

public in this country, although the critics gave respectful notices to his novel *The Demons* (1956).

Doderer's new book, his seventh novel and the second to be published in English, affords American readers another opportunity to become acquainted with his work. Like Musil, Doderer gives a panorama of antebellum Austria; but unlike Musil he does not lapse into philosophical essays designed to illuminate the metaphysical significance of it all. For Doderer, a smell, a sound, a view out of a train window are more important than elaborate analyses or even recorded historical events. In fact, in one of his theoretical pronouncements on the novel he states as his goal the "description of that which happens in spite of history." His detractors respond by accusing him of high-level gossip-mongering.

In *The Waterfalls of Slunj* Doderer traces the fortunes of the Claytons, an English industrial family that sets up a subsidiary concern in Vienna. Clayton, father and son, quickly take root in Austria and achieve a position of social and economic prominence. With infinite love of detail Doderer evokes the world in which they move; he pays as much attention to the prices and models of cars and the shapes of teacups as to the architectural background of the imperial city. The scenes in Vienna are reconstructed with the care usually reserved for ancient civilizations. We are told how high-school examinations were modified over a period of twenty years, and how many marks a student needed to live comfortably. The London chapters, by comparison, are less well realized, even though Doderer traveled there in order to gather material.

The marginal characters, from the sons of the *haute bourgeoisie* to the charming prostitutes Finy and Feverl, reflect the social spectrum of the capital and, on occasion, compel more attention than the principals. In the company of Frau Wewerka, "the bulbous troglodyte with a dislocated hip . . . equipped with the sensitive antennae of a crab," Donald, the junior Clayton, seems pale and impotent, and there is poetic justice in the fact that he is upstaged in business and in love by the upstart Chwostik.

A novelist in the grand manner, Doderer intertwines the fates of his characters in a most sovereign fashion, pushing some to sudden prominence for a few pages and then dismissing them "with a hearty kick in the behind." Avoiding all overt symbolism, he nevertheless manages to enmesh them in a web of connections held together by seeming accidents. Thus Donald Clayton finds his death at the waterfalls of Slunj, near which he was conceived on the wedding trip of his parents. Chwostik, by the same alchemy of events, picks up a pros-

titute who takes him to the bedroom in which he was born. The logic of these concatenations is not readily apparent, but Doderer leaves no doubt that such coincidences form the matrix of life. In one brilliant scene a student suddenly remembers that in class he sits next to the son of a woman who had seduced him. Doderer muses: "He might have gone on to reflect that they had both passed across the same secret threshold, although at very different times in their lives and in opposite directions . . . It is in the nature of life that we never give a thought to many an obvious and undeniable phenomenon."

The Waterfalls of Slunj is so superbly translated that the English version is more pleasant to read than Doderer's German with its mannerisms and its Austrian idiosyncracies. The publishers, however, could have made it easier for the reader of this challenging and engrossing novel if they had admitted that it is the first volume of a projected tetralogy dealing with the period between about 1880 and 1960. Though the present work is in itself complete, the author's intentions are not really made clear. Obviously, Doderer is not aiming merely to recapitulate a chapter in the history of Vienna. Given his Balzacian vigor, he may well be writing a human comedy, played in Austrian garb.

The Darkness Ahead

Waiting for Winter, by John O'Hara (Random House. 466 pp. \$5.95), collects twenty-one short stories mainly preoccupied with nostalgia, aging, and death. David McDowell is a New York editor and critic.

By DAVID McDOWELL

JOHN O'HARA is probably the most underrated of American writers. Not only is his talent a major one; he has in addition those extremely rare qualities, creative energy and fecundity. Talent isn't particularly hard to come by these days, but such a steady and almost startling productivity most certainly is.

O'Hara, now in his sixty-first year, has published some thirty-odd books, beginning with *Appointment in Samarra* in 1934, and they include at least five major novels. He has also written in the neighborhood of a thousand short stories. Since few writers in any language have worked so hard in that medium, this present collection of twenty-one new stories offers an occasion to speculate a little on O'Hara's accomplishments in it. This is by no means easy. In fact, it is

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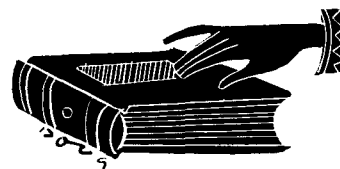
exceedingly hard to pinpoint why one O'Hara story fails and another succeeds. Somewhat the same difficulty is encountered in Chekhov's stories. For a long time I had chalked that up to my being somehow occasionally out of phase with an inscrutable Russian sensibility, but my experiences in rereading O'Hara these past few years have led me to conclude that the cases are similar and that nothing mystical is involved.

The curious thing is that the stories of both writers are so clear, so well made, and, if you like, so professional that they defy any plotting on an esthetic graph. They simply succeed or they don't, for each individual reader—and few readers are in agreement about any except the very, very best.

Waiting for Winter has perhaps less range than other O'Hara collections. The title is apt, as O'Hara suggests at the end of his "Author's Note." This is a dark book, full of nostalgia, aging, the end of hope, and death. In tone it is almost completely retrospective and pessimistic. There is no romance in these stories, and even where there is sex or marriage, the specter of infidelity is always in the background whether it materializes or not. And there is no wit or humor at all. O'Hara seems to look upon the process of growing old with as little enthusiasm as Yeats, and with the same compulsion to write about it.

These stories are more uneven, too, than those in the other O'Hara collections I have read. Some end so abruptly that I suspect O'Hara could no longer bear to dwell on such "downward paths to wisdom." For example, "Andrea," a long and beautifully worked out story about a twenty-year relationship between a man and woman, is marred by the absence of any specific motive for the woman's apparent suicide. In "The Pomeranian" O'Hara also develops a wonderful story only to fail to come to terms with it at the end.

But these are minor quarrels. Most writers would be happy with the kind of success O'Hara achieves in "Flight," "The General," "The Portly Gentleman," and "The Way to Majorca." In stories like these we see a completely independent writer plowing his own furrow, and in his "Gibbsville, Pa." populating a countryside as original and as recognizable as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Surely it is the fault of the literary critics that such creative accomplishments are so often patronized as being out of the mainstream of American letters.



SR/December 17, 1966



A Boston Premiere for "Moses and Aron"

BOSTON.
IT WAS a Bostonian who, when asked "Why go to the moon?" replied "Because it is there." Some similar spirit of steely eyed determination might have animated the Opera Company of Boston to give the first American performance of Arnold Schoenberg's thirty-five-year-old *Moses and Aron* in what was once the Loew's State and is now the Back Bay Theater. Relative to ordinary opera, its style is lunar-like in remoteness; relative to even an ill-equipped opera house, the Back Bay's launching pad is but primitive. That Sarah Caldwell, director of the production as well as of the company, managed to convey some idea of how it all goes together was—as has been said in another lyric circumstance—"greatly to her credit."

Indeed, in a work which probes dialectically back and forth from the word to the miracle and the miracle to the word (Schoenberg never composed his projected Act III, so the issue remains unresolved), the real miracle was Miss Caldwell's accomplishment in making room for the large chorus to get on and off and take an active, positive part in the conflicts between the brothers. Her most apt thought was to order into existence a lateral front platform running the width of the theater where the rail separating orchestra from audience would normally be. This permitted circulation all around the stage as well as drawing the audience closer into what action there is in the two acts. She also plotted well in building connections from the front boxes of the old movie house down to the stage, thus making possible a small likeness to the pageantry practiced at the Radio City Music Hall.

All this was mothered by the necessity arising from a "stage" which is but thirty feet from footlights to rear wall and was cramped even for the close contacts of the "virgins" and their lovers in the scene of the Golden Calf. Aside from a well gilded bovine (which fell apart nicely when Moses commanded), and a large symbol of a prior faith (which toppled impressively in Act I), the two acts were played against but a suggestion of scenery (by Oliver Smith). Rather it was the sight of the two hundred or more choristers, actors, and supers, ranged in groups on the stage or positioned on ramps running high up into the wings, which comprised a kind of living curtain before which Moses and Aron, identically clad in blue robes and

white beards, carried on their struggle for ideological supremacy.

Indeed, with Donald Gramm (Moses) and Richard Lewis (Aron) as the "opposite" twins, the visual aspect of the evening came off rather better than the aural. This, again, derived largely from the directness and imagination of Miss Caldwell's conception, in which practically all the "effects" demanded in Schoenberg's script—the rod and the serpent, the leprous hand and the well, the waters of the Nile and the blood, the slaughterous orgies of Act II—were pantomimed. After awhile one did not particularly care, for this device became merely one more instance of unreality in addition to all the others in the work.

Most sizable of these was Schoenberg's serious whimsy in calling this work an opera rather than an oratorio on a sacred-secular theme. Moses himself produces a sustained vocal line only once in the two acts, and then briefly; Aron's part is written in *sprechstimme*, a form of half-sung, half-spoken declamation; and the orchestra goes through the whole proceedings with those brief, disjointed, formally related but audibly non-secutive interjections that delight the analysts and bore the public. Even the dance before the Golden Calf which, in some circumstances, can make a lively likeness of intellectualized frenzy, did not achieve such an outcome this time. Possibly because the excellent orchestra of Boston Symphony personnel was so blocked off by the construction before and behind it, the quantity of sound it produced under Osbourne McConathy was rather dead and distant.

Perhaps the most interesting discovery from this adventure into the relatively unknown (there has been, for years, a recording available of a German radio performance) is that it no longer sounds very adventurous, or even perplexing. Since Schoenberg laid the score aside in 1931, after bringing it more or less to the point where it stands today, composers have moved on to sound combinations much more tenuous, skeletonized, and arbitrary than his. Thus one may listen not only with an open mind but also with open ears and conclude that the whole intellectual apparatus is weighted down by commitment to a style which takes it no place, least of all into the emotions of the onlooker-listener. There were, of course, bravos at the end, but one wonders how many of them bespoke an enthusiasm to hear it again—ever.

In terms of an ultimate performance—say, the one Schoenberg imagined in his mind—this one fell short in several respects unrelated to the lack of scenery or other visual resources. Principal among them was the decision to perform the work in English rather than German. This conferred some modest advantage in intelligibility on the solo performers (the choral English, as is almost always the case, was mostly a syllabic hash), but it destroyed the pattern of alliteration to which the composer attached so much importance. As Allen Forte points out in one of his penetrating commentaries on the subject, it is present from Moses's opening "Einziger, Ewiger Allgegenwärtiger" (hardly matched by "Only one, infinite, thou omnipresent one") to his final "O Wort, du Wort, das mir fehlt" ("O Word, thou Word, that I lack!"). It was Forte's own translation, with some small alterations for singing convenience, that was utilized.

However, even should such an ultimate performance be organized somewhere, somehow, it could scarcely affect profoundly, let alone reverse, the canon of values embodied in *Moses and Aron*. Undertaken shortly after *Wozzeck* was first performed, it lacks, from the outset, the factor that has drawn more and more audiences into Berg's somewhat similar orbit—identification with the personal woe of a recognizable human. There is, indeed, much more drama in Schoenberg the man, with his dauntless pursuit of an ideal, his devotion to principle, his conviction that he was unlocking secrets of art that would endure for decades, than in the work he did under the spell of his visions.

There was, while it remained unproduced, a lingering possibility that *Moses and Aron* would be the work to make much else about Schoenberg's theorizing "come right." Now that it has been put on, this possibility is, for me at least, foreclosed. What held the attention was, for the most part, the nonmusical elements of the whole—the resourceful scheme of Miss Caldwell's production, the animation generated by the masses of choristers (mostly young, a majority from the New England Conservatory and local choral societies), the wriggling abandon of some of Claude Kipnis's choreography. But these are hardly the stuff from which enduring interest—the life force of operatic vitality—derives.

BACK at home, the season's first matinee broadcast from the Metropolitan of Puccini's *Turandot* confirmed what the opening night's transmission of *Antony and Cleopatra* had suggested—that the new pickup for these far flung enterprises is vastly superior to the old. A by-product of the new Metropolitan's much more live sound projection, it gave it

(Continued on page 64)