

with Andrés displaying the impotence of his class. But the representatives of the working class are no better. René is cruel and greedy, almost a personification of evil. Mario shows some decent impulses at the outset, but he is corrupted by circumstances and his brother, and there is little doubt that he will come to a bad end.

In fact, almost everyone ends badly. Poor Estela, the only character for whom the reader can feel either sympathy or compassion, seems destined to live in squalor and misery with Mario if she lives at all. Misiá Elisa is an exception of sorts, an ironic exception, for at least she dies happy. No one has come to visit her on her saint's day, but Lourdes and Rosario, a little tipsy, dress her in antiquated finery. "Then the two maids, the one tiny and rotund, the other tall and square, picked up the silver crown and went up to the old woman." "Long live the nicest, prettiest little queen in the world," they cry, and she dies in the belief that she has gone straight to heaven.

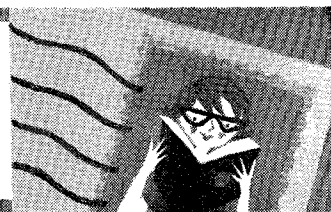
Donoso, it is clear, takes a dark view of the human condition, and yet the book does not succeed in giving the reader a tragic sense of life. This is in part because the author relies so heavily on direct analysis of psychological states. The portrayal of Don Andrés, in particular, is close to a case history of regression. Despite the fact that the author has studied in America and teaches English literature, he seems to be under the influence of the French psychological novel.

In part, however, he is quite successful. Misiá Elisa in her bad mood is the incarnation of malice. The affair of Mario and Estela has its idyllic moments, though they are brief. The old servants provide an effective sort of chorus, and one can only be amused by their high jinks at the end.

The translation, by Jocasta Goodwin, is adequate, I would guess, or perhaps better than that. The only difficulty lies in the attempts to translate what I suppose to be the Chilean Spanish vernacular into the American English vernacular: the tough guys just don't sound right. —GRANVILLE HICKS.



LETTERS TO THE Book Review Editor



Twin Demurs

ALLOW ME TWO SHORT REMARKS to Robert J. Clements's informative report in *THE EUROPEAN LITERARY SCENE* [SR, Jan. 30]. If the reader is informed about Dr. Oppenheimer's objection to the "scenic report" (not "drama," as Mr. Clements says) in *Sachen J. Robert Oppenheimer* by Heinar Kipphardt, it seems only fair to quote also from the author's statement at the end of his work, qualified by him as "a literary text, not a document. However, the author feels himself expressly bound by the facts which result from the documents and reports on the subject matter."

My second point is Mr. Clements's statement that the anthology of opinion *Summa iniuria . . .* was "just published by Rowohlt." Actually, the first 60,000 copies of this paperback were published as early as September 1963, only seven months after Hochhuth's *The Deputy*.

WOLF FRANCK.

New York, N.Y.

ROBERT J. CLEMENTS's column, *THE EUROPEAN LITERARY SCENE*, is interesting; why not make it a weekly feature? Or at least, every other week?

WILLIAM H. ARCHER.

Athens, Tenn.

Experience of Deity

THE PARALLEL BETWEEN "religious cognition" and the perception of the physical world, introduced by John Hick in his review of *The Existence of God*, by W. I. Matson [SR, Feb. 6], is itself suggestive of the real problem: the physical world is public, the claimed experience of deity private. Mr. Hick, as so many other modern theologians, seems too ready to limit theism to what goes on in the individual's skull. It is not surprising, then, that theological arguments begin to look "irrelevant." But if the theist is going to claim that when he speaks of God he is talking about the public universe, then he must come up with more than reports of his own feelings. Mr. Matson's point, to my mind, is that what the theist has come up with is simply not enough. If it is now pointed out that theological arguments are more or less irrelevant, then so much the worse for theism.

C. GONZALEZ.

Berkeley, Calif.

MR. HICK IS UNABLE to see that his own ideas are also defunct.

. . . Modern atheism is consistent with wonder at the world, with a sense of "contingency," and with all the noble sentiments that are ever harbored within the human breast. It maintains that statements that affirm or deny the existence of an "unseen presence," with which no connection is in principle possible, are cognitively meaningless. Religious feelings are still emotively

significant, and always will be, but theistic presuppositions based on "faith" are inadequate for the state of affairs characterizing the twentieth century.

The genesis of belief in a higher being can be explained on the basis of infantile experience. The work of Piaget in the language and thought of children shows what order of "rationality" can be attached to theistic utterances.

GERALD GROSS.

Kenmore, N.Y.

MR. HICK SEEMS TO BELIEVE that a subjective awareness of God is in some strange way a substitute for rational proof of God's existence. He even claims that his approach is empirical, and yet all that Mr. Hick establishes empirically is the existence of faith in God.

ARTHUR N. GILBERT.

Denver, Colo.

MR. HICK REFERS TO HIS GROUP as apologists but I have yet to meet a single atheist who needs apologia as an argument. Every atheist I have known has been tolerant, not just patronizing toward the theist. Unlike the theists, the atheists are not evangelists. Where atheism is a part of the political structure, a different picture prevails, of course. But then, isn't that true also of those places where State and Church are one?

A. KOPPELMAN.

Miami Beach, Fla.

No Rebuff

I MUST RESPECTFULLY OBJECT to the statement of Carl Hermann Voss in his review of Cardinal Bea's *Unity in Freedom: Reflections on the Human Family* [SR, Feb. 6] that the conclusion of the third session of Vatican Council II last November saw several of Cardinal Bea's views rebuffed by Pope Paul VI. On the contrary, I am quite certain that the Pope and Cardinal Bea see eye to eye on more issues than Mr. Voss realizes. Firstly, with regard to the Religious Liberty schema, Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., would appear to agree that Pope Paul could really hardly have cleared up the whole matter by merely permitting the Council Fathers to vote on this schema. The issue was more complex than a last-minute scramble with the monkey wrench by the Roman Curia, and involved a cleavage between the liberals themselves.

RICHARD WERKHEISER.

Flint, Mich.

Wrong Handle

IN THE FIRST PARAGRAPH of my quarterly poetry round-up [SR, Feb. 13], Cleanth Brooks is referred to as Van Wyck Brooks. The *Van Wyck* was not a part of my review.

ROBERT D. SPECTOR.

Brooklyn, N.Y.

An Unforeseen Development On Mount Parnassus

(or, *The Laurel Wreaths Are Cut Down to Size*)

SOMETHING just short of revolutionary took place recently when the Poetry Society of America awarded its Dante Prize for 1965 to Miss Barbara Overmyer and Mr. Paul Roche, who will share the grant of \$3,500. What's so remarkable about this? The combined ages of the two winners (sixty-five years) equal the usual age of one. Perhaps this is why the Poetry Society was so generous: by dividing the age of an old poet it could afford to endow two young ones.

Actually, as these fringe benefits go, sixty-five is not really old for a modern versifier. John Masefield was recently given a \$7,000 award from the National Book League in England. He is eighty-six. "I am still writing and hope to be able to write better some day," he told bookmen. (Masefield's twenty-sixth volume of verse, *Old Raiger*, has just been published.) Old soldiers fade away, headmasters lose their faculties, but poets go right on getting prizes.

Once a writer gets through the romantic crisis of youth, there is something about the air on Mount Parnassus that prolongs life. Poets don't die young, although there was a time when they did. Chatterton took arsenic at eighteen; Keats, as we know, died of tuberculosis at twenty-five; and Shelley drowned at thirty. Byron lived on to thirty-six, finally succumbing to a fever. Modern psychotherapy, goof balls, isoniazid, and streptomycin have changed all this. The disturbed psyche is calmed, the fevered brow made cool. A general lack of adventurousness among literary men reduces the chance of accidental death. In the process the poet himself sometimes vanishes, although the man lives on. The late Dylan Thomas was an exception, of course, but we must remember that he was not one to pay attention to doctors.

The trouble began with Wordsworth, who insisted on living to eighty, exemplifying La Rochefoucauld's dictum that old men give good advice because they are no longer able to set a bad example. In crowning the bald pate with laurel wreaths we render homage to the advice, when, alas, it is the examples that usually make the bard. Hence the delay.

There is really not much to do with an elderly poet except to honor him.

But things are improving. The eight "leading contenders" for the National Book Award in poetry for 1965 averaged out at 45.6 years. (The oldest, Ben Belitt, was fifty-four; Galway Kinnell, the youngest, a mere thirty-eight.) Two years ago, NBA winners over the previous fourteen years averaged out to fifty-four years of age. At that time I did a little homework on poets and prizes, and came up with results that should reassure the actuaries of all the life insurance companies in the land. For example, to win the Bollingen Prize your chances increase as you pass sixty. The American Academy of Arts and Letters does even better by our senior citizens. The average age of all Academy fellows in poetry at the time of their appointment has been not quite seventy-two years. Edgar Lee Masters got his \$5,000 fellowship at seventy-seven, and Edwin Markham at eighty-five—thirty-eight years after he had written "The Man with the Hoe."

ONE explanation for this is that the scrolls which accompany prizes usually refer to "distinguished service," as though the recipient were being tendered a farewell dinner after fifty years with a large corporation. It is as a functionary of letters that the poet is rewarded, although hardly as such that he is remembered.

The awards accumulate in geometric ratio to the square of the man. Ezra Pound, who isn't very square, is virtually unscrolled (things don't look too good for Ferlinghetti or Ginsburg, either). Robert Frost, on the other hand, could hardly keep up with all the dinners he was compelled to attend in order to claim his share of the plaques, medals, and outright cash. This is not to deny Frost's greatness. It is to question the



apparatus—more accurately, the politics of prize-giving—by which honor is bestowed only after it is safe to do so.

Thus Frost died with seventeen major awards in his trophy room, including four Pulitzers. Archibald MacLeish, who got a later start, has won eleven to date; Marianne Moore follows with ten, and Carl Sandburg with nine. ("It's his banjo playing that has mitigated against Carl," one officer of a well-known literary society maintains. "Most poetry dinners just don't want to be turned into a hootenanny.")

The private survey I conducted two years ago turned up another fact: if you take any group of respectable, moderately well-known poets and put them on prize committees, sooner or later they will give the prizes to each other. The NBA poetry juries, for example, have skipped their own members only three times in fourteen years. They aren't, of course, so blatant as to give awards to themselves at the time they are serving. By no means. A decent lapse of three or four years is indicated. In this respect, too, things are improving: none of the three 1965 judges has won the award previously, although there is a better than even chance that this year's winner will soon become a judge.

The charmed circle, when one starts to square it, intersects nearly all the official prize-giving bodies in the field: The National Institute of Arts and Letters, The Poetry Society of America, the Pulitzer Prize Committee, the Academy of American Poets, the Bollingen, and so on. There is certainly nothing venal about this, and one cannot even claim that there is anything like an Establishment, let alone a conspiracy. What does exist is a happy convenience of peers. There is a limited number of practicing poets to begin with, and an even smaller number who are willing to take on the chores (usually unpaid) of sorting out the contenders. These are the ones who end up on juries. Can they be blamed for rewarding each other? Besides, there's always the chance that the work they choose really *is* good poetry.

Do prizes help to sell books of verse? This is like asking, "When did you stop beating your wife?" With a few spectacular exceptions, poetry does not "sell" at all. It is usually bought by other poets. A book of verse is a publisher's votive offering to his conscience; it looks good in the catalogue and helps justify the trash he puts out to stay in business. Prizes take the curse off the situation—or at least try to. They give poetry a status denied it by the general public. What we propose are more awards for the young and unrepentant. A crown of thorns will do—something to remind the poet how barbarous the rewards of his profession can be as he gets older.

—DAVID DEMPSEY.