Books

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LITERARY HORIZONS

The Critique in Brief

A NEW series of pamphlets, "Columbia Essays on Modern Writers," is modeled upon and intended to supplement "University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers." (Minnesota has recently published seven new titles, bringing the total to forty-four.) The Columbia pamphlets are devoted to non-American writers, so far mostly English and Western Europeans. The pamphlets are of the same size as those from Minnesota, forty-eight pages, and sell for the same price, 65¢. They are physically somewhat less substantial and to me less attractive in appearance, but the first six are not at all inferior in content.

Number One in the Columbia series is Germaine Brée's *Albert Camus*, which illustrates very well what essays of this sort can do. A recognized authority on Camus, author of a book about him, Miss Brée has here summarized her findings in compendious form. After a brief but important account of the life of Camus, she cogently discusses the principal works. She studies with particular care *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, and *The Rebel*.

Miss Brée sums up, "Camus proposes the lucid acceptance of the situation: to love life, and to live with the knowledge that life is incomprehensible; to multiply all the chances for happiness, knowing its impossibility; to explore the infinite possibilities of life within the narrow limits of a life." It is easy to see why, even apart from their different attitudes towards Communism, Camus and Sartre should have gone their diverging ways. In these days when Sartre is in the headlines, it is good to have so convincing an estimate of the significance of Camus.

The reputation of Camus has pretty well taken shape since his premature and most unfortunate death in 1960. The position of Lawrence Durrell, on the other hand, is still in doubt. After the great enthusiasm for *The Alexandria Quartet*, there has been the usual Monday morning shaking of heads over his limitations. In his *Lawrence Durrell*, John Unterecker, an associate professor at Columbia and author of a book on Yeats, helps us to strike a reasonable balance. He begins with an admirable summary statement: "Lawrence Durrell is a man of infinite variety. But he's a man of marble constancy as well. The forms in which he has worked embrace the whole range of literary possibility. Yet the themes he has dealt with—even the images which carry those themes—display a simple kind of shining directness, mark out a clear path for his developing but remarkably consistent point of view. He is consequently one of our most protean writers and at the same time one of our most predictable ones."

As he discusses Durrell's poetry, early novels, travel books, plays, and criticism, Unterecker defines and clarifies the persistent themes, and prepares the way for his examination of *The Alexandria Quartet*. He writes well on this work, clearing up certain points about which other critics have been doubtful, and coming to the conclusion that it has deserved a large part of the praise it has received.

"Most readers know Constantine Cavafy only as a legend encountered in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*." Thus Peter Bien opens his *Constantine Cavafy*. What he says is true, but it is also true, as Bien points out, that the reputation of the eccentric Greek poet has grown steadily since his death in 1933. It is always difficult to do justice to a poet who writes in another language, but Bien, who uses Rae Dalven's translations, gives the reader a sense of Cavafy's quality. He relates the poetry to the man's strange life and to the course of Greek history in his lifetime.

William York Tindall, who is editor of the series, has chosen to write *Samuel Beckett*. The expatriate Irishman, who now usually writes his books in French and translates them himself, is a tough problem for the critics. Since he insists on the meaninglessness of everything, it is not easy to define the meaning of his novels and plays. Tindall is convinced that they do have meaning, but he is cautious about saying what it is. Speaking of the reception of *Waiting for Godot*, he writes, "There was no better agreement among professional critics. To each his guess, the less certain, the more dogmatically propounded. 'The danger,' says Beckett in his essay on Joyce (1929), 'is the neatness of identification.' But this much is certain: each of the neat identifiers, justified more or less by something in the text, took a part for a whole too slippery to handle." Carefully making no large claims for his interpretations, Tindall tries to say what can safely be said about each of the works, and his comments are enlightening. The pamphlet is an excellent guide for readers of Beckett.

Samuel Hynes's *William Golding* is to me the most exciting of the six pamphlets. He discusses each of the five novels, from *Lord of the Flies* to *The Spire*, in an illuminating fashion. He is particularly good on *Pincher Martin*. When I came to the passage devoted to this novel, I put a question mark beside the first sentence: "Both formally and intellectually, *Pincher Martin* is the most impressive of Golding's novels." But I erased it when I had read all that he had to say. He is also excellent on *The Inheritors* and *The Spire,* and, for that matter, on all the novels.

Theodore Ziolkowski has written *Hermann Broch*, a study of a writer with whom I am only superficially acquainted. Ziolkowski says: "At his worst, Broch is ponderous, humorless, pedantic, and presumptuous. At his best, he opens up unplumbed areas of literary experience in a manner worthy of his literary idols, Joyce and Kafka." The pamphlet convinces me that I must have another try at *The Sleepwalkers*, for Ziolkowski makes the novel seem worth the effort it demands. If I could get through that, I might have courage enough to tackle *The Death of Virgil*.

Like the Minnesota pamphlets before them, the Columbia pamphlets suggest that 15,000 words is a good length for a discussion of a writer. The critic has more space than he would be likely to have in an article written for a magazine, and this gives him a chance to go beneath the surface. At the same time he is forced to be terse and incisive, and readers can be grateful for that. There have been full-length books written about many of the authors represented in the two series, and there will be and should be more. But for the ordinary reader with an interest in literary matters, as apart from the literary scholar, the pamphlets are uncommonly useful. I am happy that Columbia has entered upon this venture.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.

FRAZER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1115

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1115 will be found in the next issue.

XPBGZ NT PWEC Q AZTNBZ XPB XENFSL: NL ENRZT YC RNPEZWGZ QWA ANZT XBPO ENYZBLC.

AQ RNWGN

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1114

Oaths are the fossils of piety.

—SANTAYANA.

He Ruled and Raised the Clan

***The Founding Father: The Story of Joseph P. Kennedy**, by Richard J. Whalen (NAL-World. 526 pp. Index. $6.95), is a multifaceted picture of an extraordinary figure whose greatest achievement was to assure his family a place in history. Margaret L. Coit is an associate professor at Fairleigh Dickinson University and the biographer of financier Bernard Baruch.*

By MARGARET L. COIT

ARISTOCRACY in America is made, not born. In Massachusetts the pattern has long been established. First comes the building of the family fortunes, perhaps in the liquor export trade, then education at the best preparatory schools and Harvard University, travel, good marriages, and finally the move away from mere money-making to public service and leadership. These steps marked the rise of the Cabot family. The same climb was made by another Massachusetts family, the Kennedys.

For years Joseph Patrick Kennedy has been the silent partner of the Kennedy clan. Now, in this probing, highly readable study by Richard Whalen of *Fortune* much of the self-admitted mystery has been dispelled. Unfortunately, the book got under way just at the time of its subject's crippling illness. He could not give his side of the story, and his private papers have long been reserved for use in his own memoirs. However, solidly based as it is on hitherto unpublished documents, manuscripts, and personal interviews with both detractors and admirers of Mr. Kennedy, *The Founding Father* will probably stand as the authoritative source for many years to come.

Red-headed and crackling with energy, Joseph Kennedy, son of an honest, teetotaling saloon-keeper and small officeholder, determined to make the American dream come true, for himself and his family. His goals were clear: wealth, power, and fame, and he pursued them single-mindedly, from his days as class president at Boston Latin School. He married the beautiful daughter of the mayor of Boston; at Harvard he cultivated only the most promising youths; abroad he bluffed his way into an introduction to the Prince of Wales. He took a seat on the board of an obscure Boston company, demanding: "Do you know any better way to meet people like the Saltonstalls?"

As the hard-driving director of the Fore River shipyard in World War I he got his ulcers and made a friend named Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At twenty-five, when his acumen saved a Boston bank from failure, he demanded and received its presidency. He halted a raid on Yellow Cab and wrested control of the stock. During thirty months in Hollywood he managed Pathé, advised First National Pictures, and emerged some five million dollars richer. Later he was to reorganize such industrial empires as Radio Corporation and the Hearst papers. Ruthless with anyone who got in his way, he could be incredibly generous, both to deserving individuals and institutions.

As a "clever lone wolf operator" on Wall Street he resembled his friend Bernard Baruch. He had the same cool nerves, the same respect for facts and contempt for "inside dope." Only fools, he said, held out for the top dollar. Getting out of the market before the crash, he made more millions selling short, and in a typical coup had his warehouses loaded and ready for "Repeal" day. But mindful always of his "good name and reputation," he kept his dealings strictly legal, and he could later challenge his New Deal critics to prove him guilty of a single shady act.

Joseph Kennedy was an original and dedicated New Dealer who saw "the specter of revolution" in the hungry men on the street corners. Roosevelt, he shrewdly concluded, could control these groups who had "no stake of ownership" and thus salvage the capitalistic structure. Whalen sees this as opportunism, but Roosevelt must have devoutly wished that more of the business community had Kennedy's insight. (The thirty million dollars that the financier piled up years later offers dramatic evidence that FDR had scarcely wrecked the money-making possibilities of the American economy.)

FDR recognized Kennedy's talents. Liberals howled when the one-time Wall Street speculator was given the power to police the Street. But Kennedy was aware that times had changed. As the hard-hitting chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and later of the Maritime Commission, he did superb work. His eventual appointment to the Court of St. James's was hailed by a London paper as "the highest compliment Roosevelt could pay Great Brit-