

Sublime Egotist Well Explored

"The Memoirs of Chateaubriand," edited and translated by Robert Baldick (Knopf, 375 pp. \$6.95), brings together some of the more dramatic and descriptive portions of the original twelve-volume work that the statesman and writer addressed to later generations as a voice "from beyond the tomb." Anna Balakian is professor of French at New York University.

By Anna Balakian

SOME men write for their own time, others conceive of the work of art as a monument to posterity. François-René de Chateaubriand was a living influence through the turmoils of the nineteenth century's political and literary revolutions. But not satisfied to epitomize his time, he relegated his most prolific work to later generations, other climates. After having worked intermittently at his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* for nearly forty of his eighty years of life, he set their publication date for fifty years later, so that they might indeed become reminiscences from beyond the grave. But in 1849, hardly a year after his death, his publisher hastened the copious, twelve-volume work into print after an abortive attempt to serialize it. As Chateaubriand had suspected, it was too soon for the "Memoirs" to earn a nonpartisan reception; the press was dismayed at the parting shots of the "sublime egotist," astonished at the lack of discretion and the betrayal of the confidences of friends. However, by the end of the century it was considered a masterpiece, and it became a model for the development of the now-popular literary genre of remembrance of things past.

In bringing out this new and extremely attractive English edition, Robert Baldick, an Oxford scholar, has assumed a double responsibility, that of translator and editor of one of the most read and quoted of French books. Bilingual by birth, he has achieved a fortunate stylistic identification. He has caught the cadences of the father of French Romanticism, whose prose was more poetic than much of the verse of his contemporaries. As editor, Mr. Bal-



Chateaubriand—"disarming revelations."

dick has apparently based his selections on his judgment of current taste. He has leaned to the descriptive and the dramatic. Included are some of the well-known passages on Chateaubriand's early life in his native castle of Combourg in the Gothic countryside of Brittany, descriptions of his explorations of the primeval beauties of America, his excitement at meeting George Washington, his return to the shambles of revolutionary France, his confrontations with Napoleon, his foreign missions, his political disappointments.

Love was ever a motive force in his life:

Love is so surely the supreme happiness that it is haunted by the illusion of perpetuity; it pronounces only irrevocable vows; in the absence of joy, it tries to make sorrow eternal; a fallen angel, it still speaks the language it spoke in the incorruptible abode; its hope is that it may never die; in its twofold nature and its twofold illusion on this earth, it endeavors to perpetuate itself by immortal thought and inexhaustible generation.

The reader will find disarming revelations of his attachments: the tender and tense affection of his sister Lucile; the awakening to love of the young and sensitive English girl Charlotte Ives; the companionship of the Countess of Beaumont; the *grande passion* for the elusive and enchanting Juliette Récamier.

Some favorite passages are missing—

the more subtle, sometimes ironic portraits of his contemporaries, his self-searching analyses and candid self-betrays, his yearnings for religious identification in the cataclysmic times through which he lived. In short, I would have liked a little more of the man of meditation, the author of *"Le Génie du Christianisme."*

But if Mr. Baldick has somewhat played up one facet of the paradoxical literary giant at the expense of the other, he has also succeeded in bringing into manageable proportions a work that heretofore has been not only too vast but too disconnected to induce uninterrupted reading.

In an age that not only made history but turned History into an art form, Chateaubriand left a rich testimony as an eyewitness. He had come of age the year of the fall of the Bastille, and died three revolutions later. The pattern of his life strangely paralleled that of Napoleon, with whom he was suspected of engaging in a duel for fame. Indeed, they were born twenty days apart, both in rocky seashore towns, had both been second lieutenants, were equally haunted by the romantic notion of the superman, one imposing his superior destiny on his contemporaries, the other, famous in his own fashion, bidding for still greater favors after death.

Chateaubriand did not believe that the perspective of time produces a truer evaluation of historic events. In burying not the good but rather the evil that men do, posterity does not necessarily reach a fairer verdict. Chateaubriand admired Napoleon more intelligently than some of the Little Corporal's fanatic adherents, and at the same time condemned him as a type of scourge to be avoided in future ages.

BUT Chateaubriand may well claim more readers as a personality than as a historian. Secretly he deemed himself a more heroic subject than the characters created by his imagination. "Renés" brooding melancholia, *"le mal du siècle,"* was only a phase of the turbulent unfolding of the well-explored ego. The "Memoirs" placed each pose into the composite framework of the total man. They enrich the life of his reader with the gamut of his moods, the paradoxes of his aristocratic spirit and liberal mind. Poet and soldier, he is at once solitary and gregarious, a dreamer and a self-conscious peruser of reality, a wise traveler who knows that the infinite within is far vaster than the outer spaces that beguile us. If he transforms reality into his own private myth, he does not offend posterity as he did his contemporaries. The indiscretions become creation and the artifices of confession assume the truth of art.

When Papa Was Still in the Ring

"Portrait of Hemingway," by Lilian Ross (Simon & Schuster, 65 pp. \$2.50), captures in the late writer's own vigorous, distinctive language the essence of a spirit both sensitive and brawny. John Killinger, associate professor of English at Georgetown College, wrote *"Hemingway and the Dead Gods."*

By John Killinger

LILLIAN ROSS'S profile is just what its title suggests—an artist's impression of the master gained from two days spent with him in New York City. Of all the biographical material that has been published or republished since the blast at Ketchum last July it is probably the cleanest, most authentic, and most viable. It does not claim to be definitive, as indeed no frame out of a motion picture could. But, to my mind, it has caught the quintessence of Hemingway.

He is the Hemingway, for instance, who ordinarily eschewed New York because it is a "phony" town where even the birds don't fly like the birds in other places; who detested falsehood in anything or anybody, and couldn't

get over the shelves of fake books in his suite at the Sherry-Netherland; who cultivated a special breed of friends, including Marlene "the Kraut" Dietrich, whom he called "the best that ever came into the ring," and Winston Guest, an old hunting partner he ran into at Abercrombie's; who prided himself on his athletic physique, and looked "happy" when a belt clerk expressed amazement at the smallness and firmness of his tummy; who preferred a kind of Anglo-Saxon simplicity in language, and often spoke a joke Indian jargon with most of the nonessential pronouns and adjectives deleted; who was never more serious than when discussing his art; and who loved life so completely that he could sound a little bit like Jesus when he said, "Who the hell should care about saving his soul when it is a man's duty to lose it intelligently, the way you would sell a position you were defending, if you could not hold it, as expensively as possible, trying to make it the most expensive position that was ever sold."

Such gems from the Hemingway conversation abound in the "Portrait," and probably constitute its chief value. His comments range widely, from champagne to taxicabs, from baseball to Breughel, covering as many subjects as



Ernest Hemingway—questions unanswered.

could possibly be brought up in two days. Especially illuminating are the apothegms about writing. "The test of a book is how much good stuff you can throw away." "I know the ten-dollar words. There are older and better words which if you arrange them in the proper combination you make it stick." "After you finish a book, you know, you're dead. But no one knows you're dead. All they see is the irresponsibility that comes in after the terrible responsibility of writing."

Hemingway had almost finished a new book, the ill-fated "Across the River and Into the Trees." He thought it was a good one. He spoke jauntily of "defending the title again." "I won it in the Twenties and defended it in the Thirties and the Forties, and I don't mind at all defending it in the Fifties." But the critics ruled a TKO. He's too old for the ring, they said; his feints are too well known, and he telegraphs his punches. How deeply Hemingway was hurt can only be measured against his hopes for the book that Miss Ross has chronicled here, or by the severity and tautness of "The Old Man and the Sea," which followed two years later and of which the critics said that he is his own old man, trying to prove he can still do it.

The death at Ketchum left several questions unanswered. Was he unable to prove it any longer? Was he simply tired of proving it? Had he at last come to terms with his father's suicide, which haunted him so dramatically through long passages of "For Whom the Bell Tolls"? His friend Carlos Baker has written, "It would be presumptuous for any outsider to attempt to reconstruct what went on behind the brow of the lion during the last dangerous summer as he approached the sixty-

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

SECOND ALARM

Here is another assortment of titular fictional conflagrations (for first see SR, July 8th) assembled by Helen Nitzsche of Maquoketa, Iowa, who requests you to designate their authors. Answers on page 61.

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| 1. Walter F. White | () "The Face Beside the Fire" |
| 2. Charles Elliott | () "The City of Frozen Fire" |
| 3. Kathrine Talbot | () "Fire Bell in the Night" |
| 4. Howard Swiggett | () "The Fire in the Flint" |
| 5. Vaughan Wilkins | () "Fire in the Morning" |
| 6. Elizabeth Spencer | () "With Fire and Sword" |
| 7. George R. Stewart | () "Fire in the Water" |
| 8. Peggy Simson Curry | () "The Durable Fire" |
| 9. Henryk Sienkiewicz | () "Tongues of Fire" |
| 10. Algernon Blackwood | () "Fire in the Sun" |
| 11. Constance Robertson | () "The Day on Fire" |
| 12. James Ramsey Ullman | () "Bread and Fire" |
| 13. Laurens van der Post | () "Trial by Fire" |
| 14. Charles Rumford Walker | () "Fire" |