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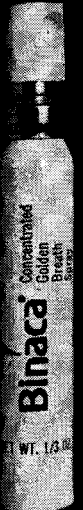


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Answer to Wit Twister, page 48
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were no moral or immoral books: "Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." But Mr. Ellmann doesn't accept such pronouncements as Wilde's absolute credo. He says that Wilde often took conflicting positions and didn't really disengage art from life—a proper comment on a master of paradox. That he was also a master of some important critical formulations we can now perceive with the help of these two well-ordered collections.

Harry T. Moore

Harry T. Moore, a research professor at Southern Illinois University, has written widely on modern literature.

ANGEL IN ARMOR: Post-Freudian Essays on the Nature of Man

by **Ernest Becker**
Braziller, 195 pp., \$5.95.

THERE IS A TACIT ASSUMPTION that books are addressed to all men of good will who are able to read them, but it is not one to which Ernest Becker subscribes. His book, he tells us, is "really" (I am not altogether sure of the force of this "really") addressed only "to the anguished and cheated youth of our time." (Mr. Becker seems callously indifferent to the prospect that this will presumably leave anyone who is anguished and cheated, but not young, feeling even more anguished and cheated.) A review by anyone over thirty thus seems an act of presumptuous eavesdropping; but these are among the penalties of publication, which is still a less sectarian performance than Becker would apparently like it to be.

Unfortunately, the snobbish silliness of Mr. Becker's prefatory remark is not insignificant; his writing characteristically exhibits a kind of complacent indignation, a tendency to think in terms of goodies and baddies, of "them" (or "it") and "us," of "life" (good) and present society (bad), which mars and coarsens a stimulating collection of essays. The views he expresses are all too likely to be eagerly oversimplified by Mr. Becker's chosen readers, for whom they will confirm what the young are already amply convinced of: that society is a monstrosity crushing the humanity of individuals, that education is a polite word for conditioning, and that in order to be free they must unlearn all that they—and perhaps mankind itself—have learned. This will be a pity, because these ideas are near enough to half-truths to be worth examining rather than chanting. On the other hand, those who could benefit most from the jolt Mr. Becker might administer, particularly doctrinaire Freudians, may well feel absolved from reading very

far by the smugly evangelical tone he can on occasion adopt. There are times when the existential psychology he professes sounds like a marriage of European pedantry and native come-to-glory—Elmer Gantry garbed in doctoral robes hired from Tübingen.

Existential psychology rejects the Freudian picture of man as a creature with specific, essentially anti-social instinctive drives that are repressed, sublimated, or perverted in the process of maturation, producing many casualties, victims of the various neurotic or psychotic ailments, on the way. Instead, man is seen as a being who necessarily endows his environment with meaning; if his life circumstances are emotionally impoverished or threatening, then the individual is rigidly encased in a set of "meanings" imbibed too early for him to have any personal control or rational understanding of them, and hence they deprive him of all flexibility and capacity for growth. Alternatively, he narrows the possibilities of life still further by endowing certain manageable features of his world with an intensity of meaning they cannot justify; this is fetishism, a term which Mr. Becker suggestively widens to include anything less than a complete response to the full possibilities of objects. Either way, a sense of being located in a significant world within one's emotional grasp is achieved at the cost of a narrowing and impoverishment of life. The implication, by contrast with Freud, is that the psychologically sick—which we all are, more or less—are not people who have failed to make the necessary transition from instinct to sociability, but individuals whose psychological growth has been impaired in a society that cramps their development as rounded and spontaneous human beings by providing and encouraging only an ossified structure of emotional meaning.

Mr. Becker builds upon this basic framework in a number of essays of varying quality. The first (chiefly on fetishism in the extended sense) and the last are the most general and the most stimulating, though the latter would have benefited from a more critical appreciation of the difficulties it raises. There is a sensitive and perceptive essay on a story by Kafka, and a sensible if predictable essay on paranoia. The other two essays, both on films, merely show that existential psychology, if less bizarre than dogmatic Freudianism in the interpretation of works of art, can descend to banality. Nevertheless, much in Mr. Becker's essays is worth pondering.

J. W. Burrow

J. W. Burrow is professor of European studies at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.

Continuity of Music

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symphonies: he turned to the symphony because it was—for one lacking any disposition to the opera house—the one, the only, way he could make use of the intoxicating sound on which he had become quite drunk. As Bruckner's acquaintance with the works of Wagner broadened and deepened . . . so did his enthusiasm for this fantastic sound source, this super organ. He poured into the symphonies not only the ideas and procedures he had devised for his sacred music, but also the devotional impulse itself.

That is, for me, a much more convincing explanation of Bruckner than most of the special pleading for him as a master of symphonic architecture.

Kolodin's study of the Strauss-Mahler-Schoenberg complex is particularly rewarding. Few modern critics manage to do justice to both Strauss and Mahler; most of them are unfair to Strauss, possibly for political reasons, probably because his aggressively self-confident art makes less appeal to our rather sick generation than Mahler's neuroticism. Kolodin sees the positive values of both, without being blind to their weaknesses. He makes it abundantly clear how completely they, and the younger Schoenberg, belong to the Pan-European tradition, and he reveals what a serious blow was given to the tradition by the invention of the "method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another." The ebbing vitality of the tradition was apparent to Schoenberg half a century ago, long before today's frantic search for new styles and techniques advertised the malaise so blatantly; he imagined his discovery would revitalize music, or at least German music, for another hundred years; but, as with some modern antibiotics, the long-term effects have worsened the patient's condition. Kolodin's statement of the case against the twelve-tone method, as a line ruled across the continuity of the Pan-European language, is too closely argued to be condensed here, but he ends on a note of hope:

The laws of logic as well as the lessons of history suggest that the dilemma confronting contemporary composition must and will be resolved by a synthesis of the values presently available on both sides of the chasm (which, providentially, the dictionary defines as "the interruption of continuity"). As synthesis itself has the meaning (in surgery) of "reuniting divided or separated structures," the outcome would be to bring together the strengths latent in the Pan-European language with the one element

of the Schoenberg alternative derived from the past: the principle of "developing variations." Thus would isolation be resolved, community of impulse restored, and continuity confirmed.

It is in the nature of a vast and stimulating subject such as this that most readers will wish to add a pebble or two to the author's great pyramid of examples. I wanted to remind him, for instance, how incredibly Debussy's String Quartet is modeled on Grieg's. And also to tell him not to pay too much attention to the things Stravinsky tells Mr. Craft, such as, "I never could love a bar of [Scriabin's] bombastic music." The letters Stravinsky wrote to, and about, Scriabin in 1913 tell quite a different story.

Gerald Abraham

ANTONIN ARTAUD: Man of Vision

by Bettina L. Knapp

David Lewis, 233 pp., \$6.95.

WHETHER FOR GOOD OR ILL—and only time will tell—the influence of Antonin Artaud has been all-pervasive upon recent twentieth-century drama; the work of playwrights as disparate as Genet, Pinter, Peter Weiss, and Günter Grass would have been impossible without it. The avant-garde theater is particularly indebted to Artaud. Barbauld hailed him as a kind of modern Aristotle.

When I was at Bennington College lecturing on the history of drama a few years ago, no other name was bandied about so much as Artaud's, though I had the impression that the girls had only the foggiest notion of what he had done or what he stood for. Of course, everyone knows he "invented" the Theater of Cruelty; but since his phrase is a highly misleading one, the uninformed have been free to improvise on what it actually signifies. A book in English stating the facts in their fullness has long been in requisition, and Bettina Knapp (whose previous studies of Genet, Yvette Guilbert, and Jouvet have been excellent contributions to the history of the theater) has at last supplied it.

Its publisher, David Lewis, a newcomer to the lists, is to be highly commended. He has already issued valuable bibliographies of Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, and is due to follow them with one on Edmund Wilson. But it is with *Antonin Artaud*, an imposing and handsomely printed book, that he launches publication for a more general public, and his choice is both admirable and reassuring.

The book will be found fascinating

on at least two scores. It is an absorbing account, full of psychological interest (though Mrs. Knapp is content to let the facts speak for themselves), of the life of a man who fought all his days against physical pain, developed his talent for self-torture into a fine art, and was eventually sent to a madhouse. It is also a penetrating study of his theories and practice in the theater and literature. This is the best book Mrs. Knapp has written to date.

Undoubtedly Antonin Artaud's particular bent may be traced to the life-long aftereffects of the meningitis from which he suffered as a child and to his self-conscious inability to follow or indulge in rational speculation. His temperament was deeply religious, and like all such people who lose their God, he had to transfer his religiosity elsewhere—in his case to the theater. For a while he was identified with the Surrealists and, like them, denounced everything connected with Roman Catholicism, his early passion. But when Breton, Aragon, and other members of the group joined the Communist Party, Artaud could not stomach the move, and before long his old friends, in approved Communist style, were anathematizing him.

It was in his Theater of Cruelty that his religious proclivities found full play. Though the expression seems to imply some species of Grand Guignol, nothing could have been further from Artaud's purpose. "I employ the word 'cruelty,'" he wrote, "in the sense of an appetite for life, a cosmic rigor, an implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could not continue." This is to say that cruelty is an attribute of living itself. "It is cruelty," he went on, "that cements matter together, cruelty that molds the features of the created world." Or, as Bettina Knapp puts it, "Everything that is not dor-

