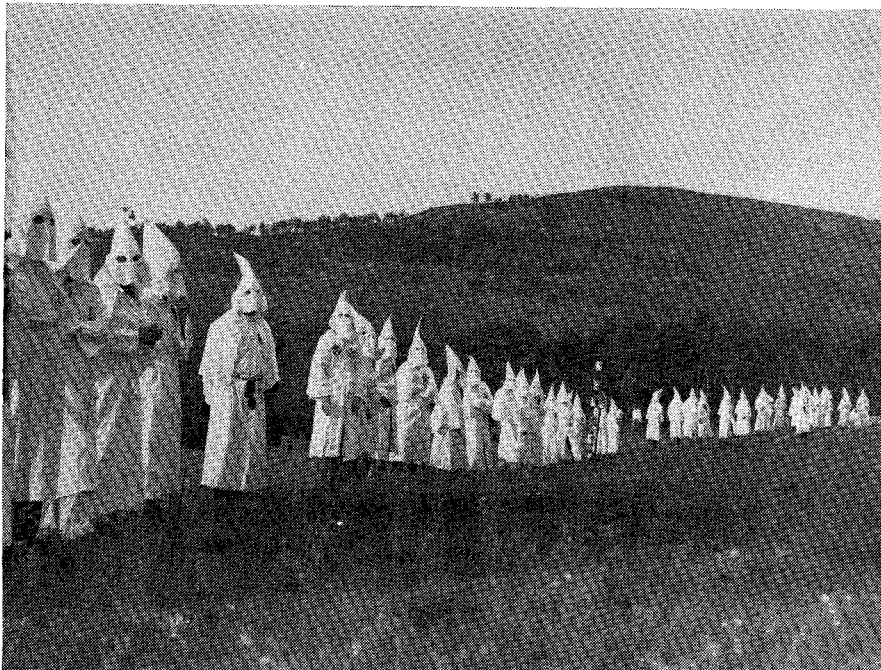


The Haters Among Us



Ku Klux Klan gathering in Stone Mountain, Georgia, 1948
—“something for every member of the . . . majority.”

—Wide World.

The Ku Klux Klan: A Century of Infamy, by William Pierce Randel (Chilton. 300 pp. \$5.95); ***Hooded Americanism***, by David M. Chalmers (Doubleday. 420 pp. \$5.95); and ***The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest***, by Charles C. Alexander (University of Kentucky Press. 288 pp. \$6), seek the roots of this prejudice-exploiting organization and the causes for its periodic resurgence in a democratic society. Roger N. Baldwin is founder of the American Civil Liberties Union.

By ROGER N. BALDWIN

THREE books by three professors on the “Invisible Empire,” appearing almost simultaneously, present timely background material for the current Congressional investigation of Klu Klux Klan outrages in the South. The studies emphasize different periods: William Pierce Randel, a Northerner transplanted to Florida, devotes more than half his book to the Klan of Reconstruction days (1865 to 1871). David Chalmers, also a Northerner, gives that period a single chapter, concentrating on the revival of the Klan in the 1920s and its

later resurgence, bringing the story almost up to date. Charles Alexander, a Texan, has written a regional study dealing with four states—Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma—and covering the revived Klan which in that area specialized in imposing through violence conformity to Victorian morals.

All three books are valuable because of the lack of previous comprehensive studies. Due to the Klan’s notorious secrecy, the authors’ sources are almost entirely limited to the press, court records, legislation, and a single Congressional hearing.

Historical studies, novels, and the notorious racist film *The Birth of a Nation* romanticized the original, short-lived Klan, giving it a false glamour which, as Professor Randel deplors, is still preserved in many historical texts. Aimed at restoring the “Southern way of life,” the Klan contributed greatly to its disappearance.

But of the Klan’s three separate incarnations (1865 to 1871, 1915 to 1944, and 1949 to the present), its most significant was its expansion from the South to the entire United States as a political force in the 1920s. So widespread was its appeal to all forms of prejudice against minorities that it caught millions in its net, especially in rural areas. There was something for every member of the

white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon majority: fear of Catholics, Jews, aliens, unions, Communists, and, of course, Negroes.

All three authors reach the same conclusion on how such a lawless, violent, reactionary organization could periodically achieve a position of influence in our democracy. In Chalmers’s words, “. . . despite general societal disapproval, newspaper attack, surveillance by the FBI, shortage of funds and a general poverty of leadership, the Klan persists because the stuff of which Klansmen are made is part of American society.” Randel observes, “The Klan at every stage has been the active expression of great American myths, especially those of divine plan and a chosen people, specifically, white Protestant Anglo-Saxons.” Alexander concludes his book with the statement: “The Klan of the Twenties has disappeared, but its spirit and goals remain, sustenance for new crusades for 100 per cent Americanism and moral conformity.” Maybe so. The author of an earlier book on the Klan declared, during its heyday in the Twenties, that “Two-thirds of the American people are members of the Klan whether they know it or not.”

Times are changing, however, with the current Negro revolution, Supreme Court affirmations of the rights of minorities, and a far greater power in the Federal Government to make uniform the rights of all American citizens. The end of anti-Catholicism was marked by Kennedy’s election to the Presidency; anti-Semitism has markedly declined, and anti-Communism is nobody’s monopoly. There’s not much left for the old white, Protestant Anglo-Saxons save the losing fight against the Negroes.

BUT even in the past the several Klans foundered on other, more tangible obstacles. They were torn by dissensions and rivalries over leadership and their handsome profits. They became corrupt rackets. Their nightriding outrages were prosecuted. The law unmasked them. Their charters were revoked. Their political power, so ominous in the early 1920s, disintegrated in a few years. From a nationwide menace, the Klan has now become what it was at its birth 100 years ago: a violent Southern racist defiance. But even this is only a weakened remnant, fighting for white supremacy against a rising tide of equality.

Extralegal violence, for so long a striking contradiction to our democratic processes, has been steadily diminishing under federal controls, and is at last on the way out. The intolerances these authors attribute to the dominant “American spirit” will find their expression rather in lawful forms of politics and propaganda, reflecting the still deep divisions of a people presumably on the road to the “Great Society.”

The Terrible Monotony of It All

The Fetish and Other Stories, by Alberto Moravia, translated from the Italian by Angus Davidson (Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 285 pp. \$4.95), offers brief glimpses of men and women separated by lack of understanding and by the banal "automatism" of their lives. Dorrie Pagones has studied literature in Europe under a Fulbright grant.

By DORRIE PAGONES

"HOW BEASTLY the bourgeois is," wrote D. H. Lawrence. "Especially if Italian," one might add after reading some of Alberto Moravia's stories. But to no critic, apparently, can the bourgeois appear more beastly than to himself:

"I dislike myself," muses the model husband in one of these forty-one tales of loneliness, boredom, and disenchantment, "'as one dislikes certain people that one meets in the train. . . ."

"How unpleasant I am! How very unpleasant!" cries a young law student in another story, looking at his image in the water of a lake.

"Inside me there's nothing but an enormous boredom," exclaims the spoiled wife of a third story.

The obvious danger in writing about a lot of bored people is that the writer is likely to seem the most crashing bore of all. But dangers, obvious or otherwise, have never deterred Moravia from his chosen path, and that is fortunate; for, although the stories in this collection are, in the most literal sense, monotonous, they are nearly all absorbing. One exception is "Too Rich," the story of the bored wife. This piece indulges, in a fashionably banal way, the current, incomprehensible Italian passion for languid conversations about life carried on in a speeding sports car.

The English title of the book is a bit misleading: a better one would have been "The Automaton," a literal translation of the Italian title. For these are men and women who have become automatons, and, in many of the stories, Moravia tells of the one moment that must come even to machines when, as one character puts it, they "get fed up with being machines and want to prove that they're not."

The situations are mostly of a sexual nature, but to say this is to give very

little idea of them. Moravia is first of all a moralist who uses the sexual relationship for the good and simple reason that there are few others which give such immediate and devastating insight into character. Much has been made of his reputation as a writer about sex; but anyone who hopes to find erotic excitement in his book will be bitterly disappointed. When Moravia's characters go to bed, they talk.

In "Words and the Night," a husband and wife are asleep. A thunderstorm awakens both and gives rise to different thoughts. Giovanni thinks of the thirty years that have passed since, as a child, he ran to his mother for comfort in a similar thunderstorm. Feeling unaccountably depressed, he asks his wife what she did when the storm woke her and she replies, "I thought of you." Giovanni, vaguely irritated, tries to force his wife to say precisely what she means when she says she thought about him. He never finds out, for he does not know how to communicate with her.

"At Night, In Sleep" tells how a husband who is separated from his wife telephones her to ask if he may come to her apartment and simply spend the night beside her. She agrees, on condition that he will on no account wake her. There follows a detailed description of the husband's impressions as he

enters the darkened apartment and watches, through the night, the unconscious movements of the sleeping woman.

Even in their waking moments, people dream—perhaps. In "Jealousy Plays Tricks," Ernesto sees his wife dash into their room, excitedly fling off her dress, and run out, no doubt to closet herself with a lover. It must have been a dream, he finally decides, and tells her of it. Why, no, she replies, to his amazement; it was all just as he imagined except for one detail: in the next room there was no lover, only a dressmaker. Later, at the beach, Ernesto again sees his wife, this time in the briefest of bikinis, disappear into a hut with a man. But this time when Ernesto confronts her she insists that he has dreamed the whole thing.

EACH of these stories is about half a dozen pages long, and each is perfect of its kind. Indeed, technically Moravia is almost too good. At times we seem to hear the echo of some distant classroom voice, passing out assignments in Creative Writing: I. A girl is about to marry a rich man whom she cannot love. Describe her state of mind as economically as you can. II. A man is waiting impatiently for a girl to visit him. How shall he pass the time? Be inventive. III. Write a brief essay on the use of anthropomorphism as a literary device, in the form of a conversation between a man and a woman.

But then the classroom mercifully recedes, and we are under the spell of a great storyteller, a man who for forty years has looked with critical compassion on the modern world and always set down honestly what he saw.

Hungry Auntie

By Adassa Frank

HUNGRY auntie came kissing and weaving into the laughing house of my father. Kissing and weaving, bringing us presents, auntie came joking and all-the-time hugging nieces and nephews unseen for a year.

Charming auntie, all of an evening, kept her voice tickling soft for my father but would not talk so warm for my mother and spoke of my quieter sister as foolish, which straightened most of our grinning a while.

Still, much of the evening auntie was friendly, chatting of family, innocent things. It was next morning, with daddy out working, auntie got shrill as a curse in the wind, thin elbows flapping rage on my mother.

Mother yelled back. Cornered, unholy, she witched into auntie, who scooped up her bags. Wilder than war, they cooled for a minute when auntie goodbyed and cooed on the phone, keeping her good voice soft for my father.