little from earlier volumes which came but to praise Caesar. It is not biography; it begins with the conquest of the Philippines and carries to the present. It is truly a command study; there is almost nothing of substance here about the fighting problem of armies or the method by which MacArthur achieved staff unity and made ranks responsive to his will. It is not history; for it had to be evaluated as such, it would have to use the words of He Adams: “I find it so replete with error that I have no choice but to go along with it.”

One or two illustrations should suffice. On page 420, Whitney says: of November 26, 1950, MacArthur sent Washington his last warning the following day the Red Chi struck.” The fact: on the night November 25, the Eighth Army lided head-on with a Red Chi