



By Granville Hicks

IN CERTAIN superficial respects Brian Glanville's *"The Bankrupts"* (Doubleday, \$3.95) resembles Herman Wouk's *"Marjorie Morningstar."* Although it is laid in London rather than New York, the Jewish community it depicts is very much like that pictured by Mr. Wouk, and both novels show a girl in revolt against her family. Unlike Wouk, however, Glanville is sympathetic to his heroine's rebellion and rather harsh in his portrayal of what she is rebelling against.

The heroine is Rosemary Frieman, whose grandfather emigrated from Vilna, whose father is a prosperous manufacturer of cheap dresses and suits. Rosemary regards her parents as dull, limited in their interests, quarrelsome, and dictatorial. She is bored by their friends, who are all a good deal like them, and she questions the sincerity of their insistence on the observation of certain religious forms. Most of all, she resents their determination to make a good match for her. She wants to get away from "the rows and the emotional blackmail and the awful materialism."

Like Marjorie, Rosemary falls in love with a young man whom her parents think wholly unsuitable. Bernard Carter is a graduate student of literature and something of a Bohemian, and he is not on easy terms with his parents, although Rosemary finds them more tolerable than her own. But if Bernard is not the up-and-coming young businessman the Friemans believe their daughter should marry, he is anything but a Noel Airman. He is serious and responsible and less inclined than Rosemary to reject his Jewish heritage.

Rosemary's struggle to establish her independence from her family and her growing involvement with Bernard are conscientiously described. Suddenly the pace quickens: Bernard goes to Israel to teach, with Rosemary reluctantly agreeing to join him later if he decides that he wants to stay; she discovers that she is pregnant and plans to join him at once; word comes that Bernard has been killed by Arabs; Rosemary decides that she wants their baby to be born and to grow up in Israel.

If Glanville intends the novel to point a moral, and if he assumes that

the events that take place in the concluding chapters do in some way bear out the arguments on behalf of Israel that Bernard offers to Rosemary, I am afraid he has made a serious mistake. On the other hand, he presents his thesis in terms that I find more acceptable than Wouk's, and in his portrayal of the Friemans' milieu there is a substantial, praiseworthy realism. The most interesting question the book raises is whether upper-middle-class Jewish life is different and worse than upper-middle-class life in general. Rosemary thinks it is different and worse, whereas Bernard will admit only the difference. So far as I am concerned, the debate is unresolved.

Many of the stories in Bernard Malamud's *"The Magic Barrel"* (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, \$3.75) portray Jewish life of a more interesting sort than what we see in *"The Bankrupts."* Of course, Malamud is a considerably more original and resourceful writer than Glanville, and whatever he touches springs to life. But it does seem to me that he has a head start in dealing with poor rather than rich Jews. In the story that gives the volume its title Malamud says of a character that he "drew the consolation that he was a Jew and that a Jew suffered." One might say that the people in *"The Bankrupts,"* having escaped from the grosser, more obvious kinds of suffering, are lost, whereas the people in a typical Malamud story are at home with misery.

Malamud's first novel, *"The Natural,"* published in 1952, was a wildly original extravaganza of baseball. In his second, *"The Assistant,"* which appeared last year, he wrote, with calm, deep assurance about a Jewish storekeeper. It is in the world of Jewish storekeepers and their like that most of the stories in *"The Magic Barrel"* are laid. In *"The Assistant,"* which seems to me one of the important novels of the postwar period, Jewish experience is used as a way of approaching the deepest, broadest problems of love and fear, of communion and isolation in human life.

So, too, in *"The Magic Barrel":* the more faithfully Malamud renders Jewish life, the wider his meanings are.

Malamud's stories often have a legendary quality, whether his method is realistic, as *"The First Seven Years,"* or fantastic, as in *"Angel Levine."* In these particular stories there are echoes of the Bible: the allusion to Jacob and Rachel in the title of the first, the paraphrase of Job in the opening of the second. He does not merely allude to legends, however; he creates them. The title story, for instance, seems to be the kind of tale that is handed down from generation to generation in a culture that depends on oral tradition. This and certain of the other stories appear to have been brought to the exactly right shape by a process of attrition.

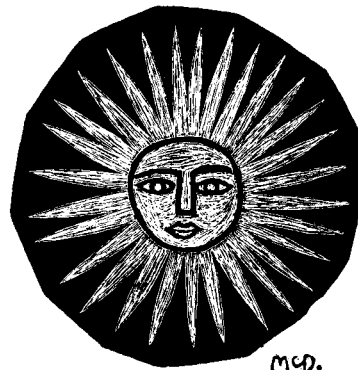
His stories are varied, more varied than I had realized as I encountered them in magazines. *"A Summer's Reading"* has a deceptive simplicity that reminds me of Sherwood Anderson. *"The Lady of the Lake"* ends with a twist that would have amused O. Henry, though Malamud, needless to say, has not written it for the sake of the twist. Some stories are put to-

gether with textbook precision, but others pass themselves off as mere anecdotes. Although compassion is obviously Malamud's great quality, he has many resources, among them the comic inventiveness of such a story as *"Behold the Key."*

The question Malamud asks more often than any other

is: what are the limits of human responsibility? In *"The Last Mohican"* he develops the theme with a rare combination of humor and pathos, whereas in *"Take Pity"* he approaches it by way of fantasy. More often he is quietly matter-of-fact, as in *"The Bill"* and *"The Loan."* *"The Loan"* will serve as an example of what Malamud can do. Here are Lieb the baker and his wife, aging and ill, and here is Kobotsky, also aging and ill, who asks Lieb for money so that he can place a stone on his wife's grave. That, in the midst of so much physical suffering, the three can undergo profound agonies of soul, Kobotsky in asking a favor, the others in deciding whether or not to grant it, becomes, in Malamud's hands, a triumph of the human spirit.

Although the leading characters in Dan Jacobson's *"The Price of Dia-* (Continued on page 39)



M.C.

China's Journey to Tomorrow

"The Long March," by Simone de Beauvoir (translated by Austryn Wainhouse; World. 513 pp. \$7.50), is a report, by one of France's most noted intellectuals, of her six week tour through Communist China. Han Suyin, who reviews the book, is the author of *"A Many-Splendored Thing."*

By Han Suyin

THE time was June, 1956, a hot afternoon in Peking. I was sitting with Chou En-lai and his wife, nearing the end of a three hours' talk, now discussing the relative merits and demerits of several books and articles published by Western visitors to China. Chou En-lai wound up: "Of those who come to see us, nine in ten bring their emotions and their prejudices with them, either for or against us; they go back to prove themselves right, either for or against." This statement may sound sweeping, but it focuses on a perplexity which, as an Asian, I often encounter when I read books by European writers on an Asian country. Rare is the volume which leaves one unaware of the emotional climate, the fixed set of moral judgments and conditioned reflexes of the author, an attitude of mind unconscious to the writer but obvious to us, and which makes every "objective assessment" a description of the writer's own reactions, rather than a description of the reality he has encountered.

This is not a reflection on the conscious honesty of the writer; each and every one of us wears impalpable blinkers; many an authoritative writer is authoritative in that proportion in which he is unaware of his limitations to understanding.

It was with a feeling of happiness, therefore, that I read Simone de Beauvoir's book. Not that it is a perfect book; some parts of it are too optimistic, even, if I may say so, in spite of my admiration for this major work, a little naïve. But to me the importance, the overwhelming value of this book in contrast with others, is that its author has attempted to know herself, to assess her mental premises and reservations, before at-

tempting to manipulate the Chinese material at her disposal. She has tried to question her own questions. She has asked herself not only, "What shall I write about this phenomenon, what do I feel and think about it?" She has gone further into scientific honesty and asked herself, "How must I look at this? From which point of view must I judge and what part of my judgment will be due to my own background?" She has questioned her own perspective, aware that not all is always as she feels or sees it. And for this integrity, as well as the humility with which she calls her volume an "Essay on China," all praise is due, for it is so much in contrast with the brilliant, wholesale, and arrogantly sweeping judgments of patented experts. By this method she has achieved for us a new perspective.

From the perspective she has adopted, Simone de Beauvoir has refused to do what others have done; refused to dignify the short weeks spent tossed in the land mass of China as capable of giving her (or them) an eternally valid picture, when all round them was change and mutability; refused to regard the present she saw in 1955 as irrevocable, but viewed it in its total reality as a fluid and labile transition from stage to stage, or, in her words, "a step in the long, long march of the Chinese people towards their own future." We are no longer asked to praise or to condemn; we can begin to try to understand. We can begin to see the enigma of China as Miss de Beauvoir wishes us to see it, "not

only a political entity, an idea to dissect, but as a bone and flesh reality that we must attempt to decipher."

If for no other reason, this makes her book an outstanding achievement, a landmark upon the long and arduous road that China has to go, a landmark to be remembered and recalled when the more brilliant, more emotionally poignant, but less painstaking records of others will have been forgotten.

This is not to say that the book is without its faults. Simone de Beauvoir herself says, "It is not sufficient to describe, one must explain." And explain she does, every inch of the way, copiously, meticulously, giving the past as background, relating the motives, enumerating the intentions, as well as what she could glean of the results. That she occasionally sounds ingenuous is not her fault; it is another homage to her integrity, to the exact reproduction of what she has been told, as well as to what she believes. Simone de Beauvoir does not speak Chinese and therefore many of the explanations came from people who were there to explain. The charge will be laid that these people were "Communists," and therefore incapable of telling the truth.

I personally have had long acquaintance, dating back to schooldays, with men and women who are now "Communists" in the Chinese government, and I do not believe that a Communist tells *more* lies than does any other kind of official. There is, in fact, an outstanding tendency in Peking to try to tell the truth, painstakingly and punctiliously. I therefore do not question the statements made, nor the *intentions* which Miss de Beauvoir explains with such care; but from my own experience, after two visits to China, I will say that in certain cases Miss de Beauvoir has shown herself more optimistic than her hosts. In her passionate yet reasonable search for accuracy



—Elliot Erwitt.

"It is not true that a Chinese village is more comfortable and richer than a village in France; what is extraordinary about it is the progress it represents over the villages of the past . . . It is naïve to be overawed by the fact that the Archbishop of Peking openly approves of the regime; if he didn't he'd lose his miter tomorrow. This rapturous enthusiasm offends me not only through the errors it leads to but because China deserves to be seen for what she is; you will sell her efforts short if you do not recognize the difficulties they involve . . . This moment in China's history is stirring precisely because of the as yet incomplete character of the victories she has won . . ."

—From "The Long March."