

Reality Was Better Forgotten

The Maias, by Eça de Queiroz, translated from the Portuguese by Patricia McGowan and Ann Stevens (St. Martin's. 633 pp. \$7.95), and *The Mandarin and Other Stories*, by Eça de Queiroz, translated from the Portuguese by Richard Franko Goldman (Ohio University Press. 176 pp. \$4), represent works by a nineteenth-century writer who, though appalled by corruption, regarded it as signifying no more than the end of an enfeebled social class. Emile Capouya's comments on fiction appear regularly in *Saturday Review*.

By EMILE CAPOUYA

IN THAT spacious nineteenth century, artists had considerably more room for maneuver than they have since enjoyed. They could develop philosophic systems in the course of writing a novel, be nasty about the government, deal directly with social questions, make pronouncements about the meaning of progress, tell a story—and how long has it been since a writer of any talent has attempted one of those feats? Eugenio Montale remarks in an essay that it is only third-raters who have the presumption nowadays to carry on the humanistic tradition in the novel, and naturally their third-rate efforts make that tradition seem even more hopelessly inappro-

priate to the way we have chosen to live.

How bracing, then, to return to the nineteenth century, to read Eça de Queiroz. We console ourselves with the tale that things were simpler in former times, but that cannot be true. Eça de Queiroz saunters through sixty years of Portuguese history in *The Maias*, three generations in the life of a single family, heaping up countless pleasant or comic or amorous episodes in order to make at last one frightful and unanswerable point. At a critical juncture, generations of Voltairean irony, nostalgia for the vanished Portuguese empire, fashionable denigration of all things Portuguese in favor of French *cocottes*, English sports, and Spanish songs, refined dilettantism in politics, in science, in literature—all at once these harmless things amount to the end of a social order.

Carlos Eduardo da Maia, the central figure of the novel, a rich, handsome, talented, and honorably disposed aristocrat, discovers that he is not committing conventional adultery but incest.

The brutal biological metaphor of flesh confounded with itself, of brother and sister who cannot recognize each other, or unconsciously choose to mistake each other for a possible mate, was strangely current in the nineteenth century. It is as if our predecessors identified at its first appearance the theme that was to dominate our own time, the retreat of the citizen to within the limits of the "personality," the rejection of public life in favor of a minute interest

in the mental life of mother's little man and daddy's girl. But at that first ominous looming, the great nineteenth-century writers did not throw down their arms; the notion was still current that man was his own master. If Eça de Queiroz is appalled by his vision of genteel corruption, he reads into it no more than the end of an enfeebled social class—certainly not the end of man. Our dilemma is that we do have clear omens of the end of man, and our art, like our politics, makes the random gestures of a stricken animal. To restore to our writers the limited optimism and tonic irony of an Eça de Queiroz, we should have to give mankind some hope of survival. A very little sign would suffice. Artists are sensitive people.

The title story of *The Mandarin and Other Stories*, by far the most substantial in the collection, is one of the great philosophic tales, worthy of Voltaire. What bad thing will you do for the sake of power, money, and women? What very little bad thing? Signify by a nod to the Devil's emissary that, so far as you are concerned, one aged, moribund, every way useless Mandarin can cease to cumber the earth? That was very much like Raskolnikov's problem, wasn't it, and we remember that he resolved it with a hatchet. Well, on the Mandarin's death, his immense fortune goes to his moral murderer—whereupon credits are opened at once in unimpeachably worldly banks. And worldly delights crowd upon the happy heir, and that topgallant delight, the power to do great good.

Unfortunately, the Mandarin's discreet and unimpeachable ghost visits him, too, inspiring him to the doubts and scruples that he should have felt before he gave his soul's assent to murder. Perhaps the Mandarin was wise and benevolent as well as aged; perhaps his counsels were the only hope of the moribund Chinese Empire, sole bulwark between her teeming millions and the British opium interests, and all the other extraterritorial scalawags that ravaged her. Perhaps, indeed. As you see, Eça de Queiroz is arguing for a quietism that would make life unlivable. That is, we should have to refrain from committing murder in a good cause.

The other three stories in the collection, excellent of their kind, are nevertheless a good deal more conventional. They are genre portraits presented in stories that are realistic in detail, romantic in conception, and have much the same qualities and limitations as the stories of O. Henry. The narration is masterly, and the human types described are quite convincing, but the author's ambition in these tales goes no further than a gentle irony that pleases at once and later fades from the reader's mind. All of which is small beer compared to that extraordinary "Mandarin."

Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich and David M. Glixon

PUT UP YOUR DUKES!

All the dukes of Column One play significant roles in the Shakespeare plays of Column Two. But—asks Ron Smith of Logan, Utah—in which play is each duke important? Identities are established on page 37.

Duke of Albany ()	1. <i>The Tempest</i>
Duke of Britaine ()	2. <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
Duke of Illyria ()	3. <i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
Duke of Milan ()	4. <i>Measure for Measure</i>
Duke of Ephesus ()	5. <i>King Henry the Sixth</i> (any Part)
Duke of Venice ()	6. <i>Twelfth Night</i>
Duke of Vienna ()	7. <i>King Lear</i>
Duke of Gloucester ()	8. <i>King Richard the Second</i>
Duke of Athens ()	9. <i>King John</i>
Duke of York ()	10. <i>Othello</i>

Notes from the Beginning of the End

The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short, by Johan Daisne, translated from the Flemish by S. J. Sackett (Horizon. 224 pp. \$4.95), tells the first-person story of an inmate of a mental institution who may or may not have murdered the girl he loved. Robert L. Stilwell teaches English at the University of Michigan.

By ROBERT L. STILWELL

TO RENDER the mingled wonder and terror of psychosis has become a central compulsion among recent European novelists, in much the same degree that the exploration of social disorder constituted a dominant impulse for the European novel of two or three decades ago. An Ignazio Silone could salvage troubled poetry from the clashes of political ideology; a Nathalie Sarraute now discovers such poetry in the deviant mental processes of aberration.

Certainly this shift in fiction's center of gravity is the stalest news. There is only a minimum of staleness, however, throughout Johan Daisne's *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short*, a harrowing but sternly controlled novel first published in Belgium some fourteen years ago and already translated into French, Spanish, and German. Daisne, who was born in Ghent in 1912 and whose real name is Herman Thiery, is widely accounted among the foremost men of letters currently writing in Flemish. And if the present work provides a sensitive index to his forty volumes of fiction, poetry, film analysis, essays, and miscellaneous prose, then he would appear to deserve the numerous literary awards, and the shelf of critical studies, accorded him in Belgium and the Netherlands.

The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short represents the confessions of a radically demented narrator—a device so often abused in the past that considerable numbers of potential readers are likely to turn away with prejudiced impatience. The Godfried Antfield who tortures out his own story (in one unbroken paragraph of nearly 200 closely printed pages) is a man confined in an institution for the criminally insane; one of those ultimate places from which, presumably, certain individuals can see into their lives with awful and perhaps

unbearable clairvoyance. Antfield's ruin, we are to infer, has been accretive; every particle of his experience has helped to bring it on. Its principal cause, however, was his obsessive love for a girl named Fran, who began to haunt his imaginings when she was his student during a brief, disastrous interlude of teaching secondary school. She continues to haunt him long after her graduation, through years in which he moves deeper and deeper into his private turmoils of mind and spirit; and when by chance they meet again he murders her, in a gesture that seems almost—but not quite—still another repetition of the classical "gratuitous act." Or *did* he murder her? Remembering in the asylum, Antfield cannot be sure. He has lost all hold on Rilke's question, "What was real in the world?"

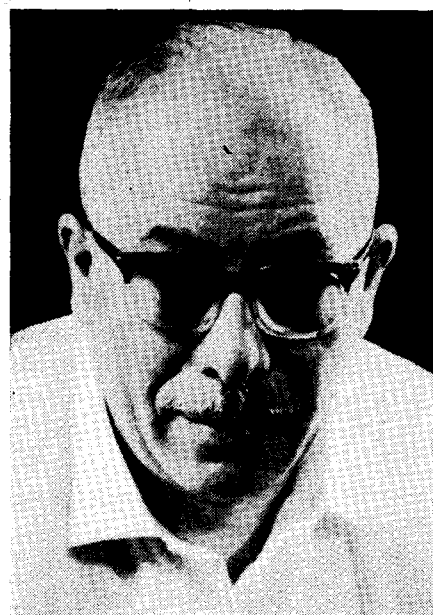
Have readers been here before? Of course they have. Yet Daisne employs such tact and delicacy, such skill at wringing formal patterns from chaos that he is able to infuse Antfield's darkening pages with a power and cogency which are always admirable and sometimes remarkable.

Professor S. J. Sackett, of the University of Kansas, has turned Daisne's extremely difficult Flemish into uncommonly good English. Included with this American version, as a sort of codicil tucked away at the end, is Daisne's fairly recent article "The Novel: Where Do We Go from Here?," a surprisingly naïve document that says little about the novel as an art form and even less about its sharply challenged future.



Berlinitis: Even those who hold no brief for the Germans are likely to be affected by the spirit of Germany's former capital, its mixture of breezy living, high politics, and pervading sense of adventure. Something is always happening in the shadow of the Wall, and no Berliner forgets for long that twenty divisions of the Red Army are ready to zero in on his city. Quite naturally, the feeling of insecurity prompts the Berliners to look to those who would protect them, and theirs is the city where nobody knows ugly Americans.

The sentiment has not gone unrequited, as is evident from a number of recent books with a Berlin background, but "Berlinitis" has never been more bril-



Johan Daisne—"power and cogency."

liantly and sympathetically diagnosed than in Hallie Burnett's new novel, *Watch on the Wall*. (Morrow, \$5.95). Realistic without vulgarity, colorful but not gaudy, topical and yet more than merely sensational, *Watch on the Wall* has, above all, been written with a decent respect for the reader.

Watch on the Wall is the story of a young New Yorker and her sudden involvement in the life of her husband, who walked out on her shortly after their marriage. Carolyn Miller arrives in Berlin as an unsuspecting tourist and in no time at all finds herself in the very midst of people who need her for designs of their own. Mr. Miller, it turns out, lives in East Berlin, and the U.S. government wants him back. New York has not prepared her for the exigencies confronting her on both sides of the Wall but Carolyn soon learns to deal with them. Her journeys to the East and her eventual escape have all the suspense that we have come to expect of a novel set in Berlin.

Mrs. Burnett's unique achievement, however, is her evocation of the city and its people, West Berliners, East Berliners, and Americans. There are vignettes, like that of the Jewish Frau Bernstein, or of Frau Hoffmann, mother of an ardent Communist, that give a glimpse of a world beyond the headlines. Readers who have visited Berlin will recognize the streets, the restaurants, and the hotels. The author has taken scrupulous care with the reality of present-day Berlin and succeeded so well that the city's heady air seems to permeate the novel. Why, one may ask, did the publishers not exercise equal care with the spelling of German words? Not many of them are correct.

—JOSEPH P. BAUKE.

