

# Progenitors of a Zombie

**"The Inheritor," by R. C. Hutchinson** (Harper. 431 pp. \$4.95), traces to their sources the components of a personality damaged by desertion and brutality. Aileen Pippett has long been a student of English fiction.

By Aileen Pippett

THE CENTRAL figure in this starkly realistic novel is a zombie. Vincent Levesque, a foundling reared by peasants, is a history professor at the University of Louvain, a man whose life has been shattered by slave labor under the Nazi invaders and by his wife's infidelity during the German retreat from Russia. Repatriated at last to a devastated Belgium, this living ghost learns he is heir to an English fortune. Legal difficulties and the cash value of the legacy matter little, but he is vitally concerned with the mystery of his parentage and the character traits he has inherited from those who abandoned him in infancy.

He discovers that his dead father was a harshly competent industrialist, a dour, unlovable man without a friend or relative to speak kindly of him. He traces his living mother to Luxembourg. She can prove she was lawfully married and reveals a gentler side of his father's nature, but a lifetime of atonement for deserting husband and child inhibits her from exhibiting tenderness. An English cousin Levesque loves is similarly conditioned by self-sacrifice and unable to respond freely to his human needs. In a trance of despair he seeks his wife (now deserted by her lover), but pity for a woman as wretched and unloved as himself finally dispels his murderous fantasies.

The intricate story is meticulously plotted, rational, and convincing at every stage, though its end leaves many doubts. Some readers will agree with Vincent's mother and cousin that one "cannot escape God's love," while others will question the future of a marriage where boredom and dislike are so reciprocal, or wonder whether he will resume his career in Belgium or start a new life as a businessman in England. My own explanation of the author's meaning is prosaic: he simply asserts that while there's life there's hope. For R. C. Hutchinson is an emi-

nently civilized man who can chart a course to sanity through violence, madness, and despair. His characters never dissolve in sentimentality because he accepts the limits imposed by inheritance and environment on their freedom to change their natures. This basic rationality makes his monsters credible and his saints sympathetic.

At times this story is almost unbearably intense, at others Mr. Hutchinson's lucid style and light touch relieve the pressure. His narrative skill is marked

by his characters' power to converse meaningfully, even when four or five at once seem to be at cross purposes. Such orchestration of voices, allowing people to talk with, not at, one another, to convey thought and reveal emotions by means of everyday speech, is an unusual gift. Rarer and more refreshing still in this sex-obsessed age is the author's attitude towards women; he seems genuinely to like them. He knows they differ from one another in particular and from men in general, but these human variations neither alarm nor enrage him. Mr. Hutchinson has declared a truce to the cold war between men and women, thereby revealing confidence in the possibility one day of peaceful co-existence between mature human beings in our complex society.

## On Sunday, Remorse

**"Each in His Darkness," by Julian Green, translated by Anne Green** (Pantheon. 347 pp. \$4.50), describes the turmoil of a man committed to both faith and debauchery. Riley Hughes is on leave as an associate professor of English at Georgetown University to write a critical survey of the Catholic literary revival.

By Riley Hughes

IN "EACH IN HIS DARKNESS" Julian Green once again celebrates his preoccupation with reconversion, that subtle and recondite art of recapturing—or being recaptured by—a lost faith. "Are you a believer?" the characters in his new novel are prone to ask one another. Whatever the answer, it is likely to exhibit a choice passionately held yet momentarily reversible. In this dynamic microcosm, where the very clouds in the sky are "like sheets torn to pieces by a madman," objects of desire and belief shift and change: the good man has his face turned toward evil, and the evil man pants after a forsaken innocence.

For young Wilfred Ingram the tension between faith and the world's wisdom brings an insupportable burden. Wilfred is preeminently the Baudelairean man, fiercely Catholic and yet committed to the pleasures of the flesh. When we first see him he is being summoned to the deathbed of his rich uncle Horace, the only other Catholic in a Presbyterian family. Wilfred alone

is fully aware of the ambiguities in his uncle's presumably edifying death after a lifetime of unholy living. He knows too that his own reputation for innocence and piety is undeserved. He has yet to learn that his talent for the absolute will alternately betray and save him.

The opening chapters suggest possible social comedy, but Mr. Green soon sweeps his stage clear of all but essential, and symbolic, furniture for the stark action of a morality play. Wilfred, back at his haberdashery clerk's job in the city, after unconsciously repulsing the advances of his cousin Angus, re-enters the familiar cycle of week-night debauchery and Sunday remorse. Even the faceless women he pursues and his cryptic association with Max, who appears and reappears like the consciousness of some foul body odor and whose mission it is "to liquidate the supernatural," do not destroy Wilfred's faith. His appearance in a confessional box he knows is empty is followed a few days later by confession to a priest. And by a quick relapse. It is his lust, not unmixed with love, for his married cousin Phoebe that finally consumes him. And it is Max, his murderer, who hears his last, irrevocable, pure word.

A character in one of Muriel Spark's short stories speaks of "that Catholic point of view that takes some getting used to," and certainly some of the persons and actions in "Each in His Darkness" can be the object of empathy only through reference to doctrinal distinctions and precisions. The scene in which Wilfred baptizes the dying Fred,

the pimply young clerk whom he had, quite technically, scandalized, could conceivably have full power only for the initiate. Yet this novel is far more than an animated theological treatise, for all that its action gives violent context to belief. It is universal and compelling because it possesses a subtext of pity and of wonder, an achievement that places it above the manipulations of a Morris L. West and in the company of Bernanos and Graham Greene.

#### RENUNCIATION AND ADJUSTMENT:

Colette was in her fifties and had just broken with her second husband when she wrote her farewell to love, "Break of Day" (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, \$3.75). Sustained by the example of her mother, that extraordinary woman who knew how to renounce and let go "as a matter of decency," Colette braces herself for a life henceforth alone. But then Vial, the young chap who inhabits the nearby "pink thimble" on the Côte d'Azur, where they are both vacationing, challenges her resolution. All night long she contemplates this lean young man who adores her; at daybreak, she sends him away. He will marry a suitable girl and Colette, liberated for good, can dig all day in her garden and then, heedless of roughened hands and sunburnt nose, can join jolly companions in romps along the Côte. Comradeship, work, her house, and her pets will fill her life to the brim.

This brief *récit*, so frankly autobiographical in inspiration that all but a couple of names are the real ones, is a veritable showpiece for Colette's talents. She lavishes the riches of her palette on evocations of the Mediterranean summer—great landscapes and seascapes as well as cosy garden scenes with growing things, spiders, little snakes, and (of course) cats. At times she turns her attention to the flora and fauna of vacationing Bohemia, and gives us Saturday night dance-hall scenes with arty types and perverts. But never is she really distracted from the subject to which she owes her fame—the psychology of a woman. And the aspect she depicts here calls forth all her great subtlety and power. I do not imagine any woman would fail to be moved by Colette's picture of serene renunciation or fail to be inspired by the heroine's healthy adjustment. But, alas, great art is often built on a lie, and Colette, in reality, held onto the young man until the day of her death.

Enid McLeod's translation of this novel, originally published as "*La Naissance du Jour*" in 1928, is part of a project to do into English the *Oeuvres Complètes de Colette*. It is preceded by a fine introduction by Glenway Wescott.

—LAURENT LESAGE.

#### BRITAIN

## The Bombs of Yesteryear

"*Why England Slept*," by John F. Kennedy (Wilfred Funk, 246 pp. \$3.50), and *The Narrow Margin*," by Derek Dempster and Derek Wood (McGraw-Hill, 406 pp. \$6.50), analyze the significance of Britain's lag in rearmament in the late Thirties and her subsequent performance under fire. Maurice Edelman, a novelist and a Member of Parliament, was a combat correspondent during the Second World War.

By Maurice Edelman

THE ACADEMIC thesis on politics is usually sneered at by practicing politicians. Written behind the ivy-covered walls of an American college or within the cloisters of an English university, it tends to be divorced from the realities of public affairs, where human behavior is rarely predictable and the laws of causation often don't apply. On the other hand, the calm view of a political analyst, studying the scene in a scholarly seclusion, can be more prescient than that of a politician hacking his way through the jungle of day-to-day problems.

So it is with President Kennedy's "Why England Slept," which would deserve the highest praise as a piece of current research even if we hadn't observed its forecasts come true and their author raised to the highest executive office, where he has responsibility for practice as well as theory. The book is written with a remarkable clarity and simplicity of style, which provokes one comforting thought in the complex international situation of today: that a man who thinks clearly must be able to act clearly.

In "Why England Slept," written in 1940, Mr. Kennedy makes a chronological breakdown of the stages in the German and Japanese rearmament during the 1930s and of Britain's gradual awakening to its threat. He shows that the two groups hostile to British rearmament were the Labour Party, which voted against Defence Estimates in the belief that the League of Nations should have been made into an effective substitute for a competition in arms, and the pro-German sympathizers in high places who believed that Hitler's

methods were right for Germany at least and nurtured the illusion that he was eager to maintain a peaceful relationship with the West. Mr. Kennedy emphasizes the fundamental paradox of the democracies—namely, that in order to preserve liberty against totalitarian regimes it is necessary from time to time to surrender part of their own liberty. Thus the trade unions, for example, had ultimately to renounce for the duration of the war many of the basic rights of the worker, such as the right to the mobility of his labor, and employers had to renounce many of their rights, such as the right to the location of their plant. But it took several years at least, from the recognition of the totalitarian threat to the ultimate challenge of war, before these adaptations could be made.

The problems of rearmament during the 1930s were thus both political and practical. The political problem in retrospect should have precedence, since the practical problem—the lag in rearmament and the need to persuade labor and management to make up the leeway—was a consequence of the Chamberlain government's grotesque failure to appreciate the menace of the Nazi regime.

THE reissue of this book at the present time naturally draws an interesting parallel between the conflict of British unpreparedness in face of the Nazi threat and the apparent unpreparedness of the West today in face of the Communist threat. Henry Luce in his Foreword rightly recalls his own words in 1940: "Not much longer shall we have time for reading the lessons of the past. An inexorable present calls us to the defense of a great future." But the lessons of the past, though relevant, don't give us all the answers to the problems of today. Mr. Kennedy quotes the general fear in Britain in 1939 that, in Stanley Baldwin's words, "The bomber would always get through." He correctly points out that the bomber did not, in the event, always get through, and that therefore the British public was unduly anguished at the prospect of having to endure the obliteration of their cities. Yet the bomber, as Coventry still testifies—and "Why England Slept" was written before the blitz had taken place—was able to wreak mass havoc, which the United States