

with his grandparents in Vermont. When he arrives, Wendall is a difficult child, contrary, malicious, precocious, skilled in discomforting his elders. In the course of a year he learns to play games, to stand up and fight, to say his prayers, to love his grandfather, and, in short, to be and to behave like a normal American boy.

If the summary suggests that the novel is a little bit on the corny side, I'm afraid it's fair enough. There are other themes besides the metamorphosis of Wendall: there is an uncle, John T., who is frustrated because a physical handicap has kept him out of the war and because his girl is obstinately virginal; there is an aunt whose husband, killed in the war, is not the father of her child; there is the grandfather, the good Doctor Oler, with his nagging wife; and there is a mysterious stranger, who of course turns out to be so-and-so. But the story of Wendall is central, and, alas, it is not convincing. It is difficult to believe in him as a bad boy and impossible to accept him as a good one.

The Sterile Cuckoo was no masterpiece, but it was fresh and honest, and, though there were juvenile touches, I felt in it an essential maturity. I wonder how *The Wizard of Loneliness* happens to be so inferior. Some of the elements seem to be so close to slickness and so appealing to the tender-minded that one might suspect Nichols of trying to fabricate a best-seller, but I somehow doubt it. Surely everyone is entitled to at least one mistake. —GRANVILLE HICKS.

**FRASER YOUNG'S
LITERARY CRYPT No. 1177**

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1177 will be found in the next issue.

KX KZ S WCKLNKWAR BC OFPSL

LSXFGR XB OSXR XOBZR IOBP

JBF OSYR KLUFGR.

—XSNKXFZ

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1176

When you have got an elephant by the hind leg, and he is trying to run away, it's best to let him run.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

LETTERS TO THE Book Review Editor



No Outsiders to Our Times

I HAVE READ NOTHING by Louis Auchincloss, but Granville Hicks's review of *The Embezzler* [Feb. 5] strikes me as an unfair piece of criticism. If Auchincloss lacks James's "insight" and "stylistic subtlety," Mr. Hicks does not prove it by citing examples from the novel itself. . . .

Why is it necessary to show the influence of Proust, Joyce, and Kafka, as Mr. Hicks seems to assume? If he favors experimentation, wouldn't it be truly experimental now to depart from these high priests? I am fond of all three, but I see no reason for every author to imitate them.

Insight into human folly and grandeur, the presentation of a world that has some meaning and order, characters that come alive, a tightly constructed plot, the spinning of a good yarn—couldn't these be accomplished with any level of society and with any form? The issue here is really an author's skill, not his choice of subject or form. Mr. Hicks has based his review on the assumption that "Whatever is, is right." Ethnic or lower-class subjects and experimental styles are the order of the day; Auchincloss has given us neither; therefore his book is uninteresting. Such seems to be the groundwork for this review. Please, if Auchincloss is not a master of his craft, let us have an analysis of the reasons for his failure, a critique based on the faults of the book itself, not on a critic's personal preferences in style and subject. And spare us implications that one kind of character is better or "belongs more truly to our times" than another.

JOAN W. TELLER.

Chicago, Ill.

BULLY FOR HEMINGWAY, Bellow, Malamud, and O'Connor. But there are other writers writing about different topics. Mr. Hicks's whining is reminiscent of the complaints of the Thirties against nonproletarian literature. Louis Auchincloss has chosen his field and deserves to be judged within it, not because of it. Mr. Hicks would be a much more enjoyable reviewer if he would review. In the Feb. 5 issue, he failed to do so.

ROBERT B. MERKIN.

Washington, D.C.

Safe in Repose

AFTER READING John Warner's review of *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile*, by Ralph Nader [SR, Jan. 5], I had some thoughts contrary to those of the author. . . . Mr. Nader's allegation that most accidents are caused by a deterioration in the quality of motor cars may to a certain extent be true, but is mostly heresy [sic]. A car is not inherently dangerous while in repose at curbside. But it most certainly can become a lethal weapon when a human being slips

behind the steering column. . . . If Mr. Nader wants a lower accident rate, why doesn't he push for more stringent driving tests and periodic re-examinations of current license-holders?

JAMES F. FREDA.

Washington, D.C.

Equally Honored

MAY I SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT? Sterling North, in his review of my *Days of Henry Thoreau* [SR, Jan. 15], seems to find some special significance in the fact that Martin Luther King's name appears before Edwin Way Teale's name on my dedication page. He overlooked the fact that the names were carefully placed in alphabetical order—which is, I believe, the standard way to indicate equality in any list of names. I did not in any way intend to derogate either man. It was my intention to honor them equally.

WALTER HARDING.

Genesco, N.Y.

STERLING NORTH'S LIGHT DISMISSAL of Thoreau prompts me to cite a modern-day classic in the implications of civil disobedience: the Nuremberg trials. The heroes to emerge out of the Third Reich were not those who obeyed authority but those who defied it. The trials have reiterated, if you please, Thoreau's contention that a man is first a man and a subject afterward. Thus, however undramatic the circumstances surrounding Thoreau's imprisonment, his meditations on the matter seem to bear a quality of timelessness. No one has been able to settle, for all of us, the matter of ultimate authority. . . .

MYRTLE LOCKEN.

Sheridan, Wyo.

Inadequate Response

THANK YOU FOR REVIEWING *Beyond the Cold War*, by Marshall D. Shulman [SR, Jan. 22]. I have long believed that sheer anti-Communism "is not an adequate response to the total situation in which we live." Our obsession with anti-Communism has become a substitution for foreign policy and it reveals a basic misunderstanding of the forces at work in our world.

WALTER T. DURHAM.

Gallatin, Tenn.

Six-Sixths Read

I DID SO finish reading *The Magus* before I reviewed it [SR, Jan. 15] and categorically deny Howard A. Burton's statement [LETTERS TO THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR, Feb. 5] that I didn't. My review said that I read five-sixths of the book with enjoyment, implying clearly (I thought) that I read the final hundred pages without any.

NICHOLAS SAMSTAG.

New York, N.Y.

European Literary Scene

Max Frisch is not the only European dramatist who is busily and successfully revising his plays. Jean Giono has also been hard at it. Most Americans know Giono not for his theater, of course, but for his novels, evocative as garlic, on peasant life in Provence, which Fernandel and Raimu brought to the screen. The Sarah Bernhardt Theater now has a hit in a revised Giono play, *La Calèche* (*The Carriage*). The first version was played at the Vieux-Colombier during the postwar period when Giono had just come blinking out of six months in prison for his *Vichysme*. The critics then were less than enthusiastic.

Set in Milan during the Napoleonic occupation of Northern Italy, *La Calèche* displays the intriguing and heroic defiance of an Italian patriot, including his involvement of a diva from La Scala in partisan activity. The lady slowly evolves from a collaboratorist and mistress of a French hussar into a latterday Judith, twice enduring prison (as did Giono himself) and confronting death along with the Carbonari, who were resolved to free Italy from both French and Austrians. We are a long way from the peasants of *Regain* (*Harvest*) and *Colline* (*Hillside*), with their idealism and stoic faith. Yet idealism and faith are here, too, even though the old pacifist who refused to be conscripted against Hitler now seems to approve of political activism.

Considering this play and Giono's earlier *Hussar on the Roof*, most critics are speaking again of a Stendhalian Giono. Yet it seems to me that this play about the Resistance hero and the soprano from La Scala derives less from Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* than from Sardou's (later, Puccini's) *La Tosca*.

As the year started, *der Bestseller* in Germany was not one of the new indictments of the cruelties of Hitler or Nazism, which would at first glance seem to have taken over the theater. It is a novel by Peter Bamm, based on another would-be world conqueror, Alexander the Great, and it is outselling respectively such notorious prose as Adenauer's *Memoirs*, the controversial *Life with Picasso*, which has done equally well here, and Bellow's *Herzog*. In *Alexander, or the World in Transformation* (Droemer, Zurich) Bamm claims to probe for fuller meaning, applicable to the present, in the fabulous life and achieve-

ments of the Macedonian king. If the critics unanimously object that his recreation of the ancient monarch lacks the color of those by Klaus Mann or Maurice Druon, they are embarrassed at having to explain the hunger of the public for an epic about a power-mad autocrat, even one given a patina of humanitarianism.

It is hard to decide whether the book's subject or its inherent inadequacy is responsible for their irritation that this bit of *Trivialliteratur* should grace the top of the list.

I cannot seem to throw away an announcement that the scholars of the Gorki Institute of World Literature in Moscow have embarked on a ten-volume history of world literature. It is a bit of intelligence fraught with significance. I do not mean, of course, that this will be the definitive universal history of literature among the several which have come out of Europe during the past two or three decades. Certain types of writing will obviously receive short shrift. The announcement does not hide the fact that a one-sided, even polemic, purpose is to be served: "Modern man, heir to the great cultural achievements, must understand that world literary history is the chronicle of the intense struggle of humanistic thinking against reactionary, stagnant forces and tendencies . . . The best writers were always connected with the socio-liberation and humanistic strivings of mankind." One foresees that Stalin Prize-winners will get much more

space than will Nobel Prize-winners.

No, the significance of this project is contained in the stipulation that full attention will be devoted to "literatures not pertaining to the West European tradition." This is a sensitive point on which the Russians are more alert than we, and is specifically the strength of the program of the Gorki Institute, a type of research center nonexistent in America. In Asia, North Africa, and Europe last year I heard frequent mention of the Gorki Institute, a cultural clearing house which is at the same time a triumph of diplomacy and propaganda. For it interests itself in the literatures of all the world, including the Afro-Asian, organizing courses and lectures, translating, and publishing.

Whatever one may think of the Soviet view of literature as an exclusively sociopolitical phenomenon, this attitude was old in the West even before it inspired the *Aeneid*. The Russians, moreover, are entirely right in recognizing that national pride is to some extent underpinned by a nation's literary achievements. A fraction of the millions we have spent so hopefully in Indonesia, for example, might have brought in a greater and more lasting harvest of friendship and respect from 100,000,000 people had we used it for a program of translation, publication, and publicizing of the works of Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, Amir Hamzah, Armijn Pane, and other talents working in the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. We may be sure that the Gorki Institute is making such authors available in Russian.

Even divested of its psychological or propagandistic value, an American Institute of World Literature would make sense in the world's most internationally committed nation. For the cost of a week's warfare we could establish such a center. Several existing agencies in the United States could coordinate their



"Put me back the way I was."