

drunk. Rosetta, Nicholas's sister and housekeeper, is a hard, unloving woman, just interested in her brother's comfort and her own security.

Only Iris, the Negro maid, takes any interest in the lonely boy or the pet cats who are his sole companions. But when Gilbert precipitates crisis not even Iris, with all her good will, can answer Hooker's inchoate questions; nor is there any help, he finds, in the bewildering adult world outside. "In all houses, all families, was it true that no one really loved?" Hooker wonders near the end. It is no surprise that his final act seems like ultimate sanity.

*The Last of the Crazy People* is not light summer reading. But it says something important, and says it with both craftsmanship and compassion.



**Pseudo-Poet and -Man:** Readers, like lovers, demand continual returns for their loyalty and affection. And when the loved one disappoints . . . This is not fair, especially to writers, but it is, I think, true and inevitable. Thus, *Cabot Wright Begins* disappointed James Purdy's readers because it lacked the imagination of *Malcolm* and the intensity of *The Nephew*. His *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$5.95) is no less disappointing.

The homosexual pseudo-poet Eustace Chisholm is supposed to unify and give meaning to the varieties of love Purdy deals with. But, as in *Cabot Wright Begins*, these loves are at once too various—Eustace with his wife, Carla, and Clayton Harms; Daniel Haws with Maureen O'Dell, Captain Stadger, and Amos Ratcliffe; Amos with his mother, Reuben Masterson, and Reuben's gardener; Reuben with his grandmother and Maureen—and not varied enough. Moreover, Eustace is an inadequate reference point, too like the other major characters to be strikingly objective, insufficiently involved with them to be significantly subjective. The most interesting story, Daniel's fatal inability to accept and express his love for Amos, is obscured. The end is gripping, but comes too late to redeem the novel.

I'm not sure what could have redeemed it. Too much is gratuitous; many details are irrelevant—Clayton, who quickly vanishes, sells electric signs; Maureen's abortion is shockingly described to no purpose; social chaos (depression, impending war) never materializes as background, much less as the controlling metaphor it might have been. The book might have been saved by the qualities Purdy is admired for: sharp contrasts, jolting ironies, colliding contradictions, all of which can furnish the focus and definition that this story lacks. In short, Purdy fails to surprise. The

grotesqueries do not tease or tantalize; they are mechanical and predictable.

We open each new novel hoping to come face to face with something commensurate to our capacity for wonder. We rarely do. But in *Malcolm* and *The Nephew* Purdy did communicate that rare experience—in *Malcolm*, wonder at the bizarre; in *The Nephew*, wonder at the banal. And where we have once found it we want and expect it again and again, fair or not. In *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*, as in *Cabot Wright Begins*, there are the bizarre and the banal, but no wonder.

—BARRY GROSS.



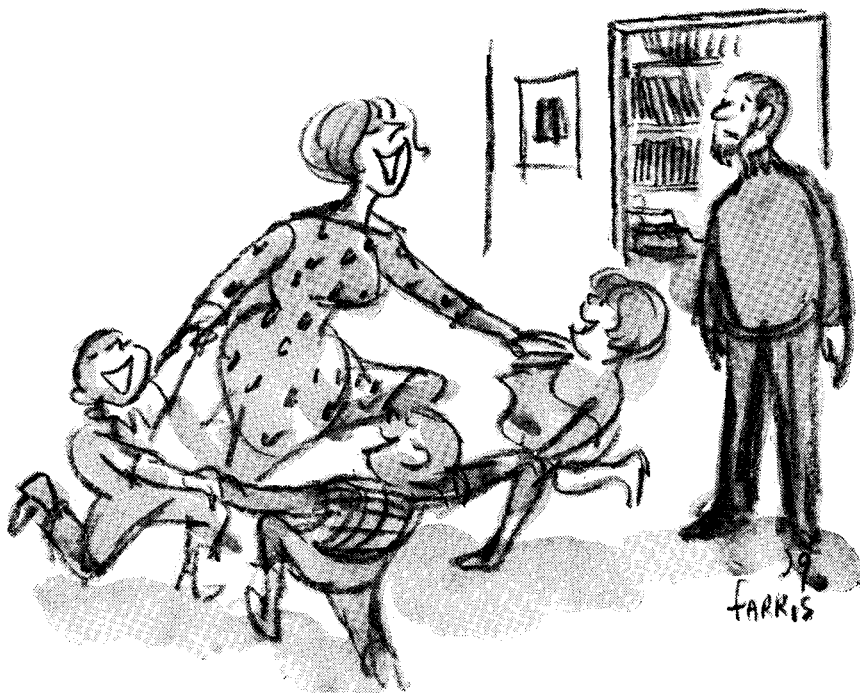
**The Uses of Invisibility:** Whether as perceivers or perceived, most of us are grateful indeed for small visibilities, given the old shadow-box to shadow-box lines of communication which we seem to be stuck with much of the time—another melancholy heritage of the Fall, no doubt. Well, exactly the reverse situation is the peg on which Maude Hutchins hangs her latest fictional frolic: Clarissa, the child-narrator of *The Unbelievers Downstairs* (Morrow, \$3.95), latches on to invisibility as a means of asserting her very assertable personality. A wildly precocious and pixilated moppet, Clarissa decides that she's not orphaned, as everyone believes, but simply the invisible offspring of invisible parents, and so proceeds to behave accordingly, slithering in and out of rooms backwards and silently merging with walls when spoken to.

The laissez-faire atmosphere of her

grandparents' household, where she lives, is well suited to do-it-yourself invisibility, though it might make a rationally inclined square feel a bit edgy. Besides the grandparents, who spend a lot of time downstairs sitting around the living room, there's "Auntie" upstairs, who's beautiful and takes goofballs; insouciant Uncle Willie, who tangles with the law because of overvisibility in public; a handsome doctor whose appointed rounds bring him to Auntie late in the night, and a couple of servants who pop about like an addled Greek chorus. When the goofball lady goofs off completely one day, Clarissa—temporarily seeable—has difficulty convincing the Unbelievers that Auntie's supposed death is only a side-effect of having learned how to become invisible, and therefore not permanent.

Nor is anything permanent in this semi-demi-fantasy, and an attempt at analytic dissection could only result in both the tale and the dissector becoming totally invisible. The main point is that Mrs. Hutchins—whose novels baffle, bemuse, or bewitch according to the reader's temperament—is riding her broomstick high as a conjurer of the comic, making wide-eyed sport of sex, having light fun with voyeurism, and beating psychiatry over the head with a featherduster, all of it acted out in a raffish Never-Never Land by elvish creatures disguised as Real People. What happens amuses momentarily by its extravagant impudence, but the cream of the jest is the back-of-the-hand slap at solemnity, the refuge of the nonserious. An accomplished caper.

—PATRICIA MACMANUS.



"Daddy's going to make some money, Daddy's going to write a potboiler!"

# Behind Asia's Headlines

***The New Face of Buddha: Buddhism and Political Power in Southeast Asia*, by Jerrold Schecter (Coward-McCann. 277 pp. \$6.95), depicts the ideological backdrop against which Asia's travails are unfolding. Lionel Landry is executive director of The Asia Society.**

By LIONEL LANDRY

A BRILLIANT chronicle of the great swells and currents behind the headline events in Asia, *The New Face of Buddha* is a responsible study of the personalities and principles of Asia's Buddhist world, their dynamic interplay, and the political triumphs and catastrophes that have taken place in the name of Buddhism.

This is a journalist's book, and the youthful author, who is *Time-Life* Tokyo Bureau chief, makes no other claim. Inevitably, it is more than reporting, for the history of men and the history of ideas must provide the setting for the turmoil in Asia today. Jerrold Schecter, in fact, writes on an almost philosophical level, as when he concludes: "In most cases, in attempting to become part of the modern political process in Asia, Buddhism has failed."

This verdict is based largely on the author's experiences in South Vietnam, where the intensity of the Buddhist effort to dominate politics went unper-

ceived by all but the most knowing of Americans. Only when living Buddhists turned themselves into funeral pyres did a shocked and nauseated American public begin to focus on the critical aspects of Buddhist life in Asia.

What are Buddhists? What do they believe? What are the implications for our future in Asia of the political activities of devout Buddhists like Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk, Thailand's Thanat Khoman, Burma's U Nu, South Vietnam's Trich Thi Quong? What is Buddhism like in Communist China? In Ceylon? In Japan's Soka Gakkai? How will Buddhist values mold, in all those countries, decisions of the utmost importance to the American interest?

Schecter answers such questions with perception, understanding, and skill. His chapter on the Buddha and the nature of Buddhism is the best short introduction to the subject in recent years. The cornerstone of his book, an essay on the interaction among Buddhism, nationalism, and Communism in Asia, is a masterful setting forth of the highly ideological backdrop against which Asia's travails are unfolding.

Vivid descriptions of Asia's Buddhist leaders abound. A sober and honest portrayal of Prince Sihanouk, for instance, depicts this brilliant ruler as far more than the willful buffoon portrayed by American newspapers. Sihanouk emerges as a deft strategist, a dedicated patriot, a far-sighted and energetic leader tragically underestimated and

misunderstood by our first diplomats at his court and by a smart-alecky American press.

Schecter examines the religious motives of other political leaders in Asia, Communist and non-Communist, their attempts to mobilize Buddhist societies, and, especially, the significance of these efforts to the future of the Far East. His commentary is richly detailed, always interesting, and supremely relevant to the contemporary American.

*The New Face of Buddha* is written on three levels. It is at its best in its scrutiny of today's Asia and today's Asians. Here the intelligent journalist makes an important contribution to a more enlightened American attitude. The book is slightly weaker on historical background, and perhaps least effective as the statement of a philosophical thesis and its demonstration.

In the chapter on Burma one must note, for instance, that the extraordinary Buddhist culture centered in the ancient capitals of Pagan, Ava, and Amarapura is not mentioned.

Burma in 1954, Schecter says, was the only parliamentary democracy in Southeast Asia; but Indonesia was also a parliamentary democracy at the time, and the Philippines had all the forms of a functioning republic. The nineteenth-century deterioration of Buddhist discipline in Burma he attributes, quoting Donald Eugene Smith, to changing political, economic, and social conditions. The British colonial government, however, was instrumental in this, denying to the principal abbots of Lower Burma the right to police their own *sangha*, or body of monks, and this on the pretext that conferring such authority would constitute colonial "interference" with local religious practice. (This reviewer, who was pleased to read an early version of the Burma chapter, wishes he might have seen a later one and, possibly, been more helpful on these and other details of Burmese history.) One has a feeling that facts are sometimes forced into a frame of reference imposed by the author's experiences in Vietnam; events in the Buddhist life of Ceylon or Burma or Tibet might have changed his viewpoint.

A more basic weakness is the author's personifying of Buddhism and his conferring upon it the traits and attributes of a living character in a cosmic drama. The cultural anthropologists call this anthropomorphization, and it is a bad tool in history or the study of cultures. Buddhism will not "do" something, or "fail" to do something. Buddhists, however, will; and the distinction between the set of beliefs first preached by the Lord Buddha and the Buddhists who practice (or fail to practice) these must be constantly kept in mind in order not to weaken the intellectual thrust of an otherwise exceptionally useful book.

## NUMBERS, PLEASE!

The numbers and letters on the label that brings Saturday Review your way each week may not mean much to you at first glance. But they are essential in helping our Subscription Department quickly identify your records. That is why it is important to include your address label whenever you write Saturday Review about your subscription.



## CHANGE of ADDRESS

Please let us know at least four weeks before you plan to move. For fastest service, clip or paste your current mailing address in space provided, fill in your name and address, and mail to Saturday Review's Subscriber Service Division.

## NEW or RENEWAL SUBSCRIPTION

Check here to enter or extend your subscription:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One year \$8     | <input type="checkbox"/> Three years \$18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Two years \$14   | <input type="checkbox"/> Four years \$20  |
| Outside U.S. and Canada, add \$2 per year |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New subscription | <input type="checkbox"/> Payment enclosed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal          | <input type="checkbox"/> Bill me          |

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

***Saturday Review***

Subscriber Service Division  
380 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017