

The entire action of the novel takes place in little more than a day's time, but the almost continuous flashback covers a period that extends to the childhood of his heroine, daughter of a good Petersburg family that fled the Bolshevik Revolution. Irena Galina she is called, and what a heroine she is, destined to become Soviet Russia's most famous sculptress but ultimately degraded, crushed, and sent to die in brokenhearted exile in Tashkent, the victim of a Kremlin intrigue that was later to spread its tentacles and strangle the flower of her generation in Leningrad. Hovering about the flamelike figure of Irena are the engineer Morozov, her earliest love; General Orlov, who defended the city in the terrible Nazi siege of the 900 days; the poet Voronsky, who married Irena and left her; the political security chief Chaikovsky, and the Leningrad Party Secretary Ivanov. We turn from one to another as, on that fateful January

The story comes to its inevitable climax in a wonderfully eloquent scene that reveals at once the nobility and the tragedy of the Russian spirit. Leading to that climax are the political machinations and human suffering that have gone hand in hand in Russia since the Mongols, as characteristic of the land in Stalin's time as in that of Peter the Great—the endless, reasonless outpouring of blood, the hypocritical struggles for favor, the bitterly ironic contrasts of patriotic sacrifice and vicious opportunism. Yet, personified in Irena's son, Michael, hope somehow remains to survive the barbarous cruelties of man to man—the hope of each new generation striving for what its predecessor had failed to attain.

PASSAGE TO AFRICA: Unless its characters have been given an exceptionally authentic treatment, a topical political novel is likely to deteriorate rapidly; in a few years many are as quaintly dated as the news clippings from which they originated. Joyce Cary's **"The African Witch"** (Harper, \$3.95) is a curious exception. Though the author's power at lucid psychologizing is everywhere in evidence, along with his unique and

Cary wrote of the work, "My book was meant to show certain men and their problems in the tragic background of a continent still little advanced from the Stone Age, and therefore exposed, like no other, to the impact of modern turmoil. An overcrowded raft manned by children who had never seen the sea would have a better chance in a typhoon." The image holds; the typhoon still rages. Nowhere are the forces struggling to express themselves in Africa at the moment more tellingly recorded than in "The African Witch."

In the course of the intricate thrust and counterthrust of Aladai's campaign to become head of state, we are introduced to Coker, an hysterical native preacher; to the missionary-saint Dr. Schlemm; to an amazingly various and amusing set of "old Africa hands" who support white prestige and British decency in Rimi. The book moves at an extraordinary rate through the horrific practices of *ju-ju* fanaticism, native riots, a woman's war, and the full gamut of treachery and misunderstanding that make up the political life of the people.

Cary himself thought of the work as primarily a study of the influence of spiritual commitment on political history. However, it is the tone of light comedy, with which he attempts to control his ambitiously detailed human landscape, that prevents the book from approaching the greatness of "A Passage to India," to which it bears many important similarities. But it is nonetheless a near-masterpiece in its own right, and certainly deserves a much higher place among Cary's works than it has yet received. Its reappearance now is a welcome and significant literary event.

—BARRY SPACKS.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

On their own regional maps, the European countries, cities, and areas listed below appear in renderings that differ, sometimes widely, from the usual English versions, which Cal Y. Meyers of Bologna, Italy, asks you to supply. Answers on page 27.

1. Livorno
2. Schweiz
3. Köln
4. Lietuva
5. Suomi
6. 's Gravenhage
7. Wien
8. Sverige
9. Venezia
10. Österreich
11. Firenze
12. Krim (peninsula)
13. München
14. Magyarország
15. Praha
16. Kärnten
17. Hellas
18. Beograd
19. Padova
20. Bourgogne

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

The Artistry of a Thinker

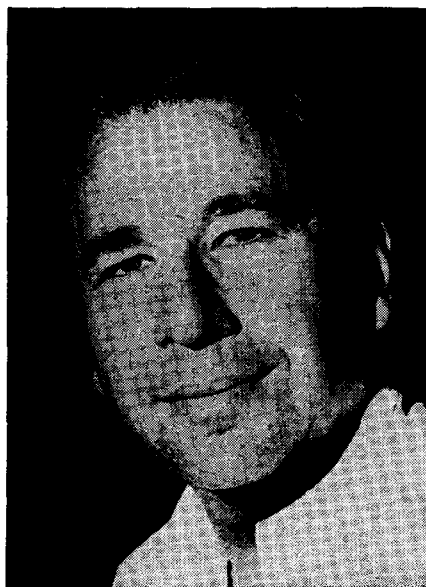
"Contemporaries," by Alfred Kazin (Atlantic-Little, Brown. 509 pp. \$7.50), a collection of essays on literary, social, and cultural topics, reveals the author's basic convictions and critical methods at mid-point in his career. Gay Wilson Allen, biographer of Walt Whitman, is a professor of English at New York University. As co-author with Harry Hayden Clark, he wrote *"Literary Criticism, Pope to Croce."*

By GAY WILSON ALLEN

IN THIS book's concluding essay, "The Function of Criticism Today," Alfred Kazin says: "A critic is not an artist, except incidentally; he is a thinker, and it is the force, the exactness, the extension—perhaps the originality—of his thinking that gets him to say those things that the artist himself may value as an artist, the reader as a reader. To the true critic insights are valuable for themselves, and different members of the audience may use them in different ways."

When judged by his own definition Kazin comes off remarkably well. Only Edmund Wilson or Malcolm Cowley at their best have written with as much clarity and originality—or on a wider range of literary subjects. The ordinary book review (including this one) is a form of journalism, reporting on a publishing event and attempting to state its importance. The latter does require critical judgment (or guesswork), but the space assigned to a reviewer does not usually permit much extension of thought.

Many of the essays in Kazin's book were initially published as book reviews, but editors were generous to him with space—one indication of his standing as a critic. Some of the longest essays were first published as introductions to classics like "Moby-Dick," or contributed to scholarly discussions of the esthetics of Dreiser or "Great American Novels." Some of the most interesting are concerned with Kazin's experiences as teacher-lecturer in Germany, Russia, and Israel. These show that he is as able in social and cultural as in literary interpretation. In Russia he found that Ehrenburg made him think of a TV



Alfred Kazin — "a savings bank of literary opinions."

star eager to establish his rating. In Germany, as "Gastprofessor für Amerikanistik," he was shocked to discover how tenaciously "the instinct to play it safe and to keep oneself above the herd has been redoubled since the war by the need at least to live with professional dignity amid so many ruins."

How absent this instinct is in Kazin is demonstrated by his frank appraisal of the intellectual situation in Puerto Rico, where "there is no positive, rich, and glowing national past either to save from the Americans or to affiliate with them." In Israel he found both the Oriental Jews and the generation that has grown up in the new state unable to understand the suffering of the European Jews. One motive for the Eichmann trial, he reports, was the desire of the Israeli government "to bring home, in full force from the lips of the principal organizer of the massacres, both how difficult it was for the Jews to resist their fate and how hard they tried."

This big volume of Kazin's essays enables us to see more clearly than in his previous books exactly what kind of literary critic he is. Aside from the fact that he has now presumably reached mid-career, this savings bank of his literary opinions shows abundantly his basic conviction and mode of operation. He has always avoided fashionable poses and pedantry. He is not in-

different to form and technique, but he knows how meaningless they are as ends. In a critique of Kenneth Rexroth he says, "I prefer radicals—people who want to transform society"; but beatniks are merely indifferent. He has no sympathy for intellectuals who lack the courage to oppose forces that they regard as invulnerable and "find distinction in their failure."

Kazin is impatient, too, with the "tiresome fear of an expanding society that is now so common among the intellectuals." Nor has he any tolerance for writers unable to see society from without, who "talk as if they were osteopaths and America were their patient." Kazin himself has no social or political dogma, and literary art is in no sense propaganda to him. But he is an expert in separating honesty from sham, pretense, meretriciousness. He sympathizes with Karl Shapiro for opposing "the cult that has set itself up in the English department as the tradition of modern poetry," but Kazin sees no T. S. Eliot "conspiracy," and predicts that Shapiro's extreme anti-intellectualism will attract only "old fogies and the lunatic fringe."

Shapiro wants to supplant Eliot with Whitman; but to do this, Kazin says, "you must believe in his revolutionary politics, in his concern with the masses, in the spiritual leaven of democracy." Loss of this faith "opened the gates to Eliot's Anglomania and Ezra Pound's Fascism, to Allen Tate's celebration of the Old South. . . . It was exactly those poets who agreed with Henry Ford that 'history is bunk,' who thought that Dylan Thomas could escape 'the obligations of intellectual life,' who opened the gates wide to the new medievalists, the dreary croakers whose despair of democracy has fastened on 'The Waste Land.'"

This anthology also shows that much of Kazin's strength comes from his Jewish roots; not from doctrine or sense of "purity," but because as a relic of the Diaspora he sees, as he says of Freud, "an essential unifying principle of identity running through human experience." In Russia he talked with old people who "could very well have been my grandparents," and felt the "disconcerting effect" of himself in "a culture that is so notoriously and visibly nervous about Jews." In Israel "the ideological cocksureness and rasping dogmatism of a few leading personalities" reminded him of Soviet writers and intellectuals he had met. One of his most appealing traits, as man and critic, is Kazin's honest awareness of his Jewishness: ". . . if I ever touch at the North Pole," he remarks, "the first Eskimo running to meet me will ask my opinion of Ben-Gurion."