

# Between Rebels and Rightists

***The Unfinished Experiment: Democracy in the Dominican Republic***, by Juan Bosch (Praeger. 239 pp. \$5.95), ***Dominican Diary***, by Tad Szulc (Delacorte. 306 pp. \$6), and ***Santo Domingo: Revolt of the Damned***, by Dan Kurzman (Putnam. 310 pp. \$5.95), agree that U.S. intervention in the recent revolution "frustrated the will of the majority." Hal Lavine covered the Cuban revolution for *Newsweek*.

By HAL LAVINE

AMERICAN foreign policy has frequently been criticized as too little, too late. But when the revolt broke out in the Dominican Army against the government of Donald Reid Cabral on April 24, the Johnson Administration reacted almost instantly and with overwhelming force. In a matter of hours the aircraft carrier *Boxer*, with 1,500 Marines aboard, had moved into Dominican waters to prepare to evacuate the Americans and other foreigners in Santo Domingo, if necessary. Less than four days later 405 Marines were ashore. Soon after, the Dominican capital was swarming with Marines and paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne, 22,000 men in all. They had orders that would have baffled any soldier: not to join in the fighting between the rebels and the forces of the military junta that had taken over the government from "Donny" Reid, but to stop it, while U.S. diplomats negotiated a settlement.

The Administration reacted without quite knowing what really was happening. Only the day before the revolt U.S. Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., had left Santo Domingo to visit his mother in Georgia and then consult with State Department officials in Washington. Eleven of the thirteen members of the Military Assistance Advisory Group had gone to Panamá for a conference. The U.S. Embassy's naval attaché was dove hunting in the Cibao Valley. In charge of the Embassy was William Connnett, Jr., who had been in the Dominican Republic for less than six months.

Possibly the outcome would have been different if these officials had been in Santo Domingo when the revolt broke out. Probably, however, it would have been precisely the same. For the specter that haunts the White House—the spec-

ter that haunted Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy and now haunts Lyndon B. Johnson—is that of "another Cuba." The rebels were demanding the return to power of the Dominican Republic's exiled former President, Juan Bosch; however, in the State Department Bosch was considered "soft on Communism," if decidedly not a Communist himself. Moreover, the rebels had distributed arms to anyone who asked for them; obviously, some of the civilians fighting with the rebels must have been Communists, since they would have been among the first to ask. On this basis—and very little, if anything, else—the Embassy was reporting that Bosch's return would inevitably lead to extremism or even Communism "in six months." The Johnson Administration's reaction was nearly as predictable as nightfall.

Now, seven months later, U.S. troops are still in Santo Domingo. They have imposed an uneasy peace on the country, a peace broken night after night by gunfire. They have imposed a caretaker government headed by a decent and highly respected man named Hector García-Godoy, who is supported almost solely by the U.S. troops. When President Johnson will find it possible to recall them nobody, including Mr. Johnson, can even begin to guess.

WAS U.S. intervention a case of too much, too soon? Tad Szulc and Dan Kurzman, who covered the fighting, one for *The New York Times*, the other for *The Washington Post*, clearly think so. And so, naturally, does Bosch, whose book does not deal with the revolt that was made in his name but with the events that led to his ouster by the military. Bosch not only denies that he was "soft on Communism"; he goes further: he accuses his conservative opponents, the members of the National Civic Union who supported his ouster, of being the real "softies." He says his own party, the Party of the Dominican Revolution, was clean of Communists, while the Civic Union was full of them.

What he asserts is a half-truth (the Communists had infiltrated both groups), but it's a half-truth the State Department some day should ponder. For all their denunciations of Communists, Dominican right-wingers have long pampered them. Realizing how much the possibility of "another Cuba" frightens the United States Government they consider the Communists a valuable

asset. After the Organization of American States had voted sanctions against him, the late Rafael Trujillo Molina actually imported Dominican Communists from Cuba; by creating a "Communist menace," El Benefactor hoped to frighten the U.S. into pressuring the OAS to lift its sanctions. Following Trujillo's assassination, his son, Ramfis, continued his policy. The U.S. urged him to expel the Communists, and he did expel several, but the others he permitted to "escape."

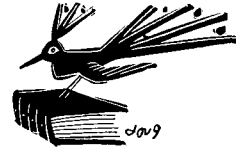
As Bill D. Moyers, the President's press secretary, recently made clear, Mr. Johnson was and still is annoyed by the dispatches that Szulc and Kurzman sent from Santo Domingo. The fact is that both reporters are quite temperate in their criticisms of U.S. intervention. They do not believe the Johnson Administration made a good case for its contention that Communists dominated the rebel forces and that, if the rebels won, the Communists would take over the Dominican Republic. On the other hand, they do not rule out the possibility of the Communists' eventually coming to power as a result of the revolution. They are aware of the dilemma Mr. Johnson faced, and they sympathize with him.

What they say, in effect, is that he should have taken a chance. If the rebels had won and if Bosch had returned, the result might not have been the disaster the Embassy predicted; there might merely have been an ineffectual government, leftist but still democratic. (Bosch, despite his protests, was an ineffectual President; and even the State Department will admit he is a democrat.)

The Dominicans were once intensely pro-American. I can remember the day when Ramfis Trujillo left the country and his uncles Hector and Arismendi attempted to seize the government from the then President Joaquin Balaguer. U.S. warships appeared on the horizon to warn them off, and Santo Domingans crowded the waterfront shouting: "*Viva las imperialistas!*" No one is cheering the *imperialistas* now, because, as Szulc, Kurzman, and (of course) Bosch agree, the vast majority of the Dominican people supported the rebels when they called for the return of Bosch. By preventing him from assuming power the United States frustrated the will of the majority. As Tad Szulc says:

... in the first days of the revolution the United States Embassy lost, perhaps out of prejudice, a great chance to become aligned with a popular democratic movement while using the leverage that the U.S. would then possess to root out the Communist influences. Instead, I believe, we closed all the democratic options to the rebels and placed the Communists in the role of being the only "friends" of Dominican democracy.

# A Sporting Occupation



**Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America**, by Richard D. Altick (Knopf, 438 pp. \$8.95), traces the development of writing about writers from moralizing hagiography to modern iconoclasm. Louis Untermeyer's latest book is "Bygones."

By LOUIS UNTERMAYER

WRITING a literary biography is, in a double sense, a sport. It has no prescribed form; it is something between an art and a science, an alternation (and, when it succeeds, a combination) of fact-gathering and gossip, journalism and conjecture, legend and literature. Biographies of the great are, as Philip Guedalla said about history, not merely written but rewritten. Concealment is a virtue in one generation, a repressed vice in the next. The once cherished convention of reticence is challenged by a desire for serious scrutiny, and traditional privacy is invaded by the historian's need—and the reader's demand—for complete candor. Reputations rise and fall as unpredictably as tomorrow's hemlines.

No one has traced the erratic course of literary biography better than, if as well as, Richard D. Altick, whose *The Scholar Adventurers* was an engrossing account of forgeries and literary concoctions. He divides his *Lives and Letters* into three parts: a short preliminary flourish, "The Beginnings," and two major sections, "From Boswell to Strachey" and "The Modern Age." He gives 1598 as the date of the first literary biography in the English language, a haphazard and wholly supposititious "life" of Geoffrey Chaucer. There had been other writings that purported to be "lives" of saints and kings. But they were, at best, a primitive sort of biography, ecclesiastical and royal glorifications without humanizing particularities. "Haloes and homely details did not go well together," says Altick, "nor did crowns and crotchets." Until the middle of the nineteenth century the chief purpose of a biography was to point a moral, to instruct and uplift. Only recently has the relation between the creative person and his product been thought worthy of a biography. In the not-so-distant past the artist was a worker, a craftsman employed by the church or a private patron—"the

poet was a mouthpiece, not an originator"—and the worker did not merit study as an individual whose emotions and experiences had some claim to attention.

It was eighteenth-century Grub Street with its pickers and stealers and snappers-up of unconsidered trifles that brought about the vogue for biography, and it was Richard Curll who capitalized on it. Curll, profiting by the never-sated appetite for scandal and the more flavorful sins, paid little attention to the well-placed worthies, and saw to it that his hacks turned up enough lurid details for him to churn out full-length biographies of roués, gamblers, slave-traders, reformed prostitutes, mercenaries, actors and actresses—narratives compounded of one part fact and three parts fiction. Altick goes on to show how fiction returned the compliment as many of the novels of the period reflected the growing taste for biography. He cites such titles as *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*; *The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great*; *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*; *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Which brings him inevitably and not too abruptly to Johnson and Boswell.

Despite his admirers' disclaimers, Johnson thought of literary biography as a means of moralizing. His partisanship—or salesmanship—and prejudice are apparent in his praise of such placid nonentities as Edmund Smith ("his contrivances were adroit and magnificent, his sentiments majestic"), Wentworth Dillon ("the only correct writer in verse before Addison"), and John Denham ("deservedly considered one of the fathers of English poetry"), and in his sneering condemnation of Milton, the troublesome nonconformist. Johnson was unquestionably a master of the rapid thrust and the keen disposal, a constant if controversial stimulator, but Boswell was a greater biographer. Boswell's unsparing frankness made his *Life of Johnson* a sensation in his day and a joy in ours. Replying to the critics who complained that Boswell had dwelt too much on Johnson's less monumental side, Altick says that they were objecting to Boswell's insistence "on the revealing, private detail rather than what tradition considered the proper concern of biography, the great and memorable act. . . . Boswell chose to make Johnson come alive. . . . His raw material was the in-

dividually minute data of the senses—sharply observed particulars of personal appearance, dress, conduct, peculiarities of speech, locale. From these thousands upon thousands of small details, carefully arranged on the broadest canvas a biographer had ever commanded, Boswell produced a vivid portrait—or whole set of portraits—which makes the *Life of Johnson* a masterpiece."

The field that Altick tries to cover is so wide that, in the midst of it, he sometimes runs out of breath. He wobbles a bit in "The Uses of Biography," a diffuse and rather dull chapter, and wanders haphazardly in "Poet and Public." In his catch-all of real-life narratives, he scoops up anecdotes of the *Tristram Shandy* craze, David Garrick's Grand Jubilee, the never-realized jubilees of Milton and Addison, and sidelights on the thriving Shakespeare industry. Altick retells the story of the mulberry tree supposedly planted by Shakespeare and how it was cut down and converted into an "inexhaustible stock of small boxes, goblets, toothpick cases, and other mementos. Although the more reflective tourists who bought them must have found it wonderful that the old tree had so much wood in it, a more powerful impulse overruled their skepticism: a desire to feel a little close to an author whom they venerated."

Most of the time, Altick steers his course adroitly down the meandering mainstream of English biography. It is an enlivening journey. He quotes a few happy quips by the unabashed John Aubrey (although he omits the more lubricious ones), reveals how often a man's life conditions the critic's estimate of his work (see Gilchrist on Blake, Eliot on Milton, etc.), and shows how the craving for topping the statues from their pedestals led to the popularity of Lytton Strachey, whose mischievous style matched his iconoclastic spirit. Nor does the author neglect to pay his non-adulating but sincere respects to Van Wyck Brooks, Newton Arvin, Leon Edel, Peter Quennell, Mark Schorer, Richard Ellmann, and other contemporary biographers.

A book as big as this in scope as well as in size is likely to blur, but Altick brings most of its significance into sharp focus. He piques our interest and satisfies the Peeping Tom in everyone. The best biographies are books which are not for the historian rechecking data or the researcher sniffing out errors, but books of intimate glimpses and unsuspected pleasure for the browser. *Lives and Letters* is such a book.