

recently have been men running from job, wife, and children to a supposed "discovery of their true selves." To my mind, at least, they've wound up more confused than self-discovered.

And what do you mean, anyway, when you talk of "modern culture"? Television? Movies? People? A man is a man and he lives as he must—but he lives in a dream world if he thinks that life is made up of corrupt officialdom fighting for the soul of innocent man. Life is flesh-and-blood people, and the battle is waged in the heart of man himself. . . .

The goal of any intelligent man is to live his life in as productive, satisfying, and meaningful a way as he can arrange it. To say that the "successful" man lives an empty life, and to imply that the "misfit" lives a fuller one, is false reasoning: failure, by its very nature, can never be a positive good. Agreed, the man who is completely happy in today's world, with its injustice and hypocrisy, is not deep enough to be worthy of respect; but the misfit you call admirable is not disciplined enough to be worthy of it either. . . .

I am not saying that "every day in every way we're getting better and better." I am saying that while there is evil in this world, there is also good . . . and that these values, good and evil, do exist. . . .

ELLEN LEVINE.

Riverdale, N.Y.

I DIDN'T SAY that "the misfits of today's fiction are admirable because modern culture isn't worth adjusting to." I said that most serious novelists today find misfits more interesting than the well-adjusted, and that this is a significant commentary on our culture.

Not many misfits in contemporary fiction make whoopee on a beach. The misfits I have in mind are such characters as Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths, O'Neill's Edmund Tyrone, Hemingway's Frederick Henry, Bellow's Moses Herzog, Malamud's Si Levin, Morris's Gordon Boyd, Baldwin's Rufus Scott, Updike's Rabbit Engstrom, and so forth and so on.

The misfit in contemporary fiction is a phenomenon that no amount of well-intentioned exhortation can dispose of.

GRANVILLE HICKS.

Grafton, N.Y.

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I GREATLY APPRECIATE your lists of recommended books, and would often like to order one or more. You seem to assume that all your readers . . . can easily find the addresses of publishers. Unfortunately, many of us live out of reach of this information, and the publisher's name is insufficient information to send in an order. . . .

MRS. EDGAR WERTHEIM.

Seal Beach, Calif.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Most public libraries have copies of *Literary Market Place*, which contains the addresses of publishers. Many, however, prefer that readers order books through their local bookstores or those in nearby towns. Booksellers in the United States and Canada are listed by state and city in *The American Book Trade Directory*—also available in libraries.

## A Free Man with a Free Mind

**Kennedy**, by Theodore C. Sorensen (Harper & Row, 783 pp. \$10), draws upon the idea man's eleven-year, "dawn to exhaustion" association with JFK for its delineation of the late President. Biographer and historian Margaret L. Coit, a member of the faculty of Fairleigh Dickinson University, became acquainted with Mr. Kennedy in 1952.

By MARGARET L. COIT

ONE OF the lost hopes of John F. Kennedy was to write his memoirs of his years in office. He was aware that his would not be the final word, that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., for instance, "would be writing a solid book." Yet, as his aide of eleven years, Theodore Sorensen, points out: "Few American Presidents who made so much history possessed his sense of history." No honor more delighted him than his Pulitzer Prize; nothing angered him more than the unfounded charge that *Profiles in Courage* was ghost-written.

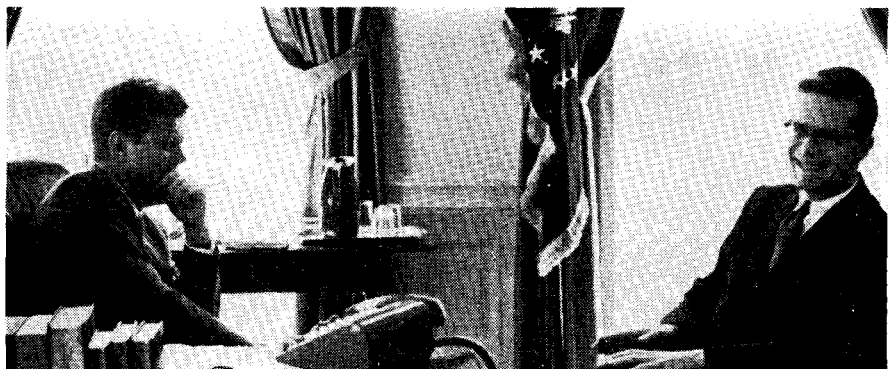
Only he could have given us a full understanding of the trials of being a President in the Atomic Age, or of the loneliness that not even the most devoted of wives or dedicated of brothers could share. Always, he realized he was President, not only of the living, but of those yet unborn; he saw politics as the noblest of professions, and truly believed that "one man can make a difference." During his Presidential years, he was preparing for his book, turning data over to Sorensen with the admonition: "I just wanted to make sure you got that down

for the book we're going to write." And Sorensen would reply: "the book you're going to write, Mr. President."

This, Sorensen admits, is his substitute for that other book, tragically lost in the greater tragedy. It is a worthy substitute—sound, solid, honest. Sorensen does not interpret; he does not psychoanalyze. He presents the facts, as lodged in his memory and stacked in his files. The book is low-key, understated, like its subject; during Sorensen's years as chief idea-man and speech writer the Kennedy style truly became "our style."

Like the speeches, the drama of the book is in the events themselves, not in their presentation. The accounts of the Cuban missile and Big Steel confrontations are spine-tingling, although the edge has been taken off by magazine serialization. Sorensen scorns to travel ground already well-trodden; for him the tragedy at Dallas was not "how his death happened" but what it stopped, how "the world had suddenly changed."

LIKE his Chief, Sorensen grinds no axes; the book is warm with his and Kennedy's admiration for the team and the Cabinet, "a Ministry of Talent"; for Dean Rusk ("at no time did the President regret having selected him") and for Lyndon B. Johnson, who really wanted to be on the ticket with Kennedy—but in a different position! Sorensen gives a fair picture of Nixon, whom he sees as "much more able and likable" than generally thought. He is unstinted in his praise for Robert Kennedy. Sorensen pictures Kennedy's fascination with de Gaulle, both for the General's role in the past and his concept of the future. He also shows us the President's meas-



—Ollie Atkins (Saturday Evening Post).

JFK and Theodore C. Sorensen—"the Kennedy style became 'our style.'"

ure of the shrewd and tough Khrushchev, the former pitting his own determination against the Russian leader's belligerency. However, although Sorensen had access to the intriguing Kennedy-Khrushchev correspondence, out of deference to future high-level communications he does not quote the earthy Russian leader.

While it is patently unfair to contrast a book in totality with magazine condensations, this can be said: Sorensen's version of events differs from other accounts, not so much in detail as in emphasis. It is to be doubted that Kennedy would really have set up any alternative, but Sorensen frankly admits that the President was "discouraged with the State Department." He is equally candid about other matters: Kennedy's overstressed relationship with his father, his years of ill health and pain, his siege on crutches in the White House in 1961. Occasionally the book sags under the weight of its detail. And though it also suffers somewhat from Sorensen's decision not to name names of participants in policy discussions, taken in all, it is a reservoir of facts for future biographers and historians.

Sorensen never, however, presumes that he or anyone else knew "all the thoughts" of so elusive and complex a man as Jack Kennedy. Superficially, he would seem to have been the last to have penetrated the Presidential reserve, so wide was the gap between the two men—one a graduate of Harvard, the other of the University of Nebraska; one a Catholic, the other Unitarian; one the son of a multimillionaire conservative Democrat, the other of a Midwestern liberal Republican. Yet, we have the

guileless assertion of Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln that Sorensen was "like a younger brother," and, second only to Robert Kennedy, "there was no one the President trusted more."

Sorensen learned from Kennedy and grew with him, played touch football with him, watched him and Jacqueline walking hand in hand during respites from the Cuban crisis, knew his surface irritability and "infinite patience." (Only once is Kennedy shown as angered at an individual: "He cursed himself for ever believing [Ross] Barnett.") Between Kennedy and Sorensen there were "few secrets and no illusions." Their affinity was a matter of temperament; both were objective, restrained. Above all, Sorensen's eleven-year "dawn-to-exhaustion" association with Kennedy gives him a vantage point over all other biographers, so far. He had a unique opportunity to evaluate what seemed to be JFK's greatest quality: his capacity for growth.

**SORENSEN**, for instance, describes him as "the oldest kind of liberal, the free man with the free mind," free of myth and prejudice and fear. He was committed; "he cared deeply and personally about education, human rights, better health, cleaner cities and greater dignity for the aged." His cool mind was matched to a warm heart, but he scorned to display his feelings by dramatics and ranting, and thus was frequently dismissed as uncommitted and cold. He saw Negroes as people and voters, no different from others; he hated no one and tried to root hatred out of public life. But his rationality only made the hate groups angrier, something that explains the antipathy he evoked in the

South, for nothing is more irritating than someone keeping his head when everyone else is losing theirs.

To Sorensen, courage was the keynote of Kennedy's entire public life. He has a vignette of the young Senator waiting, crutches in one hand and a speech of censure in the other, when suddenly the issue of Joseph McCarthy was sent back into committee and Kennedy into a hospital. When the final vote was called, Kennedy was at death's door, and the responsibility for recording him or not recording him on the censure vote fell to Sorensen. "But I had been trained in the discipline of due process and civil liberties. An absent juror, who had not been present for the trial or even heard the indictment (which in this case was amended in the course of debate), should not have his predetermined position recorded. In all conscience I could not ask the Secretary of the Senate to pair or record Kennedy for censure."

As a campaigner, Kennedy defended the Catholic Church in Texas, and civil rights in Mississippi; later he admitted, "This issue could cost me the election, but we are not turning back." As President, he refused to accept Eisenhower's assurances that the military structure was adequate, and that if you could win a big war, you could surely win a little one. Fighting a two-front battle with Congress and the Pentagon, he narrowed the missile gap, ordered training for guerrilla warfare, and double-checked civilian control, command, and communications.

**REALIZING** that no one could "win" a nuclear war and that massive retaliation was "no longer credible," Kennedy sought new solutions, and ways of living with problems without solutions. With Congress mathematically stacked against him, he learned to by-pass it, to do by Executive Order what Congress denied him. World affairs challenged his greatest talents, and here most of his best work had to be done in secret. His climactic moment came at the end of the Cuban confrontation: JFK entered the Cabinet Room, and all instinctively stood up. He had earned his place in history.

To Sorensen, Kennedy was "an extraordinary man, an extraordinary politician, and an extraordinary President," who may well loom even larger in the long perspective of history. He had helped bring about a new era in race relations, in Soviet relations, in space, and in the concept of federal aid for education. He had reached for the moon. More important than the Kennedy "style" was the tone he gave his era, the atmosphere for the later and more dramatic achievements of the Great Society. "History," writes Sorensen, "will remember John Kennedy for what he started as well as for what he completed."



# In Love with the Renaissance

*Conversations with Berenson, by Umberto Morra, translated from the Italian by Florence Hammond (Houghton Mifflin. 305 pp. \$5.95), credits the Renaissance art historian with political and social attitudes that are at odds with his previous expressions. Arthur Darack is book and art editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer.*

By ARTHUR DARACK

THE LEADING Renaissance art scholar of the early part of our century, Bernard Berenson has been the subject of a flood of books ever since he was discovered alive in his hideout from the Nazis near the famous Florentine villa, *I Tatti*. Surely, he is worth studying. Yet how much weight should be attached to this book of conversations with him? How much of it is Berenson; how much Umberto Morra—even though the latter's credentials are certified by Berenson:

Morra, working with his pincers the way one does to pull the last little piece of meat from the claw of a lobster, has by now extracted from us all the information possible about our entire life, and must now know it down to the least detail, as we know it ourselves.

Nevertheless, Morra's book is not quite Berenson. The root attitudes and ideas, their contradictions and paradoxes, his familiar prejudices and persuasions, and something of the man's scope are here—in part. But one questions certain of the political and social postures compared with Berenson's own writing, for example in his wartime diary.

The key to Berenson was his worship of the art of the Italian Renaissance; he believed in its masterpieces as holy writ. "If we are honest and clear-sighted, we have to admit that there is no comment one can make on the new products of the day. Likewise one can never be sure of the 'duration' of the work of art, except at a definite and fairly considerable distance. . . ." That distance he reckoned as the time between us and the Renaissance. In his own books Berenson is best when he is describing individual painters and their works. He stressed "tactile values" in painting and, of course, is famous for his "attributions"—the au-

thenticating of doubtful works, the denial of earlier attributions. He made a fortune at it, working for the Gardner collections, and later for Duveen.

Sometimes Morra reports an illuminating description of an artist: "Goya is a rapid, nervous draftsman, but he is not a great draftsman. He is an artist riddled with Mannerism. . . . He is not a realist but a brutalist; he has no more contact with reality than his emulators, except to the extent that he violates it."

Morra ascribes to Berenson the fashionable anti-American attitude of the times: Americans are barbarians because we did not have a Renaissance. Trained in the traditions of Pater (for attitude), Winckelmann and Burckhardt (for method), Berenson had, as a boy of ten, been brought to this country from the Lithuanian Jewish "pale." At Harvard he was a brilliant student, as interested in literature and music as in painting and languages. There is something inexpressibly comic about his assertion that New England's "terrible climate" will not support civilization; the air up there does not permit Boston to breathe. Berenson overcame this atmospheric handicap admirably.

Berenson was noted for his wit in conversation. Morra quotes, among others, this epigram: "Boast is always a cry of despair, except when in the young it is a cry of hope." Sometimes he sounds like an early Dwight Macdonald excoriating popular culture: "I predict an age of deformed and vulgar esthetic. . . ." He talks about some of the great men whom he knew. Proust he describes as ". . . dirty, untidy, with a voice like a peacock—a bad imitation of Montesquieu. His conversations were like his letters, interminable explanations of why he could not stay longer, or could not be

seen more often (walking back and forth in Place Vendôme). He was eaten alive by snobbery."

Morra pictures Berenson as talking often about philosophy, which he disdained, and about politics, in which he was a royalist: he went about holding his nose at most of the history of our century. Indeed, much of the book is taken up with politics, but Morra saddles Berenson with attitudes that do not wholly ring true, considering Berenson's own expressions elsewhere. He seems here, for example, to prefer the Fascists and the Nazis to Soviet Russia. While he was by no means in sympathy with Communism, Berenson detested the Fascists and Nazis, and regarded the USSR with the perspective of the historian. In this book he thinks it will take Russia several centuries to meet his approval, and it is unlikely that American culture will develop more rapidly.

Suppose these are Berenson's real views? Perhaps our century should be put in a kind of historical ghetto, sealed off and contained. Our age has contributed the worst scientific mark against humanity, the nuclear bomb, and the worst moral blot, Hitler's murder factories and murder squads. But if he believed that, Berenson surely was wrong in crediting the Renaissance with moral superiority. It had every intention to do what Hitler, Stalin, and modern technology achieved. It merely lacked technology.

Containment is a poor solution to anything. It implies that your opponent is not good enough to associate with you; and tensions, hates, and fears are the only possible reactions in an argument in which agreement seems difficult and remote. Berenson seems to think that the centuries following the Renaissance were not good enough to associate with him. In this he will be proven false; his works will continue to be read (though he complains elsewhere that his books on the Italian painters are now ignored), and all the reminiscences, letters, diaries, biographies, and conversations in which he figures will cause him to associate with us whether he would like it or not.

Bernard Berenson: "I predict an age of deformed and vulgar esthetic . . ."

—Pix.

