Book Forum

Letters from Readers

Rationalization Rejected

IN HIS REVIEW OF Arthur Schlesinger's *The Crisis of Confidence* [*SR*, May 17], John Bunzel too easily depicts the revolt of youth as an "abandonment of rationality as a way to set things right." It is one thing to observe a growing emphasis on feeling and sensory experience among today's young, another to conclude that youth has "discarded the worth and value of rationality."

Rather than turning their backs on rationality, the young reject rationalization—words and explanations that only serve to hide the tragic wrongs of our society. In short, it is the hypocrisy of their elders that turns the young off; a rejuvenation of feeling, of empathy, turns them on.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Bunzel and so many others "over thirty" don't dig a little deeper, at least to observe the millions of disenchanted young who seek to work out a rational order of thought encompassing their values.

EDWARD P. MORGAN,
Cambridge, Mass.

Basis for Successful Society

THE REVIEW OF ROBERT MACIVER'S book, *Politics and Society* [*SR*, May 17], has helped me to understand, more clearly, the position in which we Americans stand today. I lived through the early 1900s and it is amusing to me to see how some of the intellectuals and politicians avoid the basic principles upon which a successful society is formed and focus their attention upon a scattering of technical ventures, which might or might not contribute to the benefit of "people."

GEORGE BOROUGH,
New Albany, Ohio.

Distortions

IN HIS REVIEW OF Herbert Matthews's *Fidel Castro* [*SR*, May 3], Paul Kidd conveys the erroneous impression that for no reason beyond the expression of unpopular opinions one can be packed off to labor in degrading conditions. Speech is not sufficient cause for arrest in Cuba today. Cubans I met on my visit last March who were alienated from the Revolution voiced their views loudly on the street.

I was very much disturbed by the caption ("Cuban forced-labor camp—for beds, strips of sacking between posts") under a picture appearing with the review. Campamento Nuestra America, a voluntary work site on the outskirts of Havana, looks the same as the picture with the same type of beds. I tried one and, though not a Beautyrest, it wasn't uncomfortable. Virtually all of the barracks for *macheteros* (cane-cutters) in Cuba are similarly outfitted.

The numerous individual distortions of Mr. Kidd's review add up to the impression of a people oppressed by their poverty and their government. A more accurate picture of Cuba is illustrated by a conversation in Nuevitas, a town on the north coast. I was asking people why they did long hours of volunteer labor. A black man with gray stubble that didn't seem to be a beard but a shortage of razor blades put his arm around a young boy and said to me, "We are working for our children."

JOEL C. EDELSTEIN,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Far Left Push

MR. KIDD QUOTES MATTHEWS that "all rural children in Cuba are now going to school and being fed and clothed." Was it so when we were exporting our American way of life to them? No revolution benefits all strata of society. That at least the most deprived innocent generation has been acknowledged its birth rights does not augur badly for the country's future, albeit under the horror of communism.

Our hypocritical concern about "bare cupboards" is exposed when we consider the sanctions we impose on Cuba's trade, a point rarely aired by critics. We, in our power, delivered the far-left push.

LENORE TARNOPOLL,
New Milford, N.J.

A Nominative Absolute

THE EDITOR MIGHT WELL have been addled by a reviewer's use of the ablative absolute [Book Forum, May 17], unless Latin were his mother tongue. The construction he used being English, Bernard Grebanier should know it was a *nominative* absolute.

JAMES A. FECHHEIMER,
Glen Head, N.Y.

Forgettable Quotations

I DESPAIR OF EVER FINDING a good reference work on quotations. Although line after line is devoted to obscure Scottish poets, both *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* (13th ed. 1955) and the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (2d ed. 1953-56) contain quotations which are neither familiar nor worthwhile. In fact, both should be entitled "Unfamiliar and Forgettable Quotations."

What I am searching for is a comprehensive collection of quotations which are selected on the basis of either familiarity or intrinsic merit. For example, I would expect such a collection at the very least to include: 1) "Form follows function" (Mies van der Rohe or "Corbu"); 2) "It is worse than a crime, it is a blunder" (Clemenceau), and 3) Any quotation which has been used by the Container Corporation of America in its advertisements "Great Ideas of Western Men."

I find it difficult to believe that architects and politicians, among them the above, never said anything memorable, nor am I convinced that Napoleon and Hitler were as tongue-tied as they appear in most reference works.

MICHAEL A. BUTTERWORTH,
New York, N.Y.

A Real Controversy

MY REVIEW OF Claude Levi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* [*SR*, May 17] contains a reference to "the alleged controversy" between Sartre and Levi-Strauss. The word "alleged" was not in the review I submitted; the controversy is indisputably real, however ethereal in substance.

ROBERT F. MURPHY,
New York, N.Y.

Cozzens Underrated

GRANVILLE HICKS RAISES a valid question in asking why certain novelists were ignored in Nelson Manfred Blake's *Novelists' America* [*SR*, Apr. 5], but vitiates his own thesis by rejecting James Gould Cozzens as a reliable delineator of the American scene and the American experience during the "early twentieth century."

Hicks says: "The truth is, however, that Cozzens's range is narrower than that of most other novelists . . . his characters, usually professional people in small towns or small cities in the East, represent a tiny part of the country's population."

Mr. Cozzens's range is *not* narrower than such "other novelists" as Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, Farrell, Marquand and O'Hara, who are cited by Blake and Hicks, to say nothing of such estimable writers as Bellow, Malamud, Salinger, Roth, *et al.* I think this needs no elaboration.

Mr. Cozzens's novels are *not* all laid in small towns of the East. *Guard of Honor* is laid mainly in Florida with a cast from all over; *Men and Brethren* is laid in New York City, *Ask Me Tomorrow* in Europe, and other Cozzens novels are laid in Cuba and on shipboard.

However, the locations of the Cozzens novels are entirely irrelevant. To one raised in the Middle West and unfamiliar with small Eastern cities, the Cozzens characters are as familiar and as true as persons well known in real life. Furthermore, Hicks is in additional error when he states that the Cozzens characters represent "a tiny part of the country's population." These people perhaps are no longer a majority, but they were certainly no "tiny minority" during the "early twentieth century"—take it from one who has lived and visited in all parts of the country.

While most of Mr. Cozzens's protagonists are "professional people," his novels are well populated by hundreds of nonprofessionals who are drawn with equal honesty, accuracy and understanding.

When Hicks implies that only John Fischer believes readers of the future can gain reliable knowledge of life in the United States from the Cozzens novels, he ignores Bernard De Voto, Elmer Davis, Edward Weeks and a host of others who are on record with the same high opinion of Mr. Cozzens's writings.

PAUL W. FERRIS,
Murfreesboro, Tenn.

European Literary Scene

Robert J. Clements

Helen Kazantzakis's moving biography of her husband concluded, you may recall, with her closing of the dying novelist's eyes. She left unwritten several poignant details of the aftermath, which she authorizes me to record here. For the odyssey of Nikos Kazantzakis did not end with his death.

On hearing the news, Aristotle Onassis telegraphed to Freiburg offering to have the writer's body flown back to his native Crete; but somehow in the confusion the telegram remained unopened. Mrs. Kazantzakis went to Paris to obtain money from her husband's account. On legal technicalities it was refused her, and she hurried to Geneva to borrow funds. Returning to Freiburg, she hired a hearse with two German drivers to transport the body over the rough roads to Athens. Upon arrival she requested permission of the Greek archbishop to allow it to rest overnight in a small chapel outside the city. This was denied, and a small mortuary was finally located.

At this point Onassis repeated his offer, and the body was taken by plane to Heraklion, Crete, where, thanks to a directive from Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul, Kazantzakis received Christian burial.

Thereafter the tomb was frequently desecrated by the novelist's local political enemies, who as early as 1924 had had him arrested as a "subversive." Ordure was piled on the tomb; oil from votive lamps was poured over it. The famous epitaph, "I hope nothing, I fear nothing, I am free," was chipped away. When the widow protested, officials merely chided her for not providing armed guards herself.

Helen Kazantzakis felt that her husband's body should stay in his native town; but she told officials she was debating three alternatives: removing the body to her family crypt in Athens, taking it back to Freiburg, where people would keep fresh flowers on the grave, or transporting it to Antibes, where flags would fly at half-mast. The desecrations promptly stopped.

The prostitutes of Heraklion plied their trade only a short distance away from that part of the cemetery where Kazantzakis lay. One of them came to Helen Kazantzakis. "Now that your husband has become a saint," she said, "we girls are uncomfortable working here. Also, we fear that the officials are going to forbid us to work here."

The older woman spoke with her typical directness and gentleness. "But you know that Nikos loved whores . . . Don't worry. I shall do all I can to see that you are not moved."

The girls added their votive candles to the grave.

From Flammarion comes the curious *Histoire d'Emile*, by Simone Balazard, the third novel from this Algerian-born professor of philosophy. It is superficially a *novella* collection, a form derived from India and North Africa, and little practiced in France since the days of Marguerite de Navarre. This structure requires a locale throwing together for a certain number of days ten or more people (as in the *Decameron*), killing time by retelling stories on set themes. These are usually licentious but atoned for by a tacked-on moral. In *Emile* five men and five nubile young women foregather every night till 12:00 in a comfortable underground bomb shelter, a *divan* well provided with wines and horizontal cushioned surfaces. This time, however, there is only one narrator, Marin, who is as talkative as Sheherezade (the jacket copy coyly puns about *L'Histoire d'Emile . . . et une nuit*). The captive audience is so eager to change the direction of the conversation that Marin can scarcely get a word in edgewise. In 281 pages he achieves only a minimum of cross-hatchings in his verbal portrait of a mythical Emile. Waiting for Emile is like waiting for Godot.

Nevertheless, through all the interruptions (including the narrator's dropping off to sleep like a dormouse), a clouded figure emerges, sometimes so human that he gets excited at soccer matches, at other times so legendary that his daughter bears centaur-like children. Mme. Balazard helps us out by including a genealogical chart which establishes that Emile is actually the narrator's father. While we feel at the end that we might have appreciated more substance to our Emile, we are not at all resentful at the pleasant *mystification* to which we have been subjected. Simone Balazard's enigmatic smile has captivated us, as have her *novelle*-of-the-absurd and her childlike inmates playing house-party without chaperon.

The 1969 Festival of Two Worlds is drawing nigh (June 27-July 13) and the program is finally assembled. Spoleto's old Theater of Caio Melisso will again ring with voices of important poets reading and discussing their works, poets everybody will talk with in the coffee houses and *trattorie*. Such familiar names as Pound, Neruda, Spender, Ginsberg, Alberti, and Ungaretti will this time be missing, but several younger, committed poets will participate: Pearse Hutchinson from Ireland (reading in English and Gaelic), Zbigniew Herbert from Poland, Jacques Dupin from France, Vasco Popa from Yugoslavia, Eduardo Sanguineti from Italy, and Anthony Hecht from the U.S. Organizer Patrick Creagh has as yet been unable to contact Greece's recently released Yannis Ritsos or Jorgos Seferis, who has been courageously indicting the autarchs of Athens.

Those who cannot make it to this unique town in the Umbrian hills can now at least hear the poetry readings, for since last year they have been available in high-fidelity recordings through a subsidiary of the Festival Foundation, Applause Productions, at 85 Long View Road, Port Washington, N.Y.

Drama always plays an imaginative part at the Festival. Lamberto Puggelli will direct *Sword of Damocles*, a play by the Turkish poet Nazim Hukmet. Roberto Guicciardini will stage Bertolt Brecht's *A Modest Man's Wedding*, and Argentina's popular Experimental Drama Group will present its special version of *Dracula*, performed last year in New York.

From Nymphenburg in Munich comes a new illustrated edition of Alfred Kubin's *Die andere Seite* (The Other Side). Welcome indeed is this revival of Kubin (1877-1959), a revival slowly spreading to France, Italy, Poland, and America. Kubin wrote several fantasy novels (*Seite* of 1909 was the first) and became a fixture of German expressionism. A painter and sketcher as well, he enriched these books with pictorial glimpses into their demon-ridden dream worlds. As a writer he encouraged Kafka, Ernst Jünger, and Hermann Kasak in their fantasies. As a painter and thinker on art he surely influenced Beckmann, Feininger, and Klee.

Kubin's pioneer novel relates the tragedy of Claus Patera, a frail Salzburg schoolboy destined to become a sorcerer and dictator of a land called Pearl Realm somewhere near Tibet. Patera is no kindly Merlin. Wielding power as "*absoluter Herr*," he governs by mere projections of his will. An antagonist appears, sworn to destroy him; he is Hercules Bell, millionaire