Books

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

GENERALIZATIONS may be illusions, and the man who said the scientific method consists of "proceeding from the general to the more general" may have been more of an objective reporter than a cynic. Nevertheless, I want to risk a generalization based on my own scientific investigation of the books of the past month. The generalization is that literature, in the relatively free countries, is turning more and more to a defense or celebration of the human spirit to compensate for the fact that institutions, both political and industrial, are tending to deny that spirit.

For example, the fascist Franco does his best to blow Spain to bits, and the Spanish communists, following a tortuous "win-the-war" logic that might easily result in a vicious peace, turn and rend the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists and libertarians in a way that can only nominally be called democratic. But Elliot Paul, in *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town* (Random House, $2.50), writes a gentle, loving, sun-shot, and elegiac book about the peace-loving population of Santa Eulalia, a town on one of Spain's Balearic Islands that has unfortunately fallen into the murderous paws of Mussolini's marauding mobs. And while Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco exalt the Prussian spirit, Ludwig Bemelmans, a twinkling, *gemütlich* German who came to America from the Tirol in 1914 in the hope of shooting some Indians in Hoboken, twits his Teuton brothers by publishing his 1917–18 diary, *My War With the United States* (Viking, $2.50). This diary, the artless account of young Bemelmans' experience as a private in the United States Army, turns out to be praise for the unsoldierly qualities of American officers and for the live-and-let-live attitude of the American doughboy. (According to Bemelmans, it was only the swivel-chair patriots who "hated the Hun every morning before breakfast." And, also according to Bemelmans, a goosestepping army which makes a fetish of discipline to the exclusion of all else is apt to prove incapable of the resourcefulness that wins wars.) To continue the deadly contrast between constricting institutions and freedom-loving authors, there is the example of Michael Foster's novel, *American Dream* (Morrow, $3), in which the "good guys" of America have a hard time squaring the necessities of making a living with the Whitmanesque vision that is close to their hearts. (Michael Foster believes in the America of Caleb Catlum, which, if you remember Vincent McHugh's fantasy of last autumn, is continually threatened by the America of the "petty traders.") Finally, to clinch my generalization before it is completely riddled next month by a crop of hard-guy, tough-talk, no-sentiment-or-I'll-cut-your-heart-out novels, there is Clyde Brion Davis's *The Anointed* (Farrar & Rinehart, $2.50). Mr. Davis's hero thinks he is a messiah, but he is not the sort of omnipotent madman who regards a population as something to be played with in the interests of satisfying personal megalomania. In fact, Mr. Davis's Harry ("Horseshoes") Patterson, seaman and dice artist, is a pretty good guy. Elliot Paul would enjoy his company; Ludwig Bemelmans would take pleasure in kidding him. And while Michael Foster is a little too serious to have much truck with people like Harry Patterson, Mr. Foster's own hero, the democratic John Thrall, would have given his life as a small-town Kansas lawyer to keep Mr. Davis's hero out of jail after one of his recurrent scrapes.

Elliot Paul's book is by far the best of those under discussion. Mr. Paul was once of the "lost generation" that was, in Gertrude Stein's heyday, completely nonpolitical. (Being nonpolitical himself, however, didn't keep Elliot Paul from writing the best political novel in American literature, *The Governor of Massachusetts.*) A natural-born "last Bohemian," Mr. Paul had gone from newspaper work to Paris, where he helped Eugene Jolas found the magazine *transition* as a monument to postwar incoherence and Freudian baby

talk. The boys had rather solemn fun. ("Hey! hey!" one might say, "a heyday is a hay day, even when it is Gertrude Stein's.") When the exchange went against the Paris expatriates (a heyday is not necessarily a pay day), Mr. Paul, an intransigent, refused to follow Harold Stearns back to New York or Ernest Hemingway to Africa and the pursuit of the great kudu. Instead, he moved on to the Balearic Islands, to Santa Eulalia on Ibiza. I have never seen Ibiza, but I have been to Mexico and Bermuda, and Mr. Paul's Balearic seaside town reminds me of the best features of both. It is Bermuda without the ghostly suggestion of the Oxford accent; it is Mexico *sans* buzzards, Le Corbusier architecture, the Trotsky-Stalin squabble, and he-men from Texas. Or rather, it *was,* for Mr. Paul's Santa Eulalia is no more. The fascists have got it, and their kiss is of death.

Sea-washed, sun-smitten, Santa Eulalia was the incarnation of Mr. Paul's escapist dream. The social life there was naturally democratic, even in Alfonso's and Primo de Rivera's day; it reminded Mr. Paul of "life in America thirty years ago." (Shades of the Booth Tarkington serenade, the front-porch democracy of our fathers! Has Mr. Paul forgotten that the expatriates originally went to Paris to get away from repressed, Babbittical America, whose common, democratic life was supposed to be the enemy of excellence in the arts and in culture?) Mr. Paul loved the Ibicenco people, even a couple of the rich ones. There were few natural extremists in Santa Eulalia or on Ibiza; Mr. Paul estimates that a half-dozen were natural fascists, while in between were 3000 moderates. Life was geared to the local rhythms of nature, the slow lift of a tideless sea, the almost imperceptible drift of summer into autumn, and winter into spring. The Ibicencos worked while they worked (they were manful fishermen, heroic gardeners) and while they loafed they really invited their souls. The *siesta* was a daily institution, respected even by mad dogs and Englishmen. And the meals were Homeric. No one tried to save his waistline for the junior prom or his energy for the Yale game, yet the Ibicencos were, for the most part, strong, comely folk.

Mr. Paul has packed his book with sharp thumbnail portraits of his former friends. He remembers the girls. There was Catalina, who worked at Cosmi's café. She had slate-blue eyes and honey-colored hair, a pleasing voice, and "a complete ignorance of everything that

a woman does not need to know." Because she was a blonde, Mr. Paul thinks she must have been a daughter of the Phoenicians, who once inhabited the island. The loveliest brunette was the daughter of Pere des Puig, a lonely farmer who played the accordion at town dances. The fishermen of Santa Eulalia were not merely fishermen; they were peers of William Beebe in their knowledge of the subaqueous world. Mr. Paul takes special pleasure in naming over their catches like beads on a rosary—the huge meros with red, open mouths and six jagged sets of teeth, the torpedo-shaped cirviolas, the sharp-billed bonitos, the large kranka crabs, the Balearic octopus (edible when eaten soft), the langosta, or local lobster.

Mr. Paul gets so lyrical about the fish and the girls and the flower beds of Santa Eulalia that at first you suspect him of seeing things ten times life size. But slowly his town takes possession of your senses, and you smell the brine and the flowers and the roasting coffee. And as you watch Guillermo, the blacksmith, as he cavalierly consents to finish up a job, you sympathize with Sindik, the carpenter, who earns much less than Guillermo and uses up ten times the energy. You laugh at José Ribas, the diving champion who fell into the open ditch when drunk, and you accept all things with the philosophical landowner, Don Ignacio Riquer, who refuses to exploit his tenants. And you hope against hope that Odila, daughter of one of the conspiratorial fascists, will somehow escape from her family's control and become the feminist and registered pharmacist that she wants so desperately to be.

Of course Odila did not escape; the civil war came, and the town's life, centuries old, was first interrupted, then destroyed. When news of the fascist rebellion reached Santa Eulalia a year ago from the mainland, the townsmen swore silently that they wouldn't permit political difficulties to ruin their community life. But slowly the war psychology took hold. The fascist coup was ended when the near-by loyalist mainland sent troops to wipe out the conspirators, and of course the traitors that were captured had to be summarily punished. One thing led to another; hates grew. The 3000 moderates slowly ceased to be moderate, and the dozen fascists and communists imposed their psychological patterns on the crowd. The end came when the Italians seized the island. By that time Mr. Paul had escaped on a warship and some of his old friends had put to sea on a schooner, the *Isabel Matutes*, bound for God knows where. The republicans and communists who stayed are probably in jail or dead, the victims of Mussolini's Cæsarism.

After reading *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town* you can sympathize with Spaniards who have, as an answer to Franco's illegal force, gone the whole way ideologically to Moscow; anything to beat the devil! You can sympathize even though as an American in a traditional two-party land you may not want to be compelled to go the same way yourself. Mr. Paul thinks the United States is reprehensible to remain neutral while loyalist Spain bleeds. He subscribes to the sentiment expressed in one of the poems of *And Spain Sings* (Vanguard, $1):

Franco, Franco
Pirate Franco
Sold your country
For a blank-o,
Damn you, Franco. . . .

Yet, as an American, I don't see how Mr. Paul has the right to ask our government, as a government, to intervene in any way on the side of any European faction, no matter how noble the cause. For discriminatory sanctions, if these are what Mr. Paul wants, are apt to mean war, and war means dictatorship even when waged to preserve democracy. And dictatorship means everything that Mr. Paul detests. It is no more pleasant to be totalitarianized by Woodrow Wilson, George Creel, and Newton D. Baker (or their successors in America) than it is to be totalitarianized by a fascist.

Mr. Foster's novel, *American Dream*, has something to tell us on this score. As a novel, *American Dream* has its deficiencies. It attempts to cover a whole century of United States history by means of the flash back, and it gets into some dubious romantic territory when Mr. Foster is writing about Yankee clippers and the Indian wars. The stuff on New England is pure stereotype; Mr. Foster evidently believes that practically all New Englanders are walking bundles of Freudian repressions. But when Mr. Foster is writing about a humane man in a prairie town he is first-rate. The story of how John Thrall was beaten and bulldozed because he defended conscientious objectors during the World War is as moving, in its way, as the recently told story of Senator George Norris's attempt to keep us out of the War (see this department in SCRIBNER'S for last month). Mr. Foster can't quite summarize in so many words just what

the American Dream is. But he knows what it isn't. And so does Ludwig Bemelmans, who left Germany because he didn't like the German worship of authority. Mr. Bemelmans' *My War With the United States* is not a serious book. But it has a serious undercurrent. And its tenderness and rueful humor have a special point. Mr. Bemelmans spent most of the War looking after madmen in army sanitariums on this side of the ocean. He learned a lot. One of the things he learned is that militarism compounds madness. As for *The Anointed,* that hasn't anything to do with the American Dream. It is simply good fun. Stephen Vincent Benét describes it as a slightly cuckoo *Tom Sawyer*. The point about *Tom Sawyer* may be mistaken (after all, Tom Sawyer is pretty typical as a character, while Harry Patterson is completely atypical), but it is certainly true that *The Anointed* is cuckoo.

Book Notes

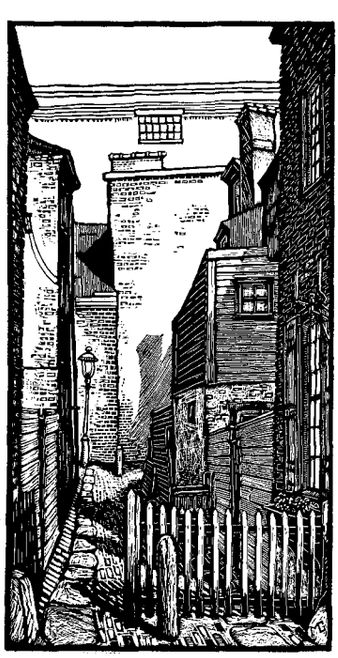
From Baltimore, where he works on *The Sun,* comes a good letter from Neil Swanson, whose *The First Rebel,* an historical novel about Pennsylvania's James Smith, has been highly praised. He says that he felt the story of the Pennsylvania rebellion deserved a place in American history and he did his best to put it there; that when he stumbled on the old records on which the book is based he stopped dead in the middle of a 200,000-word novel and went to work on *The First Rebel.*

"Now," he says, "I am trying to sort out the pieces of my orphaned novel, *The Temporary Gentleman,* from among shirts and socks, moth balls and my wife's most precious linen. Eventually, I suppose, it will come unscrambled, if the dog hasn't developed a taste for historical fiction and disposed of the most vital chapters. He disposes of practically everything else around our house."

He also informs us that if he's an author at all, he's an author by marriage, and then explains the statement. "I had just begun to write my first novel, *The Judas Tree,* when I met the most beautiful girl I had ever seen and discovered that under her red hair she had considerably more than the normal allotment of brains. When I got to page 117, I proposed—in the middle of the second paragraph. . . . I spun the typewriter a few turns and, without changing paper, wrote the lovely redhead an urgent invitation to marry me. She did.

"*The First Rebel* is a child of that marriage. My wife's aunt, Mrs. Margaret Koch of Bridgeville and Mercer, Pennsylvania, is a great-great-granddaughter of Colonel James Smith, my 'first rebel.' It was her gift of a tattered and yellowed copy of Smith's memoirs which started me on my hunt for the documents which would fill out his tantalizingly brief account of the rebellion he led. And my wife, the Margaret Diana to whom all my books are dedicated, has borne the brunt of the research. The hard work has been fun with her to share it—and I make no apology for that bit of sentimentality. Anyone who wants to know what she's like need only read *The Phantom Emperor,* for she is Maurine Dufresne.

"As I remember *Locos,* by Felipe Alfau, his 'author at the mercy of his characters' was not doomed to be troubled by them beyond the limits of one volume. From where I sit, it looks as if I'd be driven through thirty volumes by the first half-dozen characters I tried to bring to life. The difficulty is that I got interested in them myself. After finishing *The Judas Tree,* I began to wonder what would happen to the people I had unceremoniously abandoned at the end of that book. More out of curiosity than out of any intention to write another book about the Pennsylvania frontier, I began to dig into source records covering the years between the Pontiac War and the Revolution. I came upon so many untold stories that I became more and more excited. In fact I think I grew a little feverish. For before I knew it, I had outlined a series of novels and biographies designed to tell the story of the 'middle border' (principally Pennsylvania and Maryland) from the first advent of white men to the years just after the World War—a series that will carry two or three families, through their successive generations, into episodes neglected by formal historians and therefore long forgotten. If I live to finish the job, there will be twenty to twenty-five novels and five to ten biographies. If I do the job as I hope to do it, those thirty books will present the most complete picture of American development ever attempted *in terms of ordinary people.*



"And just the other day I read a pontifical critic's statement that 'historical novelists contribute nothing.' But I'm stubborn. . . . I don't know whether I'll get to my destination; but at any rate *The Temporary Gentleman* will be a sequel to *The Judas Tree. . . .*"

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Michael Foster's *American Dream* is keeping fast company with *Northwest Passage, Gone With the Wind,* and *The Years* at the top of best-seller lists all over the country. We wondered if he had any new literary plans hidden away. From Deer Harbor, Orcas Island, Washington, he writes back: "This is the first time, really, that I have ever regretted the extraordinarily quiet life which we live here, on this wilderness beach—because, in the nature of it, it precludes happenings which could possibly be described as 'up-to-the-minute information' about this somewhat dubious writer, anyway.

"Of course, from time to time, other and more agile writers come to visit us from New York, and even members of the firm; but all we ever do is go fishing. . . . So if you don't mind I am sending your letter to Mr. Bob Hunt, of the publicity department of William Morrow and Company, who, as a publicity writer, compels the profound respect of one who has spent his life in publicizing other people." To date, nothing heard from Mr. Bob Hunt of William Morrow and Company, but we're still hoping.

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Dale Warren at Houghton Mifflin has sent us what he says is pretty special