

You Can't Go Home to Stay

Island of Salvation, by Włodzimierz Odojewski, translated from the Polish by Davis Welsh (Harcourt, Brace & World. 248 pp. \$4.75), enters a young boy's dream world, to which he has retreated to escape the stresses of postwar Poland. Harold B. Segel, an associate professor of Slavic languages at Columbia University, is a specialist in Polish literature.

By HAROLD B. SEGEL

MAN'S inability to find in his past a refuge from reality, to make of the past an "island of salvation"—this is the theme of the second novel of the young Polish writer Włodzimierz Odojewski to come to the attention of the English reader. (In 1964 his novel *The Dying Day* won critical praise.) Although the desire for escape is motivated by the stresses of post-World War II Polish life, *Island of Salvation* is not a political novel, nor is it a work solely for the initiated. In a lyrical, poeticized style, reminiscent at times of the early-twentieth-century Polish novelist Stefan Żeromski, Odojewski traces the stubborn, inescapable insinuation of reality into the consciousness of a young boy, Peter, who returns in 1942 to the estate of his grandparents, from which he and his family were driven by the Soviet-Nazi "partition" of Poland in 1939. Despite the war raging all around it, life at Chupryn appears to Peter to go on exactly as it had before, unchanged, capable of sheltering him from the conflicts he leaves behind.

Chupryn and its people are seen by Peter as through a haze. This dreamlike quality is effectively conveyed by the drifting character of the narration, by its not being broken into chapters.

Gradually, but with grim persistence, the reality of the anguish of war, of the year 1942, invade the dream world of Peter and destroy it. But this destruction is not without its positive side, for it becomes the agent by which he is metamorphosed from a boy into a man. When the process of change is complete, Peter emerges from the world of illusion carrying a wisdom appropriate to his new maturity: a recognition that the past can never become an impregnable shelter from the present and that one should press on from the present into the future, preserving from the past only



Włodzimierz Odojewski—"lyrical."

what can offer sustenance on the journey.

A poignant literary experience, Odojewski's sensitive novel is marred only occasionally by a too obvious enunciation of the theme and by the translator's refusal to compromise with a strict fidelity to the style of the original for the sake of a somewhat more readable English.

The Reeling Death: "You know who the critics are? The men who have failed in literature and art." Though Benjamin Disraeli wrote those words many years ago, a reading of *One by One* (Atheneum, \$3.95) will prove that they still have validity. The author, Penelope Gilliatt, is one of London's leading dramatic critics, according to transatlantic grapevine; her novel is a most disappointing affair.

The setting is present-day London, caught in the grip of a mysterious plague that sends its victims reeling about like drunks before they die. Where the plague has come from, how it spreads, why it leaves—these are matters of no concern to the author. One could tolerate this if Miss Gilliatt demonstrated any real interest in the hero and heroine she has plunked down in the middle of her plague. But no, she regularly abandons them—as well as her narrative—in favor of chunks of reportage on the effects of plague on British shipping, etc., and for

chatty little editorials in the first person plural: "Under our possessive excitement about a hot spell, which is comic to anyone used to a more regular climate, and under the pleasure of adjusting to a kind of ease that even melts the edges of the class system a little, the English sometimes seem to get a buried suspicion that some compensation is going to be extracted for good weather."

Since Miss Gilliatt doesn't seem to care enough for her people to stick with them through the hells she has dreamed up, it is not surprising that the reader is more confused than moved by their fate. Though neither the author nor her hero ever discovers a method of avoiding infection, there is one easy way: don't open *One by One*.

—HASKEL FRANKEL.



Make Believe Youdunit: There was once a little boy who liked to make believe he was somebody else, preferably someone dangerous like a cowboy or an Indian. He met a little girl who liked to make believe she was married to a poisoner. So he played poisoner with her for a while, until he got bored and went swimming, where he met another little girl. She also liked to make believe she was married to a murderer, but her murderer did his killing with an airplane. So the little boy played war ace with her. But she got tired of the game before he did and went away, leaving him with the little girl who liked to play poisoner. But he wouldn't play poisoner any more, and she wouldn't play war ace, and so they lived unhappily together for a while, hating each other very much. Finally she got so mad at him that she broke his toy airplane, so he walloped her and she had to go to the hospital. The end.

Move everybody's age up a quarter-century or so; make the poisoner the famous Dr. Crippen; make the first girl ambisexual; make the second girl an admirer of Richthofen and also ambisexual. Mix in plenty of sex and squalor, and stir sluggishly. Then simmer in a prose thickly manured with unwashed old clothing from a sort of London Thrift Shop. Drench with whiskey, sprinkle heavily with vomit, and serve.

Result? Well, the jacket for Peter Everett's *Negatives* (Simon & Schuster, \$4.95) quotes someone from *The Manchester Guardian* who calls it "a brilliant macabre tour de force." And adds, "This will stay with me for a long time."

Me, too. Once I started it, I couldn't put it down. When I finished it, I could hardly keep it down.

"May howls of protest hound it into the best-seller lists!" says the obviously anti-American *Yorkshire Post*.

—NICHOLAS SAMSTAG.

Passion That Poisons Our Daily Bread

A Sense of Life, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, translated from the French by Adrienne Foulke (Funk & Wagnalls. 231 pp. \$5), collects some previously unpublished writings by the pilot-poet, including his thoughts on the Spanish Civil War and on war in general. Louis Fischer, who covered the Spanish Civil War for *The Nation*, is the author of "A Life of Mahatma Gandhi," "The Soviets in World Affairs," "The Story of Indonesia: Old Land, New Nation," and "A Life of Lenin." The last won the 1964 National Book Award for Biography.

By LOUIS FISCHER

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY was a hero to a generation of Frenchmen in the 1930s and Forties, and remains a hero in France today. He was also a hero to many Americans. And he wrote like an angel about matters relevant to our lives today.

A twin of the twentieth century, St. Ex, as his colleagues called him, was over age in 1943 when he joined a French air squadron near Algiers. During the early days of his training period he wrote a long letter reproduced in this volume. "Ours," he declared, "is a decadent society that has declined from the level of Greek tragedy to the clichés of escapist comedy. (How much lower can one sink?) Ours is the age of publicity and the point system, of totalitarian governments and armies without flags or bugles or services for their dead. . . . I hate my own period with all my heart. Today man is dying of thirst." Is that why men drink so much and youngsters take dope?

"Suppose," he asks in the same letter, "we do achieve the mass distribution of perfectly machined musical instruments. Where will the musician be? The possibility that I may be killed in this war is not important. . . . But if I do come back alive from the thankless job that must be done, it will be to face only one challenge: What can one, what must one, say to men?"

He did not come back. This volume is, in a way, his testament to young and old, to powermen and laymen, to those who can lend an ear and those who are dumb.



Antoine de Saint-Exupéry:
"Each individual is an empire."

It is often cruel to reprint, after thirty years, what someone wrote about a week's or a month's tour of a country he did not know, and this applies to Saint-Exupéry's comments on the Russia of 1935. But he does bring the Spanish Civil War to life, because there he was free to mingle with peasants in their villages and with soldiers in the front line that ran through a suburb of Madrid.

Saint-Exupéry loved people. To him, "each individual is an empire"; and he was a genius at invading these empires with a squadron of words that flow from the heart.

He hated war. "A moral role?" he exclaims. "But a bombardment turns against the bombarder! Each shell that fell on Madrid fortified something in the town. . . . It was clear to me that a bombardment did not disperse—it unified. Horror causes men to clench their fists, and in horror men join together." (Nevertheless, the stronger battalions and bombarders won and inaugurated decades of Francoism.)

St. Ex was a logical if lyrical Frenchman, and he knew that "if we merely recite the horrors of war, we will never prevail against war." Rather, he suggests, we must try to understand "why it is that we make war when we realize that it is monstrous and senseless. . . . The familiar explanations of savage instincts, greed, blood lust . . . overlook what is truly essential. They ignore the asceticism that surrounds war."

But he does not leave the reader suspended in helplessness. He offers an answer: "If we want to come to grips with what is universal in war we must forget such things as opposing camps and we must avoid arguing over ideologies. . . . Do not insist that your beliefs are evidence of the truth, for in that case, is not each of us right? . . . We must put aside the passions and beliefs that divide us."

Passions and emotions are the chief ingredients of politics everywhere, and therefore of international frictions and wars. So Saint-Exupéry hunts for the hidden springs of man's actions. In war, he confesses, there is a sense of individual fulfillment, of comradeship in breaking bread; "But of this bread men die." Consequently "we cannot draw a free breath unless we are bound to others by a common and disinterested ideal. . . . To those of us who have known the joy of rescuing a crew downed in the Sahara, all other pleasures seem empty." There is salvation and freedom in sacrifice, in identification with human beings in distress. "What all of us want," he adds, "is to be set free. . . . There is nothing dramatic in the world, nothing pathetic, except in human relations." Strange—or is it?—that all those who dig deep come to the golden vein of Gandhian love.

This book is full of memorable quotes. Saint-Exupéry had the knack of getting under the skin of universal and eternal problems and then saying something meaningful. In this posthumous book, as in earlier ones, he accomplished what all authors would like to achieve: he takes the reader not only outside of himself but above himself. Let St. Ex carry you in his flimsy mail plane across the Andes in a cyclone, and you will forget you are angry. He enriches life by depicting the abyss of death.

WHAT GOOD will it do to win this war if we then face a century-long crisis of revolutionary epilepsy? Once the question of German aggression is settled, the real problems will begin to emerge. It is quite unlikely that speculation on the New York Stock Exchange will suffice at the end of this war, as it did in 1919, to distract humanity from its real troubles. If a strong spiritual force is absent, there will be dozens of sectarian faiths sprouting up like so many mushrooms, each at odds with the other. A quaintly outdated Marxism will disintegrate into a swarm of competitive neo-Marxisms. (This is already evident in Spain.) Unless, of course, a French Caesar appears and installs us in a new-socialist concentration camp for all eternity. . . .

—From "A Sense of Life."