

more lethal opposition engendered by the gang wars that were touched off by the famous Appalachen meeting. All in all, it's a tale to raise your hair, and it provides answers to some questions that have been puzzling newspaper readers for years.

Fred Cook, author of six books and free-lance magazine writer (he has won three Page One awards from the Newspaper Guild of New York), is an old and respected hand at the business of writing about larceny. His story of national crime is factual but at the same time it is as exciting as a first-rate crime novel. Had the Kefauver Committee ever done the awesome amount of research Fred Cook did in compiling material for "A Two-Dollar Bet Means Murder," that well-meant investigation might have been more productive.

His thesis is that if you place a two-dollar bet with the corner bookmaker it starts a chain reaction that leads to corruption of the police, to a breakdown of law and order, to narcotic activities, and—when the occasional honest citizen protests—to murder.

There is a great deal in this book that I learned for the first time (so will you). Most of us think of New York and Chicago as the centers of illegal capers (gambling, numbers racket, prostitution, narcotics, etc.), but although these two cities contribute greatly to the illegal profits made, they are not the only gross offenders.

Consider a charming university city like Ithaca, New York. Fred Cook strips the charm from it. Until recently (perhaps even now) there were fifty professional gamblers plying their trade in this relatively small community (permanent population, 29,000), and there was a Saturday night dice game in the Sons of Italy Lodge, where \$500 bets were routine. The police "investigated" after protests but only eight gamblers were apprehended and they merely had their hands gently slapped.

The New York State Crime Commission cast its eyes on Buffalo and was understandably startled at what it saw. It saw that gambling, bookmaking, prostitution, and the numbers racket were grossing in the neighborhood of about \$107 million a year.

These are just a couple of samples Fred Cook gives us. He presents the low-down on New York, Chicago, Las Vegas, and half a dozen other cities and invariably proves that big-time crime could not be a success without the connivance of local police and the acquiescence of otherwise reputable citizens. This is a frightening book; it should be read by everyone, including the Pulitzer Prize Committee. Fred Cook deserves their consideration.

Stereotypical Eccentric

"Confessions of a Conformist," by Morris Freedman (Norton. 224 pp. \$3.95), and **"The Importance of Being Imperfect," by John Robert Clarke** (McKay. 216 pp. \$3.50), deal with different aspects of the American people's public and personal ways of regarding themselves and their neighbors. Sydney J. Harris is a syndicated newspaper columnist for General Features.

By Sydney J. Harris

WHAT these two books have in common is, chiefly, a severe case of literary edema, that disease so pandemic in the book publishing business. Both are essentially brief essays that have been swollen (mostly with water) wholly out of proportion to the importance of the subject and to the capacities of the authors.

Morris Freedman's "Confessions of a Conformist" was born some two years ago, as an article in *The American Scholar* on "The Dangers of Nonconformism." I read it at the time, and thought it made a valid and interesting if trivial point, namely: that nonconformism for its own sake eventually becomes as stupid and restrictive as unthinking conformity.

This minor strain has been expanded into a symphonic suite of 224 repetitious, ill-thought, and exasperating pages. Not content with pointing out that the avant-garde can be as silly and stereotyped as the Philistines they despise, Freedman has undertaken a defense of popular culture that embraces television, advertising, Detroit cars, Hollywood movies, soap operas, disk jockeys, Broadway musicals, baseball, football, and such mass-circulation magazines as *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Freedman, of course, is not a "conformist," in the conventional sense of the word; he is actually an anti-anti-conformist, who seems to have been pushed into an absurd position by the exaggerations of some of the intelligentsia.

Except for the first and last chapters, which bear reading, the bulk of the book consists of intemperate (and poorly written) attacks upon an intellectual straw man who never existed

on land or sea. Freedman's antagonist is a caricature, embodying all the most distasteful features of the third-rate avant-gardist and none of his virtues.

He seems to have a curious conception of what constitutes an "intellectual." Most of the men and women I know who belong in that category enjoy jazz, attend Hollywood movies, go to baseball games, are more likely to drive Fords than Fiats, and appreciate the occasional amusing or pungent ad. (Some time ago in fact, I spent an evening with Karl Shapiro and Delmore Schwartz, two highly nonconformist poets, who expressed at length their admiration for baseball and for Marilyn Monroe.)

It is only the fakes, the untalented, the hangers-on who feel they must adopt every symbol of nonconformity. This can be said in a paragraph; we scarcely need a whole book to demolish such pathetic creatures. Nor should it be necessary to take such immoderate pride in accepting popular culture that the railroads' advertising slogan "A Hog Can Cross the Country Without Changing Trains—But YOU Can't!" is lauded as possessing "the vigor of classical polemic," and suggesting that Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" is seductively on a par with "the blandishments of a perfume ad or a brassiere ad."

A careful reading of the book, if you have the patience, reveals that Freedman is neither for conformity nor nonconformity, but for independence of choice on a rational basis. Thus the title is a fraud, and the author is simply stating the position of every civilized and educated man, who respects both tradition and innovation; although most of us, perhaps, do not expect to have our cultural cake and eat it at the same time, which is Freedman's delusive aim.

In "The Importance of Being Imperfect," John Robert Clarke also inflates a simple and relatively unimportant aspect of American life into a 216-page farrago of indignation, expostulation, inspiration, a little sense, and a great deal of pretentious nonsense.

Clarke's target is the "perfectionist personality," which he sees all around him—the people he calls "picture straighteners on the wall of life." That phrase will give you some idea of the style and tone of the book, which is
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Navigating to Nowhere

"The Ship," by Hans Henny Jahn, translated by Catherine Hutter (Scribners. 210 pp. \$3.95), tells in a grammatically dismantled "new language" about the expressionistic journey of a mysterious three-master. Richard Plant, who teaches German literature at the City College of New York, specializes in modern German writing.

By Richard Plant

HANS HENNY JAHNN, organ builder and expressionist writer, was born in 1894 and died in 1959. To the public at large in Germany he remained just a name. Only a small group of disciples kept writing about him, reminding the world that here was a forgotten genius—eccentric, perhaps even incomprehensible, but still a genius. It speaks for the courage of the German theatre that it performed a few of Jahn's plays, although each play created a scandal. Jahn has been called "The Prophet of Lechery," and in some cases, as for instance in his early drama "Physician, Wife and Son," the erotic entanglements of the characters were too complex to unravel.

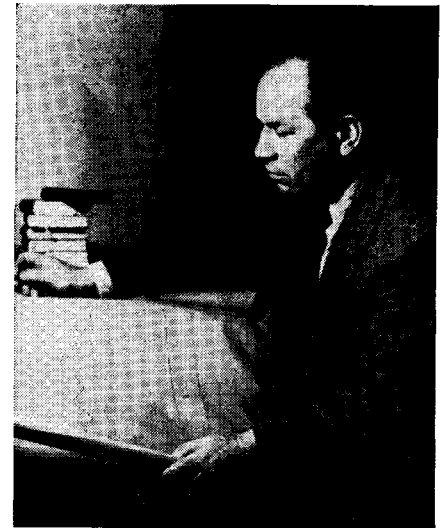
Neither failure nor scandal kept Jahn from going on. He wrote a "Coronation of Richard the Third" that failed, and a "Medea" that impressed even the sophisticated audiences of the Twenties as more sadistic than the other versions of this innately blood-thirsty myth. Jahn stopped writing when the Nazis seized power, fled to Denmark, started breeding horses, and created news again in 1948 when his play "Poverty, Wealth, Man and Animal" saw a public performance. This time he told of a Norwegian farmer who not only loves two women, but is filled with a deep-seated, mystic affection for his horse. The same obsession with horses, by the way, could be observed in Jahn's formless, gigantic, supra-expressionist novel "Perrudja," written in 1929 and still a riddle to most students of German literature.

Jahn, if anyone in the large field of German experimental writers, is the outsider's outsider, the true literary astronaut. Like many expressionists of the Twenties, he is preoccupied with

"the new man" and a "new language." In all of Jahn's work we encounter large, general ideas and concepts. He is forever treating his themes of Life and Death, Wealth, Poverty, and Love. These ideas are embodied in abstractions. Jahn cannot and does not wish to create human beings. He strives to create ciphers and symbols. He tries to go deeper than Freud; he wants to give us a work that is a metaphor of existence. Life is cruel, incomprehensible, impenetrable, doomed to die. Only those who create and those who truly love can overcome the senselessness of existence. Violence is everywhere. Perversion may be a futile way out for people who feel trapped, but it is a sort of protest. These are a few basic concepts which Jahn has tried to embody in his writings; some scholars believe that through them he has really done pioneer work and broken the fourth dimension of literature.

However the dangers and pitfalls inherent in all expressionist writing seem—at least to this observer—to have overwhelmed Jahn most of the time. He has gone beyond that which has been tried by even the most advanced Anglo-Saxon writers. For instance, in Joyce's section "Nighttown" the visual, the irrational, the dreamlike elements have assumed a larger importance than in the rest of the volume. But we are at least conscious that we are witnessing the hallucinations of two characters to whom we have been introduced. As Walter Sokel points out in his excellent study of expressionism, Kafka has gone another step towards abolishing realism. His "Metamorphosis" reveals not only Gregor Samsa's hidden wishes, dreams, and guilt feelings, but the transformation into a bug provides a metaphor that can embody disintegration without disintegrating as a narrative. This time we don't know where any reality begins or where it ends. But we can accept Gregor the bug. We understand him, and the story flows on, relentlessly driven by the marvelously tortuous Kafka logic.

However, Jahn's novels, both the early "Perrudja" and the late (1937) "The Ship," must be termed attempts to shoot into outer space. The language itself is under attack, like a metal corroded by a powerful acid. The author himself once complained that music took its build-up from poetry, and that



—Anny Brier.

Hans Henny Jahn—"strives to create ciphers and symbols."

the novelist is entitled to take back what music took away. Yet the technique of leitmotifs, fugues, strophes, chords, rhythmical phrases recurring again and again, lead all too quickly to anarchy. And Jahn has not escaped this danger. He ignores the narrative, delves into the subconscious of a character, then leaves him, goes to a childhood memory of a subsidiary character—who plays a small part in the book—and then embarks on a discussion of one of his favorite themes, the putrefaction of corpses.

It is not possible to offer a summary of "The Ship." Only a few things can be stated with certainty. In the hold of the three-master are hidden heavy crates. No one aboard knows what they contain. Later on it appears as if they were holding the mummified corpses of young girls, but when a crate is broken open there is nothing in it. Ellena, the captain's daughter, disappears without a trace; invisible powers are at work everywhere; the ship's destination is never given, though she was built originally for the exploration of magnetic phenomena. Gustave, the fiancé of Ellena, travels along as a stowaway, and the larger part of the book is dedicated to his search for Ellena. The ship, by the way, opens into nowhere at a few spots, and in chapter eight we discover a metal shaft that no one has ever seen before. At the end the ship sinks. But this is not really the end: Jahn has written a sequel in several volumes which traces the travels of a few of the characters through many countries.

By creating his own laws of narration Jahn has forfeited most of his chances to carry the reader along. He admits that, while writing, he does not yet know what will happen next;