

its faults. Djilas's mind is teeming with ideas and he puts them down as they come forth; on the printed page one can "see" him thinking, trying out thoughts to test their validity. The torrent of his discourse flows on, sometimes brilliantly, sometimes romantically, but always with deep emotion and sincerity. This undoubtedly accounts for the fact that on page 15, for example, we read, "History does not choose the easy way," one of Djilas's many aphorisms; on page 21, however, "History favors the bold and the wise. It also seeks the line of least resistance." Again, we read on page 290-291: "In regarding evil and the struggle against it as absolutes, as long, at least, as men are men, Njegoš departed from the Church." On page 293: "Njegoš's evil is not absolute, neither cosmic nor

earthly evil." But such lapses are really unimportant in this powerful book.

Professor Petrovich is to be congratulated on his very readable translation. Moreover, his introduction is extremely helpful for the reader who may know little or nothing about Montenegro, Njegoš, or Djilas. His comparison of the two writers is illuminating. Especially is Professor Petrovich to be complimented on the bibliography that he has gathered of works that Djilas must at some time have used. It was a formidable task requiring both learning and judgment, and Professor Petrovich has acquitted himself admirably.

In sum, this book is an event for those in the English-speaking world who believe that Yugoslav literature and literary figures should be better known.

"an extraordinary example of the effects of a bad education."

The bad education was largely in the realm of the emotions. His father sat in judgment at home as he did on the bench; and, between religious and paternal wrath, the spirited boy had little choice. He found it politic to be constantly ill. As he matured, a benign tutor and two college friends (oddly enough, one was named Johnston and the other's middle name was Johnson) gave him the confidence to substitute rebellion for illness. At first it took forms of flight: he wished to go to America; he sought to join the Guards; and above all he committed the religio-political sin of flirting with Catholicism. The dissolute Lord Eglinton resolved these issues. Pottle tells us that he "rescued Boswell from religious error by making him a libertine."

The accepted modern opinion has been that Boswell was engaged in a lifelong "search for a father," and that Johnson's mixture of curmudgeonry and affection supplied the want. But Boswell's relation to authority was in reality complex. We can discern his cycles of rebellion, his ever-present feeling of guilt, and his sense, from earliest childhood, of his worthlessness. This led to a great deal of self-surveillance with constant relapses into self-indulgence, and various modes of self-punishment. Mr. Pottle argues that Boswell's recklessly acquired venereal infections may have been one way of imposing suffering for his fleshly sins. They also provided for long periods of abstinence and a feeling of virtue. Another way may have been Boswell's constant attendance at executions. If these gave him terrible nightmares, they ministered to the cruelty in his nature and his guilt. He always imagined himself the condemned man.

He found relief from these deep-seated emotional troubles in the writing of diaries and journals. He could lecture himself as if he were his father; he could vent his spleen; he could confess—to himself as well as to the world. His condensed notations would be banal enough save that suddenly there is the flash of insight, the shock of personal recognition. "Desperate. This day, *Easter*, rouse. Be Johnson." Then he consoles himself: "You've done no harm. Be *retenu*." And suddenly: "What am I?" What indeed? This last might have been spoken by a character in Kafka. When he forced himself on Rousseau or Voltaire or Paoli, or when he knelt for Johnson's blessing, he seems to have been piecing together a personality for himself out of the lives of the illustrious. The biography of Johnson in the end would be also the biography of Boswell.

Parallel with his excesses in theaters, the streets and the foul alleys of London, we have Boswell's earnest—but in reality

## Biographer's Borrowed Personality

**James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740-1769**, by Frederick A. Pottle (McGraw-Hill. 606 pp. \$12.50), draws on unpublished material to provide new insight into the paradoxical character of Johnson's friend. Books by the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Leon Edel include *"Literary Biography"* and *"Henry James."*

By LEON EDEL

THE FIRST volume of Frederick A. Pottle's long-awaited life of James Boswell takes us from his birth in 1740 to his marriage twenty-nine years later. As might be expected from the chief editor of Yale's massive Boswell archive, Professor Pottle's work is substantial and authoritative; he tells his story with ease and lucidity, the fruit of a long saturation in the copious yield of Fettercairn and Malahide. By now the details of Boswell's compulsive haunting of brothels and his pursuit of the great are well known; and Mr. Pottle has addressed himself, as a biographer should, to the character and the personality. We thus gain insight into the riddle propounded long ago by Macaulay: How was it possible for this eighteenth-century rake and buffoon to make a progress to the high places of literature? How could Boswell the busybody have written the *Life of Samuel Johnson*?

If this view was Victorian, and was cogently answered by Carlyle, it is still a good psychological question. Mr. Pottle enables us to look at the paradox freshly, and with many refinements of detail. He begins his book with a hitherto unpublished autobiographical sketch

by Boswell written for Rousseau—a confession by the young, boisterous Scot to the master-confessor of the century. In it Boswell, aged twenty-four, describes how as a boy he suffered from the wrathful God of Calvinism and the effects of a mother "extremely kind but too anxious." He blames her for frightening him too early with "the eternity of punishment." But what he omits is his fear of his stern father, the Laird of Auchinleck. Indeed, Boswell speaks of his father as "worthy" and as "one of the ablest and worthiest men in the world"; he thereby withholds from Rousseau the truth of his chronic quarrels with his parent. "You will see in me," he adds,



Boswell—"precursor of press-agentry."

half-hearted—quest for a wife. The celebrated courtship of the bluestocking Belle de Zuylen is told here in scattered detail and invites comparison with Geoffrey Scott's delicate irony and fine economy in his celebrated *Portrait of Zélide*. Boswell always adeptly sabotaged his own wooings. No "lover" could have been clumsier and more unfeeling—doubtless because his gallantries masked a contempt for women. He was nearly always ready to buy the cheapest kind of love, even when he had kindly, maternal mistresses. When he finally married, it was in haste and to a first cousin. He unbachelored himself, it seems, more in anger than in love, and as if to match his father's remarriage.

The Boswell of this first volume is certainly not the hero Mr. Pottle wishes to make of him. At twenty-nine he has won a show of fame with his book on Corsica; but he has written appalling verse (on which too many pages are wasted) and emerges more as a precursor of press-agentry and public relations than of biographical literature. In a long aside Mr. Pottle argues that Boswell is the peer in "imaginative power" of Scott and Dickens, and that "imaginative biography is not a lower thing than fiction, but is actually better." He thereby sets up an unnecessary competition between two distinct and honorable forms of literary art.

I think what readers may question, or be confused by, are Mr. Pottle's excessive intrusions into the story he is telling. Thus when he informs us he has "no evidence at all" on a given point, he nevertheless must fill the gap with an "I shall choose to believe," etc. Biographers would be a happy lot indeed if such choices were really open to them. Also his comments are often subjective: he "winces" at Boswell's showing his bad verses to Voltaire and "sighs" when he sees Boswell "slipping into bed again with Mrs. Dodds."

The narrative strategy of the volume accordingly suffers. Mr. Pottle at one stage tells us that he has "misrepresented the swirling incongruous existential variety of Boswell's consciousness by isolating one narrative pattern and carrying it forward without reference to other events." In effect, he seems to be apologizing for making his story coherent instead of discursive. There is a distinct contradiction between this and his admirable account of Boswell's method, that is, the way in which the journal-keeper "experimented and discarded until his infallible sense of tune picked up the precise unifying notes." It is always by the unifying notes that a biography becomes a work of art.

But with all this, it is a great pleasure to have this fine book, and by the man who knows more about Boswell than anyone else in the world.

## In Love with Louis XIV

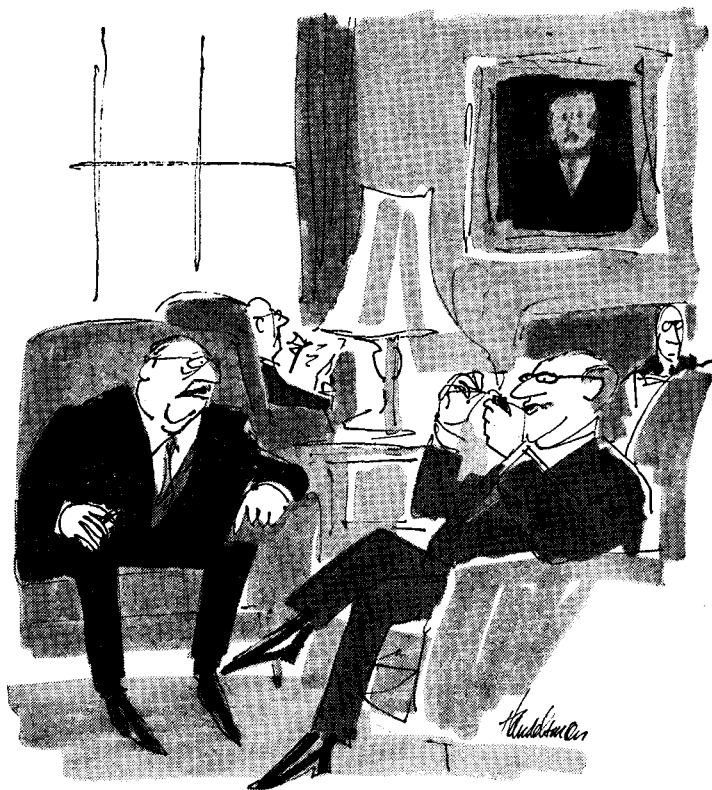
*The Uncompromising Heart*, by Françoise Mallet-Joris, translated from the French by Patrick O'Brian (Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 274 pp. \$5.50), recounts the life of Marie Mancini, niece of Cardinal Mazarin and, briefly, mistress of Louis XIV. J. H. Plumb of Christ's College, Cambridge, wrote "Italian Renaissance" and "Men and Centuries."

By J. H. PLUMB

THE WORLD of fiction seems to be in strange torment and indecision: certainly in no branch of literature are the contrasts now so vivid. Truman Capote's nonfiction novel, in which the novelist becomes contemporary historian, is perhaps one of the most remarkable *tours de force* of our time. And now we have a distinguished French novelist also deserting, or seeming to, the trade of fiction to become historian. But the difference between *In Cold Blood* and *The Uncompromising Heart* is far greater than that between Milton and Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

Truth should be a novelist's pursuit as much as the historian's; but if a novelist becomes a historian, then he or she must use the established methods and techniques by which historians measure truth. I have no idea what qualities mark Françoise Mallet-Joris's fiction, but her history is mawkish, rhetorical, and false. She gives next to no references (four or five in the entire book), no sources apart from the *Memoirs* of Marie Mancini, the subject of this *soi-disant* biography.

Marie Mancini, the niece of Cardinal Mazarin, was one of the many pawns on that wily statesman's diplomatic chessboard. She briefly attracted Louis XIV's attention, possibly swept him a little way towards romantic love (at least she liked to believe so), but was finally dispatched from the Court. Later she married the Constable Colonna, loved him, bore two sons, quarreled tempestuously with him, and went her own high-handed way, only to land in further trouble. She was one of those high-spirited, imperious creatures who could have made excellent female bandits. But she haunts Mme. Mallet-Joris's imagination as some Hollywood film star



"But what happens if we take a licking in the marketplace of ideas?"