

Sing and Let the Phone Ring

Ehregard, by Isak Dinesen (Random House, 111 pp. \$3.95), displays the characteristic Gothicism of a writer who remained all her life an unreconstructed Romantic. Charles Alva Hoyt teaches English at Bennett College, Millbrook, N. Y.

By CHARLES ALVA HOYT

For myself, I do not believe a word of it. You know quite well that things do not happen so in reality.

—*An Enemy of the People*,
Act III, by Henrik Ibsen.

THE SPEAKER is that pompously matter-of-fact girl Petra, one of the first of a great line in modern literature, a line that reached early prominence with the heroines of Bernard Shaw and is perhaps the most repellent body of women ever assembled. Their descendants continue in unabated vigor to this very day, in both the best and the worst books that we write, nearly all of which tend to reproduce our world in only one of its aspects: the matter-of-fact. We have been deafened by telephones.

Petra was a Norwegian. It is only justice, then, that in our time Scandinavia has recompensed us for her with Isak Dinesen. Her posthumous novel *Ehregard* is another of her splendid Gothic tales that combine great ingenuity of plot with old-fashioned precision and purity of style:

But the blossoms of the hawthorn lie along the branches like light layers of white and rosy snow. Such infinite variance cannot possibly be necessitated by the economy of Nature, it will needs be the manifestation of a universal spirit — inventive, buoyant and frolicsome to excess, incapable of holding back its playful torrents of bliss. Indeed, indeed: *Domine, non sum dignus*.

Isak Dinesen was not the first to expound the playful universe; that honor belongs to the first Romantic, generations before Homer. The great question is whether she is to be the last. It hardly seems possible; and yet we are living in the age that has finally succeeded where the Victorians failed, in making the fairy tale respectable. No more bones are to be ground to



—Culver

Isak Dinesen—"a philosophy of life."

make somebody's bread, and the ugly stepmother, instead of being rolled down the hill in a barrel lined with nails, is forgiven (and presumably put under observation).

If we rise from the matter-of-fact, we are not necessarily obligated to ascend immediately into the purely supernatural. Between these two planes there is an intermediate one where the ordinary and the marvelous are inextricably threaded together; and it is upon this level that we live most of our lives. The ringing telephone often persuades us that the ordinary is all that counts, but our artists should be better advised. Some of the greatest works of the recent past depict the playful universe in both its pleasant and unpleasant aspects: *Don Juan*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Ulysses*.

When we speak of Isak Dinesen, then, let us not, as her publishers do, make excuses for her as a spinner of cobwebs, no matter how many times we add the word "genius." She was a great Romantic, in the tradition of Blake and Keats; and those who find her simply "charming" are most likely those who remember Blake as the author of "Little lamb, who made thee?" and Keats as the one who said a thing of beauty was a joy forever. *Ehregard*, like all of Isak Dinesen's works, is a superbly written tale embodying a philosophy of life; the theory of the artist that it presents, for example, is as brilliant as it is unobtrusive. But its principal song is a very old one, far beyond the reach of originality:

Yet the order of the Universe is sublime, graceful and inexorable. Inside it nothing is without a consequence, but your first move on the board may in the end pronounce you mate.

How Dark Was His Valley: It is there in the soft, speedy voice of Richard Burton, in the pages and paragraphs of such wildly different writers as Alun Lewis, Gwyn Thomas, and the haunting David Jones, and naked and full flood in the tumbling lyricism of Dylan Thomas. It is also the first and most obvious quality in a current novel by another Thomas: the Merlin music of Wales, magically sweet yet sad with resignation, sometimes mystic, sometimes merely misty. It is perhaps what one of the characters in *Ask at the Unicorn* (New Directions, hardbound \$3.75, paperback \$1.90) means when he talks about "all this inner drunkenness" that is the weakness and perhaps also the strength of Wales.

First-novelist Norman Thomas reels with this word-drunkenness in some of the early pages, particularly in such incidental descriptive passages as the following:

A grey bigpregnant cat like a fur bowler hat stared from a pile of blankets on a brass bedstead, and a fluffed-up-in-itself speaking-to-itself bird in a fire-corner cage suddenly went wheewheetowhee frightening itself so that it huddled low and closed its lids.

But after a few trial flights to test his Welsh wings Mr. Thomas settles down to his story, which brings Morgan Johns back to Wales from California in search of Grando, an old man who was a friend of his father's. Grando's wisdom is both a memory of his childhood and the treasure he hopes to find at the end of the journey. In the village of Dyfnaint ("the dark valley") he finds instead a new old world in such contrast with the city-centered life and world involvement he has left that most of his "realities" are left trembling and doubtful. He learns that wisdom is not to be found in any one man, however old, but in himself and in the continuity of life around him.

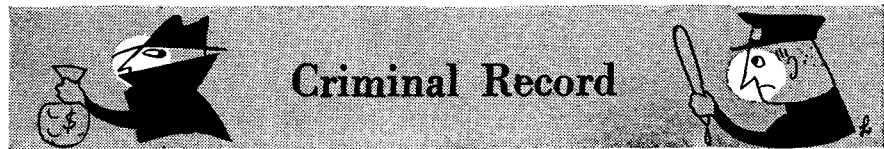
Thomas's firework display of language and his gallery of "character" characters cannot hide a certain thinness in the book's frame; and Mr. Thomas in fact promises more than he delivers. He is, however, a brilliant stylist and a good storyteller, and one is glad to hear that his second novel, just completed, has an American setting. One does not ask for sobriety, but if he can escape just a little from his Welshness, he may be a very fine novelist.

—ERIC MOON.

Candide in the Third Reich: Shortly after the fall of the Third Reich, if memory serves—and it does—it was impossible to find a German citizen who had been a member of the Nazi Party, who had heard of a concentration camp, or who had been anything but a helpless prisoner of that madman with the toothbrush mustache. But that was nearly twenty years ago. Today, regardless of what the citizenry is up to, the German novelists—such men as Hans Hellmut Kirst, Günter Grass, Stefan Olivier—are speaking out loudly, clearly, and talentedly about the way things were and warning a new generation that they must never be that way again. Olivier's *Rise Up in Anger*, translated by Sigrid Rock and Michael Roloff (Putnam, \$5.95), is such a novel, and it is a powerful one.

Oberleutnant Herbert Boysen "was not a Jew and not a Communist, not an offspring of the Royal House of Hapsburg or the Royal House of Wittelsbach, not a Christian Scientist and not a homosexual. He was, in other words, simply a German . . ." What he was in the summer of 1942 was a soldier back from the front on his way to a new assignment in Athens. He was also a Candide in his innocence about the political expediences of the Third Reich. His written protest against the treatment of a trainload of Jews he passed on the way to Athens and his complaint about a brothel run *sub rosa* in Athens by fellow officers leads to his being railroaded into a concentration camp as a political enemy of the Reich. It is here, in a world where survival is all, that Candide evolves into an avenging angel. The Herbert Boysen who emerges from the war is a far cry from the innocent who went into it. A tough opportunist on the rise in Western Germany, he plots his revenge against those who framed him.

American readers will find no shocks or new information in the concentration camp scenes, vividly written as they are. These are horrors long familiar to the Allied nations. It is reassuring, however, to know that there are Germans who remember them, too. But there is much thoughtful material to work with in Boysen's interchangeable experiences as Nazi prisoner and Russian prisoner and in incidents on the German home front, where citizen operated against citizen. Especially memorable are the closing scenes in an economically burgeoning West Germany, where a new empire is being built amidst private guilts that cannot be swept away as easily as the rubble of World War II. It was a long time coming, but *Rise Up in Anger* is a big, fascinating novel, emotionally and cerebrally rich. —HASKEL FRANKEL.



SMITH AND JONES. By Nicholas Monsarrat. *Sloane*. \$3.50. This is a security officer's revealing personal account of the activities of a pair of fictional defectors who resemble similar recent real-life individuals. Vividly, sharply, effectively presented.

LION IN WAIT. By Dorothy Gardiner. *Crime Club*. \$3.50. Senescent king of beasts in roving circus is blamed for Colorado killing, but pleasant Sheriff Moss Magill uncovers a two-legged culprit. Nice to have you back, ma'am and sir!

BYE, BABY BUNTING. By Day Keene. *Holt, Rinehart & Winston*. \$3.95. Australian novelist, wedded to Yank analyst she loathes, is charged with Catskill killing; her agent (who is soft on the dame) plays peeper. Slightly preposterous, but a wowser just the same.

THE PROWLER. By Frances Rickett. *Simon & Schuster*. \$3.50. Doctor's and wife's knife deaths tizzy Hoosier community; sub-teen-age youngster prominent. Ends with legitimate surprise twist.

NIGHTINGALE AT NOON. By Margaret Summerton. *Dutton*. \$3.50. Malta, South of France, England, Wales figure in tale that has to do with murders old and new. One for a long day's journey into the night.

SUCH IS DEATH. By Leo Bruce. *London House & Maxwell*. \$3.50. Motiveless murders A and B draw schoolmaster Carolus Deene to English seaside resort, where he exercises his penchant for detection. If you like a sound Q&A job, this one is your dish.

A DRAGON FOR CHRISTMAS. By Gavin Black. *Harper & Row*. \$3.95. Britisher on Red China mission finds the going tough; attempt to work way out leads to smash dénouement. Has fine air of authenticity, good humor.

CRAIG'S SPUR. By E. S. Madden. *Vanguard*. \$3.95. Australian wife, deserting hubby, cracks up fatally; two sons also in car; search involves pangs and perils. A real tingler.

EVERYBODY ADORED CARA. By Ann Head. *Crime Club*. \$3.50. Strangula-

tion of architect's second spouse jolts U.S. suburban community; Tom Ridley, plausible peeper, wraps it up. Literate and lively.

THE TROUBLE MAKERS. By Celia Fremlin. *Lippincott*. \$3.50. Housewives in English suburb of look-alike houses in flap when bloodstains pop up; watch out for the folks next door is the motto here. Nicely handled.

THE MAN WHO NEVER LAUGHED. By Arnold Hare. *Norton*. \$3.95. English youth, picked as personal aide to mystery tycoon who maintains headquarters in Austrian castle, suspects sinister goings-on, and, by gum, he's right. Good suspense, bang-bang finish.

DIE A LITTLE EVERY DAY. By Lawrence Fisher. *Random House*. \$3.50. Hit-run catastrophe leads to further disasters in U.S. city; nice detective Dave Pitt (who is the real hero of yarn) ponders his resignation. Grown-up and well-managed.

DOUBLE EXPOSURE. By Donald MacKenzie. *Houghton Mifflin*. \$3.75. Canadian-born professional burglar is offered freedom by secret British facility if he will take on tricky spy role in Germany. Intelligent cloak-and-dagger number, with a neatly manageable cast.

JOURNEY INTO VIOLENCE. By Douglas Orgill. *Morrow*. \$3.95. London news-hawk accepts hush-hush mission to Italian lake country; gal goes along; skin-diving pays off; foot-wide butterflies important. Entertaining cliff-hanger (several cliffs).

A CALL FROM AUSTRIA. By Martha Albrand. *Random House*. \$3.95. Roving U.S. correspondent gets phone appeal in New York from brother to hurry to Vienna, then line goes dead; overseas flight follows, with noisy payoff; love again finds a way. Has the professional touch.

MURDER'S LITTLE HELPER. By George Bagby. *Crime Club*. \$3.50. Woman's jumped-fell-pushed demise in New York's East River poses problem for Inspector Schmidt and newly-created detective Danny Kirk (he does OK). Holds up agreeably.

—SERGEANT CUFF.