

## Ill-Paid Were the Players of the Communist Drama

*The voracity of the Red flame that promised warmth to the forlorn and thereby hypnotized the idealist is revealed in two current books: "The Disinherited," by Michel del Castillo; translated from the French by Humphrey Hare (Knopf. 274 pp. \$3.95), and "The Owl of Minerva: The Autobiography of Gustav Regler," translated from the German by Norman Denny (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 375 pp. \$5). Though the first is a novel and the second a memoir, they dovetail in their accounts of the Spanish Civil War. To review them SR has chosen critics with personal knowledge of the hopes, dilemmas, and disillusionments described. Novelist Richard Wright wrote "The God That Failed" and, most recently, "Black Power." Louis Fischer, who was the first American to join the International Brigade, is the author of "Russia Revisited." His latest book is "The Story of Indonesia."*

### 1. The Voiceless Ones

By RICHARD WRIGHT

FROM Dostoevsky's "The Possessed" to Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon," a Niagara of serious fiction has depicted man's outliving the mythological symbols of Christendom and his agonized groping for some new faith. In no area of contemporary life has this dilemma assumed so intense a form as in the reality of the rise and meaning of world Communism. Hitherto this dramatic Communist reality has been almost exclusively treated in the literature produced by bourgeois philosophical novelists who repeatedly posed the question of Communism in terms of: If there is a God, then Communism is an aberration, a sin, a spawn of intellectual pride; but, if there is no God, then Communism is the logical consequence of a God-less universe; anything is possible; man becomes God; the floodgates to criminality are open; etc., etc.

Yet I, an ex-Communist who spent ten years under Party discipline, never met a single functioning Communist whose actions were informed by such absurd and abstract notions. The Communists I knew were victims of a society, men and women and children whose personalities bore the festering wounds of the Church and State, repressive organs of power wielded by acquisitive and exploitive social classes; at times they were victims of racial or economic conditions; at other times they were double victims, victims of their own backward society and that of distant colonial powers. And not once did I ever hear a victim say, "If there is a God, then what is happening to me is right and I accept it." Indeed,



—On extended loan from the artist to The Museum of Modern Art.

Picasso's "Guernica"—A human motor power with energy enough to move Spain.

the contrary was most often true; the more stoutly Christian the victim, the more inclined was he toward rebellion and eventual Communism.

It was, then, with a sense of relief that I turned the gripping pages of Michel del Castillo's second novel, "The Disinherited," which tells the story of the making of a Communist in terms of how I saw and lived that process. I do not exclude other processes; perhaps Dostoevsky's and Koestler's mentally tormented heroes really do exist, but they surely would (and this applies as much to Marx as to Lenin and Stalin) have had no human raw material to organize and catapult into tragic action if the conditions of poverty and degradation, as so graphically depicted by Castillo, had not thrown up hordes of violently exasperated men eager to embrace any philosophy that even hinted at redemption or liberation.

How is it that so many of the portraits of Communists presented to us have been pale-visaged high-brows thrashing about in the throes of meta-

physics—high-brows whose presence or absence would not have mattered much, as history has so amply demonstrated? Hundreds of thousands of intellectual Communists, as Khrushchev has testified, have been slain for jaywalking in the path of the revolution and that revolution has roared relentlessly on. How was that possible? Who has been trying to fool us? Was it their fault that the voiceless ones who bore the brunt of the revolution could not tell their side of the story? Why did not the Communist or ex-Communist intellectuals recount the experience of those voiceless ones instead of extolling and celebrating the state of their own tired and frayed nerves?

IN "The Disinherited," Castillo has done this. Only, his hero (if such caloused and determined men can be imagined in that genre), embittered and hard, simple in action but confoundingly complex in reaction, springing out of a quarantined slum on the outskirts of Madrid just prior to Franco's onslaught on Spanish freedom, is

a truly terrifying man whose existence calls into account our responsibility, for our society produces Olmys with the same skilled efficiency that River Rouge produces Fords. Not even Gorky ever drew such pictures of human brutality and suffering. Beneath the Spanish Church and State, today as then, is a subworld where there is more death than bread, where curses have superseded caresses, where murder is a casual joke, where sadism is entertainment, where prostitution is almost respectable, where all human joy has put been on deposit in the cathedrals to be withdrawn in a life beyond the grave. And with what terse power Castillo delineates the volatile, sodden, drunken, and dreamy denizens of this slum!

Here is that human motor power that the Bolsheviks called the "locomotive of history," a motor power which they alone seem to be able, no matter what their motives, to weigh in terms of its dynamic potentials, a motor power without which no single Communist intellectual, no matter how genius-ridden, would ever dream of going into revolutionary action. Without history's generations of Olmys there would have been no energy to move Spain toward republican government or to sustain its self-sacrificial struggle against

Fascism; there would have been no wild human tide to drag the Russian October-train down its bloody rails; there would have been no élan to spur China upon its long arduous march; no fire to set ablaze the hearts of Africa's black millions.

**C**ASTILLO, artist that he is, reaches no hard conclusions in his dramatic recital of degradation, sacrifice, and death; instead, he concentrates with white-hot heat on showing his chief characters becoming entangled in a web of insoluble contradictions. The brooding Santiago, impelled, like so many before him, toward Communism out of Christian love, finds himself a traitor lurching between the exploiters and the exploited and is slain by his Communist comrades; led by Santiago into the Party and freed of poverty and hunger, Olmy is frozen with horror at the tragic price he pays, a symbolical and biological emasculation. Carlos, a dry, arrogant, crippled intellectual, discovers that he can't fight Franco's dictatorship and approve proletarian dictatorship at the same time, and he reaches that point of despair that makes him give his life for a revolution in which he no longer believes; Loto, the fifteen-year-old boy who swears continually to keep up his courage and

prefers to die in battle than live in a slum; a kindhearted and weary priest who, about to die before a Communist firing squad, stands bewildered at complexities of life never hinted at in the Scriptures—all these brave and trembling men slide down the grim Greek route to defeat, without glimpsing why they are fighting or what they are dying for, shipwrecked upon the shoals of their own illusions, yet somehow managing to cling until the end to their dream of a world of peace for all mankind.

**O**UT of this welter of negation, the sheer fierceness of despair tints the horizon of feeling with the afterglow of hope. Only the proud and bitter Spanish women—Olmy's mother and wife (Consuelo and Marianita) emerge with some tattered dignity in Castillo's laconic narrative, but theirs is a dignity born more of biological functioning than of clear-eyed hope.

Castillo restates the Communist drama in a manner that reminds us that its strength is in each hungry body, in each outraged sense of human dignity, in each alienated personality, in each thwarted dream of comradeship and love, a challenging reality that is not all new and that predates the appearance of proletarian political parties. Anti-Communist, anti-Fascist, Castillo writes with blazing fury about men thrown into conflict by forces in themselves they but dimly perceive. His is a new voice whose accent is on the wordless words of the heart. Religion seems to be no answer to the needs of these deeply troubled men; indeed, as is evident in Asia and Africa today, religion all too often awakens the initial impulse to rebellion that leads to Communism.

What then is the answer? Castillo does not tell us, but his suffering-wrought book rouses us to speculation. May it not ultimately develop that this sense of being disinherited is not mainly political at all, that politics serves it as a temporary vessel, that Marxist ideology in particular is but a transitory makeshift pending a more accurate diagnosis, that Communism may be but a painful compromise containing a definition of man by sheer default?

If any of the foregoing speculations are but remotely true, then I believe that the present Cold War, and all the contemporary schemes for the "containment" of Communism, are beside the point, and Communism, deriving its nuclear energy from mankind's global awakening out of traditional and tribal slumber, might well turn out to be an even greater problem to the Communists themselves than to their strident enemies.



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

MUSIC OUT OF MYTHOLOGY

The mythologies of many lands have provided a fertile source for musical compositions. This is particularly true of the Graeco-Roman tradition. Here are twenty composers and twenty works derived from many sources to be matched with each other, submitted by Robb McKenzie of Newark, New Jersey. Answers on page 52.

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|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Barber           | ( ) "Les Amours de Jupiter"  |
| 2. Berlioz          | ( ) "Apollo and Daphne"      |
| 3. Debussy          | ( ) "Apollon Musagete"       |
| 4. Dukas            | ( ) "Bacchus et Ariane"      |
| 5. Gluck            | ( ) "Le Coq d'Or"            |
| 6. Handel           | ( ) "Daphnis et Chloe"       |
| 7. Ibert            | ( ) "Diane et Actaeon"       |
| 8. Milhaud          | ( ) "Dido and Aeneas"        |
| 9. Monteverdi       | ( ) "Elektra"                |
| 10. Offenbach       | ( ) "Götterdämmerung"        |
| 11. Purcell         | ( ) "Lemminkäinen"           |
| 12. Rameau          | ( ) "Les Malheurs d'Orphée"  |
| 13. Ravel           | ( ) "Medea"                  |
| 14. Rimsky-Korsakov | ( ) "Orfeo"                  |
| 15. Roussel         | ( ) "Orfeo ed Euridice"      |
| 16. Saint-Saëns     | ( ) "Orpheus in Hades"       |
| 17. Sibelius        | ( ) "La Péri"                |
| 18. Strauss         | ( ) "Le Rouet d'Omphale"     |
| 19. Stravinsky      | ( ) "Syrinx"                 |
| 20. Wagner          | ( ) "Les Troyens à Carthage" |