

## Homage to Many

*Men in Dark Times*, by Hannah Arendt (Harcourt, Brace & World. 272 pp. \$5.95), covers ten figures ranging from Rosa Luxemburg to Pope John XXIII. David Littlejohn, who teaches English and journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of books on Samuel Johnson and American Negro writers.

By DAVID LITTLEJOHN

WHAT MAY LOOK LIKE a new book by Hannah Arendt is really a publisher's compilation of eleven of her essays, addresses, and book reviews from the past thirteen years. What unites the selections is the dedication of each to a single important figure, all but one of them from the twentieth century—the “dark times” of the title—and all but one of them dead.

It is a rare publisher (or author) who can pass up the opportunity to fill out such a book with lesser pieces, transient or specially directed essays that need never, in all justice, have been broadcast beyond their initial audience. In this category fall five of Miss Arendt's articles: a vulgar and vapid halo for John XXIII; two academic eulogies (for Karl Jaspers and Waldemar Gurian) in the sentimental, mock-Roman, lifeless style of that nineteenth-century genre; a gauche, informal memoir of Randall Jarrell, and an essay-review on Isak Dinesen originally published in *The New Yorker* that is simply very badly written. But after subtracting these five we are left with more than 200 pages of substance.

The six remaining essays are on Hermann Broch, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Gotthold Lessing, and a second, more provocative essay on Karl Jaspers. Let me say a few words about each of these useful reflections, and in the process try to reconstruct the critical mind that lies behind them.

Miss Arendt has paid her homage elsewhere to the novels of Hermann Broch. The present essay is essentially a chart of his desperate philosophic journey during the years after he abandoned literature. As such it may well prove the least accessible or meaningful to the average intelligent reader of the selections in this volume. Broch lived in holy terror of death, disorder, contingency, and time, and spent his last years in an obsessive quest for a new absolute, for a new, nonmythical, demonstrable *logos* that would freeze the world's chaos and the mind's confusion in the security and stillness of a premodern era. His philosophic quest, and Miss Arendt's reproduction of it, have about them a satisfying and invigorating elegance. But to those who share neither Broch's anguish



—Fred Stein.

Hannah Arendt—“keep talking.”

for the absolute nor Miss Arendt's passion for philosophy, the whole enterprise may seem rather unearthly. What grounds this study in the same earth as the others is the dark vision of the twentieth century—“the century ‘of the darkest anarchy, the darkest atavism, the darkest cruelty.’”

I find the review-essay on Rosa Luxemburg, like the introduction to Walter Benjamin's essays, at least as interesting for what it reveals about Hannah Arendt as for what she reveals about her subject. The first is a sustained, deeply committed defense of an independent-minded, nondoctrinaire Leftist-by-compassion, a woman, a Jew of German cultural origins, antiwar and antinationalist; and I think it not perverse to see in it an idealized mirror-image of the author, a kind of unconscious *apologia pro vita sua*.

THE biocritical study of Walter Benjamin, the German critic who committed suicide in 1940, seems to reveal another face of the author's own intellectual ideal. One can, I think, always discover the shape of a moral-intellectual personality by superimposing the outlines of its models. The fact that so many of these “portraits” take the form of abstract fables—none of them really evokes the living man—leads one to suspect that Miss Arendt is overstating her subjects' qualities and importance in order to assert an ideal. The case of Walter Benjamin affords her a pretext for eloquent reflections on the Jew in Germany, on the role of the free and independent critic, and on the relevance of tradition in this junkyard of ruins.

This last theme animates as well “Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World,” an especially provocative analysis. Jaspers, like everyone else Miss Arendt discusses here, finds Today appalling in contrast

to Yesterday. The technology that has at last, suddenly, and somewhat frighteningly united “Mankind” in a simultaneous, contiguous present seems of necessity to be destroying “all national traditions . . . the authentic origins of all human existence . . .”

Its result would be a shallowness that would transform man, as we have known him in five thousand years of recorded history, beyond recognition. It would be more than superficiality; it would be as though the whole dimension of depth, without which human thought, even on the mere level of technical invention, could not exist, would simply disappear . . . It looks as though the historical pasts of the nations, in their utter diversity and disparity, in their confusing variety and bewildering strangeness, are nothing but obstacles on the road to a horribly shallow unity.

It is precisely because Jaspers suggests a means of using (and hence preserving) this past, these traditions—not as dogmas of “truths” but simply as the free substance of human discourse—that Miss Arendt treasures him so highly.

THE Brecht essay is a special case, and difficult to summarize justly. The three central sections isolate with justice and insight the essential human and artistic qualities of Brecht's genius, and one is grateful to have them. But they are inserted into a judgment of Brecht's political “sins” which is specious, pretentious, nervous, and incomplete, a piece of confused anti-Communist polemic quite inadequate to the complexity of the man or the nature of his compromise. Miss Arendt seems most angry, if I may say so, at the fact that Brecht's hatreds were not directed at the same targets as hers.

The keynote of the book is set by its first essay, “Humanity in Dark Times,” an address given in Hamburg in 1959 on the eighteenth-century playwright Lessing. After a few thorny pages of academic ritual, this is the most touching and desperately pertinent of all the essays. In it Miss Arendt reaffirms her belief that these are, indeed, dark times, when the public world has become so ugly that men of good will have taken to avoiding it altogether. And yet, since all action is willy-nilly political, and since *humanitas* depends on public discourse, then such retreats, such silences, such closings of the ranks—the results of dark times—lead toward the end of humanity. Miss Arendt pleads, through the example of Lessing, that we keep talking, keep the discourse alive and political; that we remain silent about nothing. For, in the definition of this eloquent and anxious woman, independent but intensely political, “humanity” consists of intelligent men conversing freely on public affairs.

## Host for Happy Times

**An Editor's Treasury: A Continuing Anthology of Prose, Verse, and Literary Curiosa**, edited by Herbert R. Mayes (Atheneum. 2 Vols. 2,196 pp. Boxed set, \$24.95), contains a portion of the clippings from four decades' omnivorous reading. Edwin Fadiman, Jr.'s next novel will be published by Little, Brown in 1969.

By EDWIN FADIMAN, JR.

ONE OF THE ODDEST of a reviewer's experiences is to find himself obliged, by professional imperatives, to read an anthology cover to cover in one uninterrupted sitting. This is a process that magnifies to an unusual, perhaps to an unfair degree the faults (and the virtues) of the anthology.

Herbert Mayes's *An Editor's Treasury* stands up well, all 2,196 pages of it, under this abusive treatment. That is to say, the editor's choices are almost always appetizing. The adjective is justly used, for this enormous collection is a smörgårsbord of literary tidbits. Some may not be to one's taste, but all are worth sampling.

Anthologies tend to divide themselves into types. There is what, for lack of a better term, can be called the proselytizing anthology. Here the editor not only selects his content with care, but does his best with footnotes, forewords or after-words, to convince the reader of the excellence of his choice. He, therefore, wears two literary hats: that of the anthologist, and that of the literary critic. Clifton Fadiman's *Reading I've Liked* is one example. So, *par excellence*, is Huntington Cairns's *The Limits of Art*.

Such achievements can be stunning. In the light of intermittent but intense flashes of informed intuition, they reveal unexpected beauty in dusty literary corners. A dozen flashes can make even the costliest of personal anthologies worth their price.

Such achievements can be dangerous. Implicit in this sort of personal compendium is the risk that the reader may not generally agree with the anthologist's taste. Some people cannot, or will not, subordinate their opinions to the editor's; for them the anthology can only be irritating.

Mr. Mayes does not run this risk (and, in all fairness, he provides no enlightening flashes). *An Editor's Treasury* is a vast compilation of what has caught his eye in four decades of reading, both for pleasure and profit. Though the gathering embraces many classical selections (in truth, there's a lot of everything), its spirit is contemporary. Mayes likes the lyrics of a number of Broadway shows and pop tunes; they are here. At

some time Edgar Guest snagged his attention; Guest is represented by some of his godawful verse. A professional editor, Mr. Mayes has included J. Addison Alexander's rhymed lesson in English, "The Power of Short Words," which every writer should read. He gives us Beardsley Rumf's "Statement on the Organization of the United Nations: 1945"; Thomas Hood's characterization of Lear in dazing trochaic hammer-blows; the story of the Baby and the Helmet, which, by presenting Hector as a pathetic human being, helps to bring the suprahuman majesty of the *Iliad* into the human scale.

Mayes includes jingles by Ogden Nash, political tracts, excerpts from great speeches, advertising copy—including the complete inspirational text of "They Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano." You meet great minds and mediocre ones. You can make acquaintances. Turn them into friends, into intimates, if you will. *An Editor's Treasury*, like a good host, introduces you and then leaves you alone.

An anthology is for a long time. It could (and in my opinion should) take five or ten years to read through. During this period if it sustains and informs some dozens of evenings, and offers numberless five-minute oases of pleasure and refreshment, the anthology has fulfilled an important function.

I cannot agree with all of Mr. Mayes's

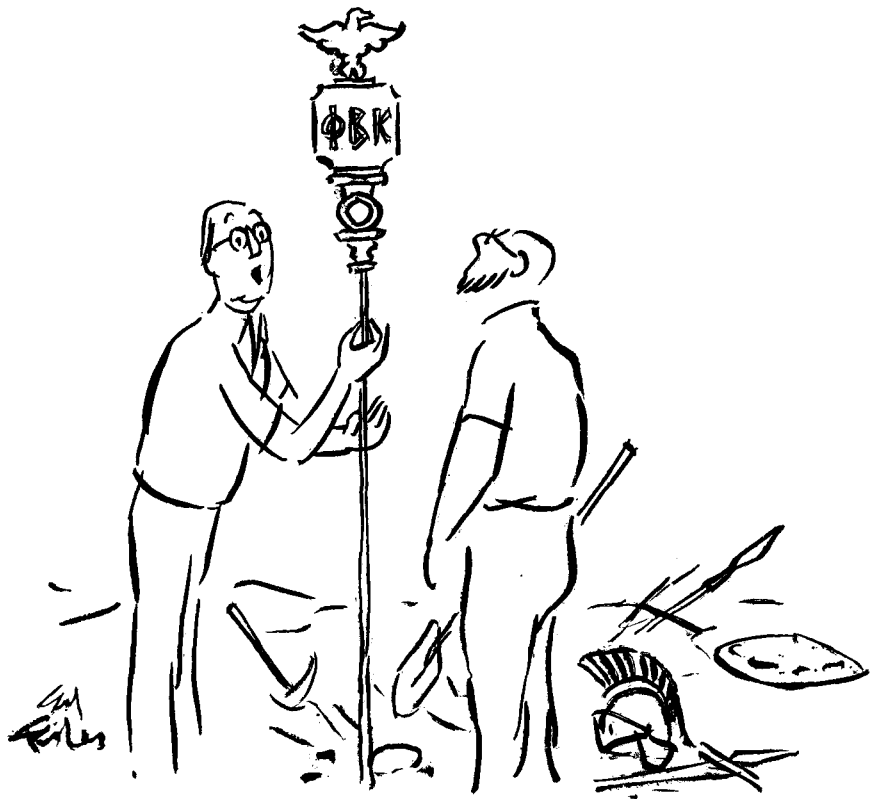
choices, nor would he wish me to. What is important is that he has gathered a vast assemblage of beauty, curiosities, and philosophy. He has created a tool for enjoyment, for reflection. What more dare we ask?

## In the Psych Ward

**Savage Sleep**, by Millen Brand (Crown. 465 pp. \$6.95), depicts a dedicated physician whose efforts to help the mentally ill are constantly frustrated by his superiors. Haskel Frankel is a fiction editor and free-lance critic.

By HASKEL FRANKEL

"I'M A NAIVE BASTARD who thinks everybody wants to do something about sickness, physical, mental, whatever the hell it is. I can't understand it when they don't want to do something." This is Dr. John Marks speaking, out of the frustration that has marred the time he spent as resident pathologist in a state mental hospital and a research center. A passionate idealist, Marks gave up a lucrative medical practice to plunge into the world of psychiatry, including his own intensive analysis, in an effort to find a way of reaching the patients he could not help through medicine. *Savage Sleep* (Continued on page 70)



"My guess is, it was carried by their intelligence corps."