

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?"

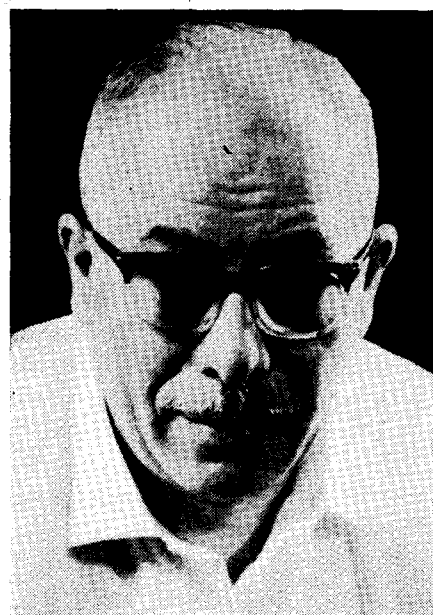
Have readers been here before? Of course they have. Yet Daisne employs such tact and delicacy, such skill at wringing formal patterns from chaos that he is able to infuse Antfield's darkening pages with a power and cogency which are always admirable and sometimes remarkable.

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.



Peace by Evolutionary Progress

A New Dimension in Political Thinking, by William J. Thorbecke (Oceana. 226 pp. \$6.50), holds that international discord will ultimately be harmonized by means of an evolutionary process not unlike that described by Aldous Huxley and Teilhard de Chardin. Kenneth W. Thompson, a social scientist, is the author of "Political Realism and Crises of World Politics."

By KENNETH W. THOMPSON

POLITICAL thinking about the present world crisis often proceeds at two levels. The one involves description and analysis; the other projects solutions and a resolution of the conflict. William J. Thorbecke's original and challenging book is no exception. As a former diplomat climaxing a brilliant career as Netherlands Envoy to China, Dr. Thorbecke, who has also been professor of political science at Emory University, examines with studied detachment and a solid grasp of political realities the world struggle between Communism and democracy. As a disciple of Teilhard de Chardin and Julian Huxley, he turns to the science of evolution to resolve the Cold War. His analysis of the discord is forceful and illuminating; his argument that evolution will end it is stimulating but not wholly convincing. Nevertheless, Dr. Thorbecke's use of an evolutionary framework helps us to comprehend some of the basic trends in the world around us.

He leaves no doubt that foreign relations are conducted today on a troubled international scene. Dr. Thorbecke, who is clear-eyed about the opportunism and ruthlessness of the Communist leaders, describes how they employ harsh discipline and terror, cement mass solidarity through common hatred and fear of external enemies, and build faith in the inevitable success of the collectivist venture. He explains that "there are signs that in many countries people are beginning to see through the Soviet maneuvers," such as the peace offensive, which might not have become so effective, if it had not coincided with a growing desire all over the world for better understanding.

Yet Dr. Thorbecke, while acknowledging the false doctrines and cynical

practices of Communism, is uneasy about the prevalent American attitude, which is "unanimous in its condemnation." He examines the American "view that Communism is a gigantic threat to human well-being, overlooking the fact that though Communism undoubtedly offers a threat to others, it made life less harsh for the Russian masses than it was under the czars." He calls on the contenders in the Cold War to disengage from continued attacks and counterattacks and to synthesize the positive elements in both systems. To some extent, he believes, this is already occurring via creeping Socialism in democracies and creeping capitalism in Communist states. Individualism "is being given somewhat more attention in Soviet Russia," and collective needs are being met on a new basis especially in the United States and Britain. The differences in the Chinese brand of Communism have deep cultural roots in China's "reaction to a century of foreign subjugation." Thanks to Mao, China for the first time in a hundred years turned back in Korea "the combined powers of the world and brought to an end a long period of national degradation and servitude."

Nevertheless, if Dr. Thorbecke holds that peace requires greater detachment in the Cold War, he also recognizes the present need for military security and resistance to expansionism. However, he notes, in the long run security rests as much on economic and social progress as on a policy of containment. In the meantime, Communism has important weaknesses in fundamental sectors of society. For example, agriculture remains its Achilles heel. "In China each farmer feeds three persons . . . , in Soviet Russia . . . seven persons, in the United States thirty. . . ." Moreover, Commu-

nism in its more revolutionary and dangerous forms is threatened by erosion from within due to the ferment of freedom agitating Russian workers and the more pragmatic, cosmopolitan outlook of an emerging managerial class. There has also been a breakup of the monolithic force of world Communism especially through the Sino-Soviet rift. History affords examples of stranger regroupings than an eventual alliance with the West by the Soviet Union to protect its eastern flank.

Thus Dr. Thorbecke sees hope for a more peaceful world in the winds of change that are drawing at least some of the Cold War adversaries more closely together. However, up to now the USSR has had no more to offer than coexistence and the West no more than the promise of peace if Communism remains within its present boundaries. Dr. Thorbecke concludes that what is needed is a "concept that grips the imagination and envisions a new equilibrium to which all nations can rally, the Communists included." Such a concept is evolution rather than the constructs of political science and diplomacy, which in the end "will fail us."

This reviewer cannot do justice in a few sentences to Dr. Thorbecke's formulation of evolution as a solution to the rivalry of ideologies and nations. Suffice it to say that his "new dimension" is essentially a restatement of Teilhard's and Huxley's theories of evolution applied to international politics. Life from its earliest beginnings has advanced by spurts and shocks toward world-wide unity. Teilhard's "noosphere" or sphere of interthinking is bringing about a convergence of the common interests of all mankind. In Huxley's phrase, a "single pool of common thought greatly helped by modern means of communication is putting an end to parochial inhibitions." World opinion is spurred on by "the meeting of millions of conscious minds on earth." As men become conscious of the evolving core of intelligence throughout the world, they will rise above nationalism and ideologies.

Dr. Thorbecke concludes his study by applying this concept of evolution to specific areas of discussion: American foreign policy, European unification, foreign aid, and the Cold War. His suggestions are provocative and challenging if highly sanguine and rationalistic. He has less to say about negotiating with the Russians on concrete outstanding problems or about the residual emotionalism of world politics than about the grand vision of evolutionary change. Yet, if Dr. Thorbecke's dream is ever to have its chance, traditional diplomats and statesmen must labor day by day not in a brave new world but in the realm of harsh claims and persistent nationalistic ambitions.

