

The European Literary Scene

ATHENS.

It has recently become a commonplace in France to say that while Albert Camus has lost his appeal for older readers, he now has an enthusiastic following among the young. Logically enough, since this same generation, according to the sumptuous new volume dedicated to Camus in Hachette's collection of *Génies et Réalités*, is busily engaged in writing an astronomical number of theses on France's 1957 Nobel Prizewinner. Gallimard has now issued the second volume of Camus's *Notebooks*, covering his jottings from January 1942 to March 1951. This was the period of the *Etranger* (1942), *Sisyphus* (1942), and the bulk of the plays. (Notes on his trips to North and South America in 1946 and 1949 will appear in a separate volume.) When all of his *carnets* are in print, many a degree candidate will seek analogies between these *obiter scripta* and Camus's formal works. Obviously, the gloomy note of a world war is reflected in this second volume, which comes to the almost inevitable conclusion that men live increasingly "like dogs." Camus felt a strong desire, as he put it, to set down *pêle-mêle* everything that passed through his head. Never a philosopher, always a *moraliste*, Camus's random thoughts make interesting reading, as the following sampler attests:

- Why am I an artist and not a philosopher? It is because I think according to words and not ideas.
- The aim is to live lucidity in a world where dispersion is the rule.
- The great problem to be solved "practically": can one be happy and alone?
- All life directed toward money is a death. The rebirth is in disinterestedness.
- The secret of my universe: just imagine God without man's immortality.
- I am not made for politics because I am incapable of wishing for or accepting the death of my adversary.
- He who despairs over an event is a coward, but he who holds hopes for the human condition is a fool.
- Every fulfillment is slavery. It drives us to a higher fulfillment.

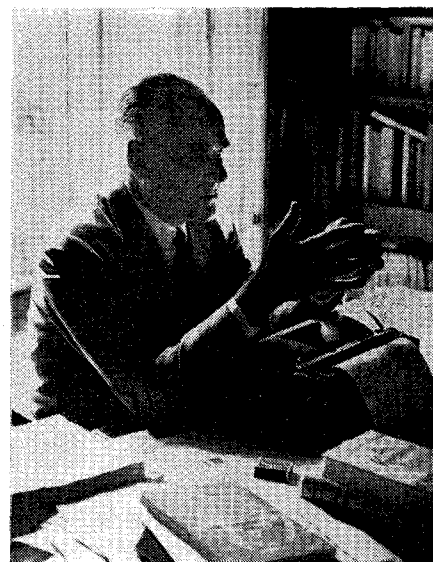
- Write a story about a contemporary cured of his anguishes by the mere lengthy contemplation of a landscape.

As Maurice Chapelan observes of this last entry, "Whatever religious there was about Camus was Taoist."

Following Italy's notorious leftward break-through (*apertura*) in politics and the weakening influence of the Demochristian party, the doctrine of committed art and literature logically should become more widespread in that peninsula. However, many of the liberal or leftist critics of the influential *Espresso* group find the doctrine unacceptable if not repugnant, even while remaining tolerant of Communism as a social experiment. They are still able to remember the "literature of the black era," which Mussolini sought to make into a vehicle of his movement, descending to such *obstats* as the depiction of suicide in plays and novels, self-destruction being an idea offensive to his dynamic state.

Alberto Moravia is a good case in point. Leftists are impressed by his distinction of having his *opera omnia* placed on the Church's Index of Forbidden Books (both under his pen name of Moravia and his family name of Pincherle, just to be safe). His writings sell abundantly in the USSR itself, and his travel notes to Russia are his only such diaries to exist in print. He once told me of his satisfaction at his popularity in Russia, but that in view of Moscow's lack of consumer goods and luxuries, he had never troubled himself to collect and spend his royalties there.

Moravia's thoughts on art and communism are expressed in his essays *L'uomo come fine* ("Man as an End"), published by Bompiani in Italy and to be issued here by Farrar, Straus & Giroux (see SR, page 23). It must come as an unhappy surprise to the Russians to be told by Moravia that their unshakable attitude about *engagé* literature is a dubious one at best, that the greatest genius matures most fully in a cultured and aristocratic state, that their esthetic amounts to little more than a "suspension of art," and that even if their idea of directed literature were valid, their own literary production is mighty poor armament in the battle between East and West. Moravia's points, expressed with a syllogistic clarity that comes as a relief after Sartre's ambiguities on this



Alberto Moravia—points made with a syllogistic clarity.

subject, add up to one of the most important recent statements on literature and politics.

In view of Moravia's arraignment of controlled literature in Russia, it is significant that the Central Committee on Ideological Matters (Moscow), recently deploring that too little control was being exercised by the Ministry of Culture, established a state committee usurping the powers of that ministry and curbing Russian publishing and printing. The committee's new head is Pavel Romanov, former head of Soviet censorship. So much we learn from the *Sunday Telegraph* of London. The pendulum of forces controlling art and literature is enough to mesmerize an observer. For example, among the new members elected to the board of the Moscow Writers' Union are three recently scolded by Khrushchev and by *Pravda*. These are the poets Yevtushenko and Voznesenski and the novelist Sergei Mikhalkov, who replaced as secretary a stalwart of the old guard, Georgi Markov. Yevtushenko has been under a cloud ever since his indictment of anti-Semitism in Russia in "Babi Yar."

In the latest issue of *Soviet Literature* Alla Marchenko's article "New Features in Contemporary Literature" finds Russian literature of the past ten years better than alleged by Sig. Moravia.

Almost a decade has passed since the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The literature of this decade is characterized by an active incursion into life and intense topicality. In overcoming the habit of illustrative and descriptive representation, it continued and deepened the traditions of genuine Socialist realism which had persisted despite unfavorable conditions in the best works of

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Books on First Base

SO HERE it is again, and from now until World Series time next October—or so think certain happily demented characters who long ago became aware of the truly enduring values of this fleeting, earthly span—life once more will seem worth all the trouble it takes to live it. The New York Mets will struggle with Houston for last place in the National League, and do you suppose for a moment that a Mets or a Houston fan will expire of disappointment when the final returns are in?

He will not.

Well, yes, it's fine to be able to root for a winner, or at least for a contender, but the all-important thing is to be there, in spirit if not in person, day after day, when the local heroes take the field, and every addict in or out of the stands becomes a genius-manager, or a Walter Mitty-ish forty-game winner, or a home-run slugger destined to leave Babe Ruth in the shadows.

For obviously commercial reasons, the books that nourish these happy daydreams usually coincide with the opening of the major league season, when public awareness of The National Pastime comes to life after a dreary winter of basketball, indoor track, and other interim time-killers. If Publishers' Row really knew what it was doing, though, it would issue such tomes directly the baseball marathon ends in the autumn, and thus reap a rich harvest from those right-minded citizens—i.e., the baseball addicts—who can take a new Arnold Toynbee treatise or leave it alone but know an earned-run average when they see it and like nothing better than to spend a midwinter evening dissecting it in the company of a hot toddy and a fellow fan.

The older he is, it hardly needs saying, the more fascinated a baseball ancient will be by the lore that reaches back into that past when all the world was young and so was he. Thus, of a trio of books lately come to hand, your grandstand manager for today naturally regards with special favor *Kings of the Diamond: The Immortals in Baseball's Hall of Fame*, by Lee Allen and the late Tom Meany (Putnam's, \$4.95). Of the more than 100 Immortals chronicled here, I am startled to note (but one who still thinks of the New York Yankees as the New York Highlanders really shouldn't be startled) that with my own hero-worshipping eyes I have seen no less than fifty-seven of them on

the field, beginning on a certain golden afternoon in 1913 when John McGraw roared up and down the coaching lines at third base at the old West Side Park in Chicago and our Cubs beat him and his hated New York Giants on a desperate slide by Frank "Wildfire" Schulte.

We are a proud company, you see, who joined the fraternity of fandom in time to see Napoleon Lajoie, Honus Wagner, and Roger Bresnahan—respectively a superlative second baseman, shortstop, and catcher—closing out splendid careers that had begun in the last century; saw the greatest of them all, Detroit's Tyrus Raymond Cobb, in his slashing prime; admired the incomparable grace at first base of the St. Louis Browns' George Sisler, even when he was making life unpleasant for our White Sox and every other team in the American League; blinked as Walter Johnson's fast ball streaked through the late afternoon shadows (how did anybody ever get a hit off him, except by pure luck?).

We veterans are actually sorry for those who don't share such memories, and in our dotage must be grateful to the Messrs. Allen and Meany for inviting us to experience them once more. Even the more knowledgeable of the survivors may pick up some information here that they overlooked along the way, unless they already had known that, say, Joe ("Iron Man") McGinnity won three doubleheaders in one month in 1904, that Carl Hubbell once pitched an eighteen-inning 1-0 victory without walking a batter.

Reading and daydreaming over *Kings of the Diamond*, one of those survivors fell to remembering how, at the age of about ten, it never occurred to him that he would not one day succeed the marvelous Eddie Collins at second base for the revered White Sox. Thanks to a kindly Providence, such illusions fade gently, and maybe it is just as well that I had no inkling of baseball as described in *Low and Outside* (Coward-McCann, \$4.50), by Jerry Kettle with Ed Addeo, Mr. Kettle being a onetime minor-league pitcher who never made it all the way to the big time; or in *The Story of Jim Bunning* (Lippincott, \$3.95), by Jim Bunning as told to Ralph Bernstein,

Mr. Bunning being a pitcher who did make it, with the Detroit Tigers and the Philadelphia Phillies, after sundry vicissitudes on the all-night-by-bus-to-the-next-town circuit.

Mr. Kettle is properly—it would seem—sore about the treatment accorded him by the Phillies, who kept farming him out but never bringing him up to the majors. Even so, his lively lament leaves the impression that he fell short of glory chiefly because he lacked the necessary skills. Mr. Bunning had—and has—them, as attested by the perfect, no-man-reached-first-base game he pitched last June against the Mets, one of only six such triumphs in this century. To one old fan, though, what most emphatically comes out of Mr. Bunning's pages are echoes of the greatest baseball book ever written, Ring W. Lardner's *You Know Me Al*.

Mr. Bunning: "So I went to him [the manager] and told him I would like some kind of understanding about taking me out for a pinch hitter in the late innings. 'What do you mean?' he asked. 'I mean I don't like getting pulled like in a tie ballgame for some lousy pinch hitter. It costs me games.'"

Mr. Lardner's rookie pitcher, Jack Keefe: "In our half of the seventh inning Weaver and Schalk got on and I was going up there with a stick when [the manager] calls me back and sends Easterly up. I don't know what kind of managing you call that. I hit good on the training trip and he must of knew they had no chance to score in the innings they had left..."

So life, in baseball as elsewhere, has a way of imitating art, as all young Cubs-White Sox fans, who got a copy of *You Know Me Al* with our annual subscription to *Baseball Magazine*, did not appreciate at the time. We merely memorized it, much as we knew by heart the essential data concerning, for instance, our noble spitball pitcher, Urban "Red" Faber of the Sox. (Born Sept. 6, 1888, Cascade, Ia. 1915 record: 24 wins, 13 losses.) It was years later that we discovered a certain difference between Lardner's subtly ironic artistry and the rather simpler drama of another baseball epic, *Courtney of the Center Garden*, by an author whose name unfortunately escapes me. At the time, all books about baseball were simply baseball.

But I digress. The new season has started, and I'd better get out to Yankee Stadium and have a look at some newcomer named Mickey Mantle, who hit .303 last year, and someday may turn out to be the equal of Elmer Flick of Cleveland, who led the American League in hitting in 1905 with .306. The vote here is for Elmer, but maybe that's just a baseball gaffer's prejudice.

—JOHN K. HUTCHENS.

