

edged wit, and careful accounts of the flow of Aghios's thoughts. For example, he hopes by tipping to gain some recognition of his fine qualities:

Signor Aghios exploited his little tips like a born miser. He did not want to buy much with them—only lasting friendship. Therefore he began by paying less than the normal amount . . . then Signor Aghios would put further coins, one by one, into the other's hand, until it closed and a smile appeared on the porter's face. Thus that smile, which had been so slow to appear, was stamped the more indelibly on Signor Aghios's memory and sweetened his way for hours and miles ahead.

In "A Nice Old Man and a Pretty Girl" the influence of Joyce and Proust is somewhat less evident, but the foreshadowing of Golding is stronger. An old man finds for a young girl a job as a tram driver, and promptly forgets about her; only when he sees her on the tram, driving exuberantly, stamping her foot on the bell, physically active and lovely, does he invite her to his house. The clinical details are pleasingly omitted; gradually, though, a moral struggle over the decency of the relationship begins within the old man, brought on by an attack of angina (whose pain is described in frightening imagery). To clear his troubled mind he tries to write about the

issues involved, finds himself putting the harder parts aside, comes to be haunted by brilliantly clear dreams, and finally "He was found dead and stiff, with the pen, over which had passed his last breath, in his mouth."

The stories are translated by several different persons; all of them have a high degree of competence, and as far as this reviewer can see they have shown considerable ingenuity in putting into decent English Svevo's tortured and turgid prose.

P. N. Furbank is a British author whose last biography, *Samuel Butler*, was well received in England. His life of Svevo is competent and thorough, sprinkled with evidence of a close study of Svevo's works and a careful reading of his letters. The volume is divided into two parts: an account of Svevo's life and an analysis of his work. In a way, this distinction, while it may simplify the structural problems of writing a biography, tends to detract from the book's considerable interest. One would prefer to have the two parts woven together; and one would also prefer to have Mr. Furbank show his hand more. He seems to have withheld his judgments and comments almost deliberately. Had he chosen to share more of himself with the reader, the biography might have been more than merely a study and a useful addition to the body of knowledge about Svevo available in English.

which leans on Conrad's letters to illuminate the strains and tensions that surface in his stories. (To Said the short fiction is "marvelously true" to Conrad's "innermost impulses and thoughts.") Though bogged down often in dissertationese, the study has some value as an anthology of useful snippets about Conrad's motive and technique.

One point Said makes is questioned in the other volumes—that Conrad's achievement was the ordering of "the chaos of his existence into a highly patterned art that accurately reflected and controlled the realities with which it dealt." Whether Conrad actually controlled those realities—or even understood them—is the psychoanalytic problem Dr. Meyer poses, suggesting rather that Conrad's art served an important psychological function: "the achievement through his creative fiction of a corrective version of a painful reality."

Among the more painful realities—and the intriguing mysteries—in Conrad's adventurous early years is the suicide attempt he made as a young man and later reconstructed into a lovers' duel in *The Arrow of Gold*. Approaching this and other biographical complexities with his psychoanalytical tools, Dr. Meyer sees a Chinese-box appearance to all the contradictory "evidence" in the apparent fiction and in the alleged fact. "One's literary life," Conrad once wrote, "must turn frequently for sustenance to memories and seek discourse with the shades." The Meyer study attempts that discourse, and finds deep within the innermost of the Chinese boxes—obviously a capacious one—an idealized mother (who died when Conrad was a child), an Oedipal rivalry, goddess-women and exogamic erotic interests, complicated guilt-feelings involving exile and alienation, virility fantasies and oral sadism, a variety of psychoanalytically significant fetishes, and neurotic maladjustment to marriage and parenthood.

To Meyer, the effect of Conrad's friendship with Ford Madox Ford upon his middle years is as crucial as his emotionally thwarted childhood was to the early ones. The decade of literary collaboration with Ford was "but one facet of a broader emotional involvement," a compensating "parent-child configuration." Here the argument is persuasive, for although the collaborative publications of Conrad and his equally self-alienated young friend were mediocre, these years also saw the creation of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Typhoon*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and many of the great short stories, culminating with "The Secret Sharer." And Ford's presence in much of the productivity, even to his hand in *The Secret Agent* and *Nostromo*, is visible without recourse to psychoanalysis. It was a time,

Molded by Painful Reality

Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography, by Edward W. Said (Harvard. 219 pp. \$4.95); **Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography**, by Bernard C. Meyer, M.D. (Princeton. 384 pp. \$8.50), and **Conrad's Eastern World**, by Norman Sherry (Cambridge. 340 pp. \$9.50), employ various methods of investigation to show how a complex writer revised his experiences into his fiction. Stanley Weintraub's "Beardsley" will be published this summer.

By STANLEY WEINTRAUB

NOT ONLY are Joseph Conrad's exotic life and multifarious works under the kind of intensive scrutiny that might elicit admiration from Scotland Yard, but the scholarship and the criticism are themselves under equally intensive scholarship and criticism. As a result, Conrad continues to be a major literary industry.

Among the newer products of the Con-

rad industry is Bernard Meyer's *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytical Biography*, which better serves psychoanalytical criticism than do several other recent exhumations. Still, Dr. Meyer—a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst—finds a profusion of fixations, fetishes, and complexes under every bed in which Conrad actually or fictively slept. From yet another sector of biographical criticism comes Edward Said's *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*,



—Bettmann Archive.

Joseph Conrad—"an author in search of his own character."

claims Meyer, of "secret sharer" tales, expositions of a Ford-influenced creative equilibrium.

The friendship faded when Ford left a young wife for a woman much older than himself, and Meyer sees in its aftermath the beginning of Conrad's deterioration—fifteen years of writing "indistinguishable from popular magazine romance," initiated by "acute febrile illness" and succeeding psychic disorders. "Psychologically it would appear that he could no longer afford those introspective journeys into the self that constitute the greatness of the impressionistic art he created during the years of his close association with Ford. . . . Deprived of that mirroring companionship. . . , Conrad seems to have elected thereafter to confine his art to the surface of life. . . ." Paraphrasing Pirandello, Meyer visualizes Conrad playing and creating a succession of roles, each a façade—"an author in search of his own character." It may have been even more complicated than that; an author in search of his own character soon becomes an author evading his own character. In any case, the psychoanalytical garment fashioned for Conrad, manufactured from the most elastic fabric in order to accommodate all the protruding motives and roles, has a convenient plasticity; while lost in the folds and frills are the complexity of Conrad's ideas, the cadences of his prose, the humanity of his characterization.

Much the same thing happens under the spell of biographical analysis. Norman Sherry, probing for Lord Jim in the background of a sailor who afterwards (according to a 1923 account) "grew fat and prospered" in Singapore, finds him in a first mate named Augustine Podmore Williams, who was involved in the abandonment of the pilgrim ship *Jeddah* in 1880. Earlier—probably at about the time the Sherry book was being set in type—Miss Allen, who had a long head start, published a parallel account. Both were based on the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry into the *Jeddah* affair, and the files of old Singapore newspapers, which Miss Allen had had checked for her, and which Mr. Sherry later checked himself. (The writers also approached members of Williams's family—different members!) If Jim were Williams, however, the later "Lord Jim" phase of his career may have been indebted to a more colorful original; and both books locate possible candidates in Borneo, drawing as much upon earlier researchers (pre-1940) by John Gordan as upon new material.

So, too, other adventures and acquaintances of Conrad in the East are examined. Although he spent only a few months of his seafaring life there, re-

(Continued on page 70)

The Wheel Turns the World

A World History, by William H. McNeill (Oxford. 478 pp. \$9.75), sees technological change as the propelling force in civilization. The author of "History in a Changing World," "An Introduction to Contemporary History," and other works, Geoffrey Barraclough was president of the Historical Association from 1964-67. He is currently visiting at the University of California, San Diego.

By GEOFFREY BARRACLOUGH

THE PROBLEMS of writing world history are considerable. It is not only a question of accumulating knowledge over a vast range. There is also the question of point of view, or of the value judgments inseparable from any selection of historical facts. Most of our historical emphases—not least the all-too-familiar outline courses on "Western civilization," which still prevail in most colleges and universities—derive from an age of Western domination which is as obsolete as the Manchu empire of China.

The first question we have to ask is whether this pattern offers students an adequate preparation for their future, or whether it is irrelevant to the problems of a world in flux. Does it reflect a considered evaluation of relative importance or an outmoded ethnocentrism? Without doubt it is the changes in the world since 1945 that have forced historians to a reconsideration of their standards. But more is at stake than that. The real issue is the integrity of history as a field of knowledge. Furthermore, only in a global context can we hope properly to understand the dynamics of Western civilization itself.

No one in this country has done more to propagate the concept of global history than Leften Stavrianos of Northwestern University. He is joined now by William H. McNeill, whose *Rise of the West* was so highly acclaimed. Professor McNeill's new book is closely related to his earlier work; its object, he says, is to make the "personal vision of the whole history of mankind" developed in *The Rise of the West* "more accessible to students." If its approach, on the whole, is less sophisticated than that of Professor Stavrianos, *A World History* also—no doubt deliberately—bears less individual an imprint than *The Rise of the West*. Nevertheless Professor McNeill can

rightly claim to present a "cohesive and intelligible" point of view. His *World History* may not be quite the "illumination of the soul" Lord Acton once postulated as the purpose of universal history; but it is neither the "rope of sand" nor the "burden on the memory" that he castigated.

Nothing, of course, would be easier than to criticize a volume such as this in detail. As with Toynbee, every expert will find points to dispute where the story traverses his own narrow domain. It is more important to consider the wider structure of Professor McNeill's book. This is basically mechanistic; in other words, he sees technological change—the plow, the chariot, the stirrup, the internal combustion engine, and now the atom bomb—as the propelling force. Secondly, he is a convinced "diffusionist," for whom all civilizations, including those of China and apparently even of Amerindia, arose through stimuli offered by events occurring far away in Mesopotamia. On this basis it is not difficult to erect a coherent structure of world history, in which "in successive ages" the centers of civilization "altered," forcing "neighbors" to "change their own traditional ways of life, sometimes by outright borrowing of techniques or ideas, but more often by adjusting." It perhaps goes without saying that this view leads inexorably to a pattern of world history of which the central



—From "A World History."

Portrait of a Roman lady, A.D. 54-117. Palazzo Capitolino, Rome.