

Emily notes as memorable that she has experienced an earthquake and has slept with an alligator, but not that she has killed a man.

Hughes's conception of the inscrutability of the child mind is the basis of the irony that permeates the book. The parents, the pirates, and the people on the steamship all make ludicrously false assumptions. Of course Hughes has to convince us that he does understand children, and it is his overwhelming success that gives the novel its power. The irony is often funny, but at the end, when the pirates are put on trial, it turns grim. The failure of understanding can create tragedy as well as comedy.

Irony is the quality that unifies Hughes's three novels. In *Hazard*, portraying men under a great strain, reveals aspects of human nature that are ordinarily concealed. In *The Fox in the Attic* the basic irony is that the young Englishman visiting Germany has no understanding whatever of the significance of the events that are going on around him; but there are countless lesser ironies along the way. If the motives of a kind and conscientious man can be misunderstood, as they are in the first part of *The Fox*, how can one be surprised, Hughes asks, if nations do not understand one another?

Much as I admire William Golding, I think that *A High Wind in Jamaica* may be a more profound novel than *Lord of the Flies*, and this is because of Hughes's ironic attitude. He has no theory of evil; he does not damn human beings, children or adults. He simply confronts, and forces us to confront, the mysteriousness of the human spirit.

—GRANVILLE HICKS.

**FRAZER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT No. 1141**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1141 will be found in the next issue.

XL FQFBGGA LBMKQ ONCK LD-
BH LDCKK EKKMQ LN RCKRBCK
B SNNT XORCNORLF QKQKYD.

OBCM LEBXH

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1140

He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing.

—OSCAR WILDE.

The European Literary Scene

LENINGRAD.

This former political hub of Russia remains at least the literary and artistic capital, its capitolium being of course the unbelievable Hermitage. It is obvious that in this city of "elegant austerity of line" (Pushkin's words), a neoclassically-planned czarist metropolis, the proletarian writer must feel a bit uncomfortable, if not out of place. Such a writer might take comfort from the fact that Lenin (whose works are about to reappear in a definitive and augmented fifth edition) did much of his class-conscious writing here. However, every square, bridge, park, and *prospekt* seems to commemorate one of the great liberal-traditionalists of the nineteenth century: Pushkin, Chekhov, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Blok. In fact, the name of Pushkin still rivals that of Lenin, adorning the leading theater, the Institute of Literature, and so on.

Alberto Moravia recently complained in these pages (SR, April 17) that the Soviets have produced no authors to equal those of nineteenth-century St. Petersburg. Perhaps, with the lessening strictures on style and possibly even on content promised by the Kremlin, this neoclassic-baroque city on the Neva will reassume its old role and once again provide the great literary names. Maybe it will find them among the talents in its branch of the Union of Soviet Writers, or in its Writers' Club (named for Mayakovsky) whose members include Panova, Gherman, Prokoviev, Lebedenko, Slonimsky, and Uspensky. Or perhaps the next Dostoevsky will be an unaffiliated maverick, willing, like Feodor Mikhailovich, to endure prison or exile to create his masterpieces.

In any case, the younger intellectuals here are reading European and American books without waiting for them to be translated. They read a monthly journal devoted exclusively to Western European letters; they frequent the bookstores selling Western literature, rather than those that carry current titles from the Eastern Democratic Republics.

Even the most liberal Russians remain deadly serious about poetry and fiction as a sociopolitical phenomenon. They are surprisingly moralistic, like Russian life in general. Malcolm Muggeridge lately complained that America's reading habits show us to be overly sex-stimulated (apparently he hasn't been to Scandinavia recently). He need have



—Sovfoto

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930),
—hero of "socialist realism."

no such concern for Russia. The compatriots of Mr. Muggeridge who have corrupted us (John Cleland, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Frank Harris, Richard Burton with his rendering of the *Kama Sutra*, and all the rest), without apparently having corrupted their own countrymen, have made no dent on the Russians. Several literary acquaintances here assured me that these authors will never be translated, challenging me to offer one reason why they should be. This moralism has led them to at least one logical dilemma: they consider Jean Genet the sickest of the lot, yet here is Sartre, one of the USSR's greatest heroes and sympathizers, hailing that depraved gallows-bait as a martyr and a saint and the greatest sincere talent about. Although Ian Fleming is without doubt the most universally read author at the moment (this spring I saw "Jam Bond" chalked on a neighborhood wall in Bangkok), most Russians have no idea who he is. Agent 007 has not infiltrated behind the ferruginous curtain.

Professor Mikhail Alexeyev, director of the sixty-year-old Pushkin Institute and my personal friend since the Dante celebrations of late April, is representative of the new Russian cosmopolitanism. He is proud that the 2,000,000 manuscripts in the Institute represent all Eu-

ropean literatures; he is as proud of the 2,000 Voltaire manuscripts as he is of the 1,730 Pushkin autographs, some of the latter contributed by such unexpected donors as Serge Lifar. Alexeyev has made of the Institute a center for research in comparative literature, where theses relating Russian to Western European authors are a specialty.

In sum, one leaves Leningrad with a pleasant memory of many literary discussions and disputes, characterized by a relative freedom of expression (with perhaps more expression than concession). This optimistic feeling was momentarily marred by one final incident as I was copying these paragraphs on the train from Leningrad to Helsinki. As we neared the Finnish border, a customs inspector and an armed guard looked over my baggage. The customs official did not ask me to open a valise or a briefcase. But the soldier, without a by-your-leave, picked up my notes of conversations with Professors Alexeyev and Yegorov of Leningrad University, notes ornamented with much doodling. It took him and his confederates a half-hour to decide that my doodles were not pilfered plans for some moon-landing mechanism and to bring them back, wordlessly. Just when everything had been going so well!

Fischer Verlag of Frankfurt has put out the inevitably fascinating correspondence between Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Arthur Schnitzler, opening with letters from before the turn of the century which the young *Wunderkind* Hugo signed with his pseudonym of Loris, and continuing to his death in 1929. Letters, yes—but also postcards



—Bettmann Archive.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal—he made the most of a world on its way out.

SR/June 19, 1965

and even telegrams, since these were busy, prolific writers. How different these men were! Schnitzler, the elder by over a decade, a physician who had abandoned his practice for writing, a friend of Freud obsessed by Don Juanism, whose *Anatol* (1893) became the prototype of the gay yet melancholy Viennese roué, and whose *Reigen* seems destined to be filmed regularly as *La Ronde*; the younger Hofmannsthal, a trained philologist, classicist, medievalist, playwright, and librettist (for Richard Strauss), a family man whose life contrasted with the *dolce vita* flaunted by Schnitzler. Yet a strong bond of friendship and admiration neutralized these differences of temperament.

The letters reflect Vienna under Freud's influence, Vienna on the eve of two world wars, when the day was to be seized in a desperate grip. Café life; outings with bicycles or in Schnitzler's new car, of which he boasted to his friend; rendezvous at the theater; arrangements for trial readings of their new works—these events record a happy time. In those days Vienna rejected the doctrine of committed literature; and if there is some social criticism in Schnitzler, both these writers on the whole made the most of life in an aristocratic and refined world that was on its way out. Yet Schnitzler, a Jew who posed the *Judenproblem* early in his play *Professor Bernhardt* (1913), thought he saw the handwriting on the wall. Typically, he sensed the doom of the old Jewish Cemetery, "whose sepulchers will be slowly sucked into the soil." Perhaps it was a blessing that Hofmannsthal died five years before the Reichstag fire and Schnitzler only three. This painstaking 412-page edition cannot help but become what Peter Beltzer calls it in *Die Bücherkommentare*: a "rich mine" for lovers of German and Austrian letters.

Alan Sillitoe, known to most Americans for his *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, has done it again with a novel called, for reasons of his own, *The Death of William Posters*. In it we meet yet another Midlandish outsider, an angry young man rebelling at the drab working-class society of Nottingham. He chucks his wife and hikes off on an odyssey of sorts, not quite sure what he is seeking, except incidentally a series of adventures with married, middle-class women. What John Osborne would call his "devil inside" drives Sillitoe's hero on his fuzzy quest to North Africa and to a decision (after 318 pages) to join up with the Algerian rebels, whose Nottingham contingent is undermanned.

Perhaps no work since Osborne's *Two for England* has so irritated British critics. Sillitoe is accused of overworking a now well-worn theme. Still, Osborne pulled it off with his angry man and



—AFP photo/Tass.

Louis Aragon in Moscow, 1964.

Wesker with his kitchen sink. The *Times's* anonymous reviewer looks back less in anger than in sorrow: "Very often in the past ten years or so critical journalism has tended to be enthusiastic not over anything to do with literary merit of the work in question so much as over its ability to gratify a strange ignorance and a strange curiosity about how the other half is supposed to live . . . [Critics] are therefore ready to be imposed upon—by accounts whose authors have not sufficient literary virtues to be always accurate—by a myth."

Louis Aragon, having completed with André Maurois their *Parallel History* (in which Maurois traces the history of the USA while Aragon presents a chronicle of the USSR), now launches another collective project—this time with his wife, Elsa Triolet, the Russian sister-in-law of Mayakovsky who transplanted Aragon from the ranks of Surrealism in 1927 to the ranks of Communist writers. This marital team has begun to publish its complete works in alternating volumes, the first being her juvenilia and the second his earliest works. It is a pleasant idea, and appropriate, since Mme. Triolet inspired some of Aragon's finest poetry, including *Les yeux d'Elsa* (1942) and *Elsa* (1959). Maurois for one is charmed by this project, which he finds without precedent, not even in the case of Robert and Elizabeth Browning (too late and too little). "Here, on the contrary, the back-and-forth interplay will be sustained throughout a long time-sequence, making up the history of a mutual love and reciprocal influences."

—ROBERT J. CLEMENTS.

His Pen Was a Welcome Weapon

The War: 1941-45 (Volume V of "Men, Years—Life"), by Ilya Ehrenburg, translated from the Russian by Tatiana Shebunina and Yvonne Kapp (World, 208 pp. \$5.95), deals with the novelist's experiences during the grim days of the Nazi invasion of the USSR. Alexander Werth spent the war years in Russia and wrote "Russia at War, 1941-45."

By ALEXANDER WERTH

ILYA EHRENBURG, now in his seventy-fifth year, is not only one of the most brilliant of Soviet writers but also one of the most controversial figures on the Russian literary scene. Born in Kiev in 1891, the son of a middle-class Jewish family, he got into trouble with the czarist police as a "revolutionary" at the age of sixteen, spent a few weeks in jail, and succeeded in emigrating to France. He met Lenin there; but Ehrenburg was actually more interested in art and literature than in politics. As a habitu  of the Rotonde Caf  in Montparnasse, he got to know Modigliani, Picasso, and other famous artists and poets, and soon blossomed out himself as a symbolist poet.

Those happy days in pre-1914 Paris,

described with a touch of nostalgia in the first volume of his autobiography, left a lifelong mark on Ehrenburg, who has remained to this day the most outspoken Russian defender of modern art and the chief antagonist of academic canons. Even at the height of the Stalin r gime he did not hesitate to pour ridicule on the "ham" painters and the writers of "socialist realism." Khrushchev, as well as Leonid Ilyichev, the recently deposed Ideological Chief of the Central Committee, attacked him savagely in 1963 as a dangerous Western and "liberal" influence. He was accused of liking Paris better than Moscow, was reminded of the fact that, between the two wars, he had preferred to live abroad, and that in the 1920s he had written several satirical novels which were not only "anarchist" and "cosmopolitan" but also insidiously anti-Soviet.

On the other hand, his enemies in the West (for if Ehrenburg has many friends, he has also many enemies) have never ceased reproaching him with being a "survivor"; had he not, they recall, been well looked upon by Stalin, who had had dozens of other writers—and particularly Jewish writers—deported or shot? They have also suggested that Ehrenburg's nonconformism was merely a pose.

This kind of criticism strikes me as most unfair, as does the common charge

that Ehrenburg's nonconformism was always strictly limited to what was "allowed" by the Soviet authorities. In reality, Ehrenburg has on many occasions shown great courage, and his autobiography, in particular, has exercised the most salutary liberal influence on the present young Soviet generation. It was also Ehrenburg who, almost immediately after Stalin's death, published his novel *The Thaw*, which marked the end of the artistic and literary deep-freeze of the dictator's last years. It was an act of real courage.

This fifth volume of Ehrenburg's autobiography deals with the war years in Russia. In spite of being more interested in art than in politics, once the war had started he felt it his duty to do "war service," and to write day after day on the most burning and topical subjects. His success was fantastic. He worked in a sort of concentrated frenzy, turning out three, four, five articles a day, for the Russian press, for countless army newspapers, for British, American, and other foreign journals. He was outraged by the Nazis, and his pungent anti-German articles made him immensely popular in Russia, not least with the Red Army. Partisans are known to have swapped a precious ounce of tobacco for a bunch of Ehrenburg clippings. His French background was of the greatest help: his witty, scurrilous journalism was in the French pamphleteering tradition, wholly different from the pompous, clich -ridden writing that was the general rule in the Soviet press. If his violent anti-Germanism was "un-Marxist" it was, nevertheless, precisely what was wanted during the war; and Stalin was not alone in thinking that, as a morale-builder, this number one propagandist was worth to Russia twenty or thirty divisions. Hence, I believe, the relative leniency with which Stalin treated Ehrenburg during subsequent years, even though in April 1945, with the Russians well inside Germany, "hate propaganda" was suddenly stopped.

Ehrenburg's volume on the war years is altogether admirable in its deep sensitiveness to human suffering. I see no reason for damning him because he now tells many things he could not tell before—for instance, the bullying to which he was subjected by some of the top bureaucrats of the Party, such as Shcherbakov; the inexplicable arrests that occurred in the newspaper offices even at the height of the war; the inhuman treatment accorded by the NKVD to repatriated Russian war prisoners, all of whom were regarded as suspects and almost as criminals.

Ehrenburg still has mixed feelings about Stalin. During the war there were signs of a liberalization of the r gime, but these hopes proved idle; on the other hand, Ehrenburg has no doubt that the



Ilya Ehrenburg with a group of Jewish partisans, Vilnius, 1944—he was outraged by the Nazis.

—From the book.