

dwelt the blind scholar Hugh Stuart Boyd, twenty-five years her senior. Her relationship with him was curious, a sort of cerebral passion. No one else ought to read Greek to him; she must stand alone as his intellectual partner. His daughter and wife she only tolerated—"empty-minded, without real sensibility." If this recalls one Jane Austen novel, another is brought to mind when Mr. Barrett behaves exactly like Sir Walter Kellynch in *Persuasion*: he had put Hope End on the market, but "would not make himself a party to its being shown."

The *Diary* was brought to an end, as Elizabeth later told Richard Hengist Horne, "in a crisis of self-disgust." She badly needed the then unknown Robert Browning—at this time almost twenty and telling us in *Pauline* how he came to terms with his own life.

Maisie Ward

Maisie Ward is the author of "Robert Browning and His World."

MAO TSE-TUNG

by Robert Payne

Weybright & Talley, 342 pp., \$10

CHIANG KAI-SHEK

by Robert Payne

Weybright & Talley, 338 pp., \$10

I DON'T BELIEVE ROBERT PAYNE EXISTS. I really don't.

I suppose that somewhere in a book-lined office there is an extraordinary writing machine, with long, gray hair and piercing eyes, which satisfies a self-imposed quota of producing at least one readable book every eighteen months. Sometimes, two books. But, for the sake of the sanity of other "writing machines" who can manage only one literary offspring every five years—if then, I hope the machine named Payne is not alive and well and living in Westchester, thank you. It would be so discouraging.

Take, for example, the two books he has just written. Granted, one is an update—his admiring biography of Mao Tse-tung, brought down through the "Cultural Revolution"—but even updating takes time and effort and talent. And the other—an unadmiring biography of Chiang Kai-shek—is wholly new. That certainly takes time and effort and talent. No doubt the scholar on modern China will find a number of deficiencies in both biographies: a certain quality of glibness that occasionally seeps into Payne's works, a weakness in documentation; but the intelligent, involved layman will enjoy the books. Why not? Like all of Payne's works they are well written, broadly

stroked, highly professional. Professional is what Payne is.

After World War II he was in China, plunged at the time in the final phases of a long and agonizing civil war. A fragile truce between the Nationalist forces of Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist forces of Mao Tse-tung (a rare photograph snapped in September 1945 shows Chiang and Mao toasting their common victory over Japan) was on the verge of collapse. Payne made his way from Peking to the Yen-an caves, where Mao had retreated after his 6,000-mile-long march through China in the mid-1930s. Payne's description of his meeting with Mao and his analysis of Mao's poetry are easily the highlights of that biography; much of the rest is secondhand. This is not Payne's fault. Since Mao's final victory over Chiang in 1949 few Westerners have been able to get into Communist China.

But they have been able to get into Chiang's offshore island bastion of Taiwan. Unfortunately, there is little evidence in *Chiang Kai-shek* that Payne bothered to get the eyewitness impressions and firsthand experiences that so enrich his style of biography. Payne, an Englishman born in 1911, has a clear prejudice. He admires Mao; he does not admire Chiang. Mao is described as having "raised China to its greatest power"; Chiang is portrayed as a Confucian dictator who brought China to its greatest despair.

Wandering through modern China in the shadows of these two old Mandarins, the reader is treated to special tidbits of history, an account of the turmoil that has swept over the world's oldest recorded civilization, a sense of the promise of the Chinese people and of the traditions of tragedy that have

hung over them like a terrible shroud. Both biographies close with brief chapters depicting two old men increasingly cut off from reality but clinging tenaciously to their respective visions of China. It is perfectly clear that until one or both of these Mandarins die, U.S. policy towards "China" cannot or will not change significantly.

Just recently, for example, the Nixon Administration decided to extend diplomatic recognition to Mongolia, once part of "greater China" and so recognized by Nationalist and Communist historians and politicians. Everyone approved of this decision—the President, Henry Kissinger, William Rogers, even Everett Dirksen. But Chiang Kai-shek did not approve, and recognition was withheld. The faded, sometimes forgotten specter of the "China Lobby" still proved powerful enough—at least, in White House eyes or imagination—to frustrate a high-level policy decision. The same specter, sustained by bureaucratic inertia and political conservatism, keeps the "open-minded" Administration of President Richard Nixon from easing policy towards mainland China.

The President talks often enough about the shape of American policy towards postwar Asia. "China" is sure to play a fundamental role, but which China? Mao's or Chiang's? Though these biographies cannot provide the answer, they will help the reader make up his own mind about which is the true one.

Marvin Kalb

Marvin Kalb, CBS News diplomatic correspondent, has just returned from two journeys to Asia, including a visit to Taiwan.



Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek toasting their common victory over Japan—"two old men increasingly cut off from reality."

COLLECTED ESSAYS

by **Graham Greene**

Viking, 463 pp., \$7.95

**BEYOND ALL THIS FIDDLE:
Essays 1955-1967**

by **A. Alvarez**

Random House, 333 pp., \$8.95

**WRITING AGAINST TIME:
Critical Essays and Reviews**

by **Howard Moss**

Morrow, 219 pp., \$5

GRAHAM GREENE POINTS OUT in one of his essays that technique is often no more than a writer's method of hiding his own deficiencies. But literary deficiencies are not limited to personality; for essayists they can reside in the very occasions of writing. Reviews, for example, which make up the bulk of these three collections, *must* deal with books that happen to be coming out. Press space is usually severely restricted. Deadline dates threaten. The tyranny of occasions must seem hydra-headed to authors like these three, all of whom are proficient in other forms (A. Alvarez and Howard Moss in poetry, Greene in many genres), but each of whom has lived with the burdens of journalistic essay-writing day by day, month after month—Greene over a span of forty years.

In a way, collections of occasional pieces are themselves deficient occasions, like using tea bags over again. There is something synthetic about them, not simply because each essay originally stood alone as a specific assignment, but because it is so hard to maintain a unified impression. Will the

pieces hang together as a book? Do their mass and substance justify collection? Should some be revised? Such questions surely occurred to these three essayists, but if there is a moral in their books, it is that talent and personal force can capitalize on occasions, no matter how inconsequential.

Of the three, Greene seems least affected by the paste-up book syndrome, and perhaps for this reason his collection is the most satisfyingly successful if not the most profound. Though he tackles a few substantial subjects at length, most of his essays are extremely slight—three or four pages—often on topics of onion-skin thinness, e.g., notes on Cook's Tours or Beatrix Potter. Quite justly, his approach to these is casual, at times simply whimsical or eccentric, despite displays of considerable knowledge and literary erudition. Selecting these essays (some from his earlier collection, *The Lost Childhood*) he must have measured the great distance between present-day tastes and many of his subjects—figures like Rider Haggard, Edgar Wallace, Anthony Hope, even Kipling and Stevenson. Nevertheless, that so much of his book transmits an Edwardian air—a bit antique, genteel, ingenuous—bothers him not in the least. It will not bother his reader. On the contrary, it is as if Greene always set out with one eye on his topic and the other on his own image in a mirror, and just because that image is winning, so are his essays.

Ultimately, it may be impossible to pin down this attraction, but its presence is inescapable. Howard Moss suggests in one of his essays that certain authors inspire affection not explained by either their works or their lives, but by some "temperamental undercurrent, some invisible connection between the writer and the reader that

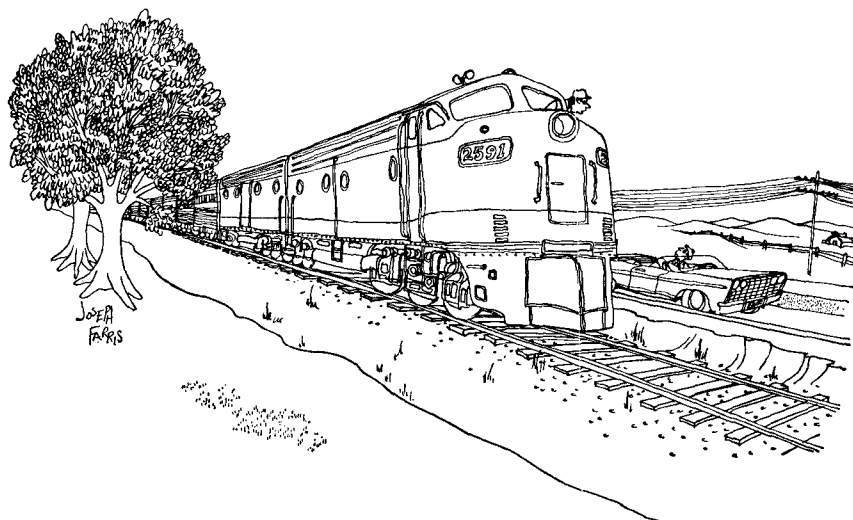
is more available to the senses and the emotions than to the mind." He might have named Greene as such an author. In him the appeal to intellect is rarely sustained or brilliantly illuminating. With subjects as rich as Henry James and François Mauriac, Greene's tendency still is to suggest a narrow thesis that interests him, then to pursue it briefly, crisply, with flashed insights that are dimmed by other, less visible appeals to "senses and emotions": by his tone, always compassionate and fair; by the purity and ease of his style; by the importance he gives to human actions; in short, by Greene the man.

Writing about Conan Doyle, Greene notes that "it isn't easy for an author to remain a pleasant human being: both success and failure are usually of a crippling kind. There are so many opportunities for histrionics, hysterics, waywardness, self-importance." Greene never uses his essays for such opportunities; he emerges from them as a pleasant human being. He is courageous and generous in tributes to writers like Ford Madox Ford and Frederick Rolfe, resolute in his attacks ("A man," he says, "should be judged by his enmities as well as by his friendships"), curious about oddities, accurate in gauging when it is better to laugh than to ponder and fuss.

If there is any central core of thought and feeling in these essays, it is the sense of man's fundamental inadequacy, of greatness escaping his grasp. In the first essay, about his childhood reading, Greene records the moment when he suddenly realized how far the spectrum of good and evil spreads beyond black and white, and how a sense of doom lies over every success. Thereafter, battles against odds fascinate him, and his conclusion about them is the one he attributes to James: rancor, or malice, but with a virile stamina that defies inevitability. He would probably approach his essays so. No single piece, he would know, will serve hereafter as a definitive reference or will be anthologized as a masterpiece of the essay form; nor does his stature as an essayist reach that of an Orwell. But given any subject, not merely the appropriate one, and any occasion, not just those that are ideal, he is very good indeed.

The appeal of Alvarez, on the other hand, is of a totally different kind; he shares with Greene little more than British nationality and the need to rise to occasions. Greene's occasions are not at all his, for if there is any mean-

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"How do you get to Grand River Junction?"

The critic, Robert Maurer, is chairman of the Literature Department at Antioch College.