

# WHAT ARE WE AFRAID OF?

By CHESTER BOWLES

**A** FEW years ago I did not like this picture," a Russian student said to me in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad last February. We were looking at a painting of Christ and Pilate entitled, "What Is the Truth?"

"Then we all thought that we knew the truth," the student said. "Now I like this picture very much. You see, we now know that the truth is a question."

"Tourism is a good thing," another young Russian told me. "You begin to think of politics in terms of people and not in terms of systems and ideologies. Why, I have even some good friends now that are American capitalists—my 'class enemies'." His quick smile indicated that "class enemies" should be in quotation marks.

On a recent trip to the USSR I saw many such signs of ferment among Soviet youth. There was nothing that would indicate any possibility of an effective rebellion against the system, but much that suggested a softening of hard lines, a questioning of old dogma. Everywhere curious, friendly young people greeted us with warmth and with questions.

"One of Stalin's worst mistakes was to close us off from the world," said a young citizen of Tashkent, the capital of the Asian Soviet state of Uzbekistan. "Now the door is opening for us, and we have much to learn from America."

The most disturbing question I came home with was whether we are making good use of this tentative open-door policy of the post-Stalin regime, or more broadly, are we doing our part to encourage the process of change and ferment which is certainly underway throughout the Communist world?

During our stay in the Soviet Union I had heard much discussion of the forthcoming Sixth World Youth Festival. According to the advance announcement in the Soviet magazine *USSR*, "With the assistance of 4,500 guides and interpreters, the delegations will be introduced to each other. People of the same trades and professions will get together. There will be student seminars, excursions, exhibits, open-air concerts, movies, a continuing program of sports events and con-

tests for all types and classes of athletes, plus numerous parties and balls."

The cost was set at two dollars a day. For \$135 a visitor coming from the West would receive his fare to and from London and full expenses for his two weeks in Moscow. Everywhere we went Russians and non-Russians asked if our Government would allow young Americans to attend.

At the first World Youth Festival held in Prague in the summer of 1947 there were nearly 20,000 delegates, but only a small motley group from the United States. A delegation of articulate, able young democratic spokesmen from our major universities had been discouraged from attending by official fears of ideological contamination.

What was the result? Members of the American Youth for Democracy and other pro-Communist organizations took the leadership in the small American group that finally appeared. They set up a makeshift "United States Exhibit" next to the impressive Soviet pavilion. Its central feature was a grim picture of a Southern lynching.

Jan Masaryk, the strongly pro-American Czech foreign minister, expressed his keen disappointment to a young American reporter. "I had hoped this festival would be like a great baseball game, and I could act as umpire," he said. "Instead you only had a sorry little team of fellow-travelers who made America look silly."

**I**F I WERE young again, I wouldn't be afraid of competing with the Communists," Masaryk said in the room from which he later plunged to his death. "I would go in fighting, offering world youth greater ideals than Communism. America could have taken this festival by storm if it had just sent Rita Hayworth, a jazz band—and the spirit of Abraham Lincoln."

After my return to this country in March I heard that several groups of particularly dedicated and able young students, sensing the opportunity to present American democratic views at this year's Moscow Festival, were tentatively planning to attend. But ten years' experience and the new fluid situation arising after Stalin's death apparently have taught us very little. Our official position was stated in letters sent to all who inquired:

Your Government will not deny you a passport, but this affair has been arranged by the Soviet Government for its own political purposes. Americans who attend will be furthering Communist ends.

This was enough to reduce the American delegation to 150 or so: several of them articulate, able, democratic spokesmen more than capable of holding up their side in any argument, but most of them either politically naive or out-and-out fellow travelers. With a handful of exceptions the young men and women who could have represented the American democratic view most competently discreetly stayed away.

Early reports of the Festival indicate that an unusual opportunity has been missed for the kind of person-to-person contacts in which young Americans are at their best. The attendance was close to 220,000 young men and women from 102 countries. And the atmosphere appears to have been made to order for articulate young Americans.

In its August 12 issue *Life* Magazine reports: "The easy camaraderie permitted for the Festival left Russians breathless with a taste of forgotten freedom."

*Life* correspondent Flora Lewis is one of the most capable and sophisticated American reporters stationed within the Soviet orbit. Observing the easy social contacts and free-swinging political arguments, Miss Lewis was reminded that, "Smothered sparks of unrest began exploding in the Communist world" following the Warsaw festival of 1955. In Moscow a Pole remarked to her, "I wonder if Khrushchev realizes what he is risking?"

This is by no means the only situation in which we have drawn back from the very person-to-person contacts which may prove most effective in awakening young Russians to the dishonesty of their Government's propaganda charges against us while at the same time opening their minds to the universal appeal of freedom.

While I was in Moscow an international hockey competition was in progress to which an American team had been invited.

"Why did your team decide at the last minute not to come?" Soviet students at the University of Moscow asked me. "Was it because we beat you at the Olympics?"

I repeated as persuasively as I could what I had been told was our official explanation, i.e., that after the eruption in Hungary in October 1956 we were calling off cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union in protest.

"In protest of what?" the Russians asked. At least this gave me an

opportunity to present a view of the Hungarian Revolution which they had not heard. But such reverse-Iron Curtain "protests" are, to say the least, self-defeating.

If a protest is to be effective, those to whom the protest is directed should be aware of it. And the best way for Russians to understand what Americans think is to meet and talk to Americans—the very "cultural contact" which we are deliberately restricting. Indeed, by pulling back from people-to-people contacts we are discouraging the very process of relaxation and liberalization which it is in our interest to encourage.

It was the partial lifting of the iron hand of Stalinism and the general lessening of tensions after the Big Four Geneva Conference which helped stimulate the present popular ferment in the Communist world. It was the questioning awareness of new possibilities rising out of the easing of the Cold War that led to the peaceful revolt of the Poles and to the upheaval in Hungary.

**W**HY NOT seize every reasonable opportunity to foster the awakening of Soviet young people which every qualified observer agrees is now in progress? What precisely is our Government afraid of?

Khrushchev's recent statements offer no hope that the Soviet Government is planning to relax its political position in the near future. But at least there has been a partial lifting of the Iron Curtain.

At the University of Moscow I was shown the student newspaper which currently featured a letter from students at the University of Indiana proposing some kind of an exchange of information and students. The Russians were excited by the prospect.

American jazz tunes are played frequently on the university radio station. Indeed, Louis Armstrong's version of "Love, Oh Love, Oh Careless Love" was on the air when we visited the broadcasting room. When the students learned we had with us recent copies of the European edition of *The New York Times* they begged to be given them when we had finished.

Everywhere I was deluged with questions about my own three college-age children. "What are they studying?" "What will they do when they graduate?" and over and over again, "Do they think that there will be peace?" Yet we seem to be holding back from the people-to-people contacts which should be our greatest strength with Russians of all ages.

Some months ago I was told that the Russians had agreed to let a group of enterprising American pri-

vate citizens put on an agricultural fair in Moscow. We could have had choice of fair grounds, presented any exhibits we wanted, and charged enough to make the show self-supporting. But the State Department took the project out of private American hands, ostensibly to make it an official venture, and now appears to have quietly dropped it altogether.

Official cold water was thrown on a proposal for a competition between American and Russian track teams which would have given us an opportunity to balance out our recent defeat in the Olympics. The suggested exchange of a tour by the Bolshoi Ballet in the United States for a tour of Russia by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra was also frowned upon.

What are we afraid of? How can we lose in open competition between Communist ideas and our own?

Do we fear that Americans, brought up in the tradition of freedom, will come off second-best in their contacts with Russians who have known only their own stagnant and discredited ideology? After seeing the grim Soviet system at work and hearing the numbing, stilted, doctrinaire phrases which are so obviously boring this new generation of Soviet young people, I predict the opposite.

Let the Kremlin pick 500 of its most trusted students at random to come to America, while we pick 500 to go to the Soviet Union, and the result could only be profoundly subversive of Communist dogma.

The Soviet students would return with their eyes opened to the dishonesty of their Government's propaganda and new respect for the dynamic power of free institutions.

The American students would undoubtedly return with sympathy and personal liking for the Russian people, but with an even keener awareness of how unpleasant life can be under an authoritarian government and with an increased appreciation of our own accomplishments and our limitless democratic potential.

The Kremlin would not attempt such a proposition. I am sure of that. But why shouldn't we propose it and thereby demonstrate to the world our faith in the vigor and persuasiveness of democratic ideas presented by American young people?

**T**HE Soviet refusal to permit its citizens to be fingerprinted, as our law requires of any unofficial visitor, has provided the Kremlin with the easy way to avoid widespread people-to-people exchanges with Americans. But they still call loudly over the Voice of Moscow for greater cultural contacts.

Hasn't the time come to call their bluff? President Eisenhower has proposed that this fingerprinting requirement, which so many foreigners think implies that they are potential criminals, be dropped from the law. Why does not Congress amend the law and see if Khrushchev will allow Soviet citizens to be exposed to the ways of freedom?

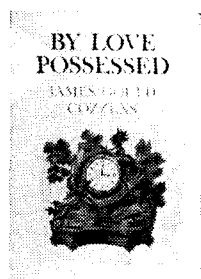
It is pure folly to slip into a reverse Iron Curtain mentality at precisely the time when it may be possible to make real progress in breaking down such curtains everywhere. Rita Hayworth is no doubt out of date, but as Jan Masaryk pointed out ten years ago, it is the confident spirit of Abraham Lincoln that the world still expects of us.



A Russian Church leader addresses the young people.

—Sovfoto.





SR's Spotlight on Fiction:

## "By Love Possessed"

Author: James Gould Cozzens

By WHITNEY BALLIETT

**J**AMES GOULD COZZENS'S new novel "By Love Possessed" (Harcourt, Brace, \$5), is brilliant, if rather staggering, proof—its nearly six hundred pages, about eight years in the writing, reveal a first-rate mind laboring at full-tilt—that its author has become the most mature, honest, painstaking, and technically accomplished American novelist alive. It is also an uncomfortable reminder that Cozzens, who is fifty-four, and the author of twelve novels—the first of them, "Confusion," was published when he was a twenty-one-year-old sophomore at Harvard—is the most underprized American novelist. His reputation, in fact, resides (despite a Pulitzer Prize and several Book-of-the-Month Club designations) in an intellectual vacuum: his books have apparently proved too demanding for the casual reader, and too lacking in stylistic innovation for the colleges. Nonetheless, in a time largely given over to soft, ingroping, semi-poetic novels, or to retreads by the aging masters, Cozzens, eschewing—indeed, even countering—any influence from his contemporaries, has stubbornly and ingeniously resurrected and remodeled the nineteenth-century moral novel.

In contrast to Faulkner, say, a moralist who writes by ear and accident, Cozzens has developed an almost forbiddingly finished technique. His uncompromising, nearly pained objectivity has, at least until the present work, repeatedly closed off, as if in embarrassment, whatever passion may lurk beneath the precise, composed surfaces of his books. Too often, his labors have emitted only the squeak of irony. Concurrently, his prose, which has from his first book had taut, knotty overtones of Shakespeare and the King James Bible, is shaped in compact, baked, fastidious sentences that are unmistakably the sign of a man straining against a garbled, cross-purposed age, to express, as far as is humanly possible, exactly what he has in mind. (Unfortunately, the result of this unflagging conscientiousness is sometimes the exact

opposite of Cozzens's most earnest intentions. The unbending intricacies of thought that are in all of his later novels occasionally seem to send his sentences into impossible log jams, piled with inversions, over-punctuation, and clauses within clauses, that demand two or even three readings before their sense filters through.)

The content of Cozzens's four or five best novels, though variously altered, has been practically constant. It has dealt with how the intelligent, old-fashioned, liberal, non-intellectual, upper-middle-class, morally inclined American man—Cozzens's women are never more than excellent representations—can make his way, without demeaning either himself or those about him, through a bewildering, institutionalized society. "The Last Adam" (1933), deals with a bright, flamboyant small-town doctor; "Men and Brethren" (1936), with a liberal minister and his New York church; "The Just and the Unjust" (1942), with a small-town district attorney and a murder trial; and "Guard of Honor" (1948), with a wise, elderly Colonel—a judge in civilian life—who, to all intents and purposes, takes command for a couple of days of a huge Air Force base in Florida during the Sec-

ond World War. Each of these men, though a distinct refinement of the last, is essentially the same—a complex, thoughtful, patient, honest, and imperfect soul who must, like Abner Coates, in "The Just and the Unjust," do what Coates's father asks on the last page of the book:

"... Nobody promises you a good time or an easy time. I don't know who it was who said when we think of the past we regret and when we think of the future we fear. And with reason. But no bets are off. There is the present to think of, and as long as you live there always will be. In the present, every day is a miracle. The world gets up in the morning and is fed and goes to work, and in the evening it comes home and is fed again and perhaps has a little amusement and goes to sleep. To make that possible, so much has to be done by so many people that, on the face of it, it is impossible. Well, every day we do it; and every day, come hell, come high water, we're going to have to go on doing it as well as we can."

"So it seems," said Abner.

"Yes, so it seems," said Judge Coates, "and so it is, and so it will be! And that's where you come in. That's all we want of you."

Abner said, "What do you want of me?"

"We just want you to do the impossible," Judge Coates said.

In "By Love Possessed," Cozzens's modern moral man comes perilously close to the superhuman. The story deals with forty-nine irrevocably crucial hours in the life of Arthur Win-



**BY ART POSSESSED:** One might suppose that John Donne's dictum that "No man is an Island" applied especially to novelists, who must obtain the grist for their mills from the people and the world about them. But of this James Gould Cozzens, one of America's foremost novelists, is living disproof. Although he has been a writer for more than three decades, he is never seen at literary parties, rarely has been interviewed, seldom stirs from his farm near Lambertville, N. J. Although his home is within commuting distance of New York, it is more than twenty years since he has been to a movie, attended a concert, seen a play. Throughout the turbulent Thirties, when many writers were involved in causes, Cozzens stayed aloof (he is, according to his own report, "more or less illiberal"). Fellow soldiers who knew him as an Air Force major during World War II, remember him as a quiet, pleasant man who went his own way. "My own social preference is to be left alone," he once wrote when he went so far as to answer a questionnaire, "and people have always seemed willing, even eager, to gratify my inclination." His path to this unbothered existence has been smoothed by his wife of thirty years, Bernice Baumgarten, one of New York's most dynamic and successful literary agents, who, in the words of another novelist, Edward Newhouse, "feeds him, cares for him, protects and spoils him."

Since his wartime digression, Cozzens has devoted himself exclusively to