PARTISAN REVIEW

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO AMERICA?

Martin Duberman, Michael Harrington, Tom Hayden, Nat Hentoff, H. Stuart Hughes, Paul Jacobs, Tom Kahn, Leon H. Keyserling, Robert Lowell, Jack Ludwig, Jack Newfield, Harold Rosenberg, Richard H. Rovere, Richard Schlatter, Susan Sontag, Diana Trilling

TONY TANNER — John Barth

LIONEL ABEL — On MacBird

ALBERT J. GUERARD — The Journey

JOHN HOLLANDER — Four Pattern Poems

and John Malcolm Brinnin, Peter Brooks, Reuben A. Brower, G. S. Fraser, David Kalstone, Wallace Katz, George Lichtheim and Aaron Rosen

ROLAND BARTHES
The Structuralist Activity
The Diseases of Costume

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MARTIN DUBERMAN is working on a new play on American Radicalism. . . . MICHAEL HARRINGTON has been speaking on the Freedom Budget at campuses across the nation. . . . NAL is publishing Staughton Lynd and TOM HAYDEN's book on Vietnam, **The Other Side.** . . . NAT HENTOFF is writing a second novel. He does a weekly TV series on the arts for NBC. . . . **H. STUART HUGHES** is completing a study of French social thought from 1930-1960, tentatively titled **The Obstructed Path.** Harper has scheduled it for Fall, 1967. . . . **PAUL JACOB's** latest book is **Is Curly Jewish?** . . . **TOM KAHN** is the Executive Director of the League of Industrial Democracy and the author of a pamphlet, **"The Economics of Equality."** . . . The A. Philip Randolph Institute has just published the **Freedom Budget for All Americans,** of which **LEON H. KEYSERLING** was the main author. . . . **ROBERT LOWELL** will be in residence at Yale during April and May. . . . **JACK LUDWIG** teaches English at Stony Brook. . . . **JACK NEWFIELD's The New Left: A Prophetic Minority** has just come out. Mr. Newfield is now at work on a political biography of Senator Robert F. Kennedy. . . . **HAROLD ROSENBERG's The Anxious Object** has just been reissued in a new revised edition by Horizon. . . . **RICHARD H. ROVERE** is Washington Correspondent to the **New Yorker.** . . . **RICHARD SCHLATTER** is at work on a life of Oliver Cromwell. . . . Farrar Straus is publishing **SUSAN SONTAG's** new novel

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WHAT'S HAPPENING TO AMERICA

The contributions printed here are in response to the following questionnaire, which was sent to a number of people. Further comments, including some by some of PR's Editors, will be printed in the Spring issue of PR, and our readers are invited to join in.

There is a good deal of anxiety about the direction of American life. In fact, there is reason to fear that America may be entering a moral and political crisis. If so, the crisis isn't to be explained by any single policy, however wrong or disastrous. There seems instead to be some more general failure or weakness in our national life. The deterioration in the quality of American life during the last few years has been made evident in several ways. The rhetoric through which issues are created and argued and which seemed during the Kennedy years to have some relation to the seriousness of the problems facing the country has become jingoistic and question-begging. The economy seems to be out of control. The civil rights movement has become more desperate as the government has become more cautious and the white population less sympathetic. U.S. foreign policy is becoming more and more indistinguishable from John Foster Dulles', if in fact it isn't even more an adjunct of our military power. Throughout the country, there is a sense of drift and frustration and confusion—and a growing sense of urgency.

Of course there are many people who don't think conditions are so bad, who regard the idea that we are in some kind of crisis as extremist, and who in any case feel sure that our problems can be solved within the terms of our current methods and policies.

To give the discussion some focus, we suggest the following questions. But you are free, of course, to approach the problem of what is happening to America in any way you choose.

1. Does it matter who is in the White House? Or is there something in our system which would force any President to act as Johnson is acting?

2. How serious is the problem of inflation? The problem of poverty?

3. What is the meaning of the split between the Administration and the American intellectuals?

4. Is white America committed to granting equality to the American Negro?

5. Where do you think our foreign policies are likely to lead us?

6. What, in general, do you think is likely to happen in America?

7. Do you think any promise is to be found in the activities of young people today?

Martin Duberman

I'll address myself to your last question. Specifically, I'll deal with the college population, because as a university teacher that's what I know best and because such promise as commentators find these days tends to center on the renewed social consciousness represented by campus groups like SDS.

The promise, I think, is limited—not because only a fraction of students is involved with groups like SDS but because only a fraction is likely to be. The large majority of undergraduates is career-oriented, concerned with making a place inside the system rather than with correcting its abuses. Most students see their four years in college as an opportunity —a joyless duty—to begin the trek toward expertise, toward achieving the status and security of a specialist.

This does not mean that they are unaware of our society's ills. On the contrary, they are often knowledgeable about our problems: about urban decay, the civil rights stalemate, the maldistribution of income, the defects in our educational policy, the military-industrial complex, the banality of our culture. Nor is it accurate to say that they are indifferent to these problems. Some undergraduates are notably troubled; others worry from time to time about this or that issue; almost none are merely cynical or content to repeat comfortable clichés about the poor being always with us.

But awareness of social ills is not enough to move the majority of

students (or adults) into action against them. Thus while many admit sympathy for the aims of SDS, few join it. Why? In part because most undergraduates share the national value structure—its faith in the benevolence of time and the Deity, its assumption that all problems carry their own solutions, its tendency to equate normality with "moderation." And these values prevent undergraduates no less than the rest of the nation from crediting the need for immediate, large-scale readjustments.

Then, too, their very knowledge can, paradoxically, inhibit any impulse to engage in protest. For not only do they know the details of social malfunction, they also know the futility of all past movements in this country for correcting it. Believing that the past does—must—repeat itself, they discount in advance any current or future hope for the success of radical protest. One can recognize that this assumption is convenient—it allows the undergraduate to pursue his private goals on the grounds that public ones are unattainable—yet also recognize that the assumption has considerable validity. The fact does remain, however much one regrets it, that the history of radical protest in this country is the history of impotence. True, the slaves were freed—but Southern intransigence seems to have played a far greater role in producing that result than did thirty years of abolitionist agitation. True, the New Deal eventually took over some of the reforms long advocated by Socialists—but with the double result of bolstering capitalism and destroying the Socialist movement itself.

Why then do *any* undergraduates become involved in organizations like SDS? Surely those who do participate are no less knowledgeable about American history or contemporary politics than those who do not. Yet somehow in their case tasting the apple produces neither skepticism nor paralysis. Why it does not is difficult to say. For one thing, those who join SDS do not accept the national hierarchy of values, do not, that is, place order above justice, compromise above principle, property rights above human rights. But another factor, less tangible, may be more significant in explaining their activism. Let me approach it indirectly, by way of an anecdote.

A few weeks ago I asked Jack Newfield, political columnist for *The Village Voice* and author of *A Prophetic Minority,* to talk to my undergraduate seminar at Princeton about the New Left. The meeting was prolonged and intense. Afterward, I asked Newfield what his reactions were to the undergraduates. I found his answer illuminating. He had been, he said, greatly impressed with their knowledge, intelligence and seriousness. They had listened to his indictment of American life with close attention, most had acknowledged its force, had seemed to agree that "something must be done"—and even that SDS seemed a promis-

ing vehicle for doing it. Yet, judging from student comments since, not a single convert to SDS was made.

The reason was pinpointed by Newfield himself: he was struck, he said, by the absence of "personal pain." Such sympathy as had been generated for his views had been grounded in logic. Newfield and his Princeton audience had reasoned together; problems had been analyzed, arguments tested, conclusions reached. Something like a rational consensus had been achieved. But what Newfield could not communicate (and not because he lacked the eloquence) was what it means to *feel* defeated and despised, to belong emotionally to the ranks of the dispossessed.

This, I think, gets to the heart of the matter. The average undergraduate can objectively understand the plight of our underclasses, but because he can establish no linkage between it and his own experience, he does not feel that plight. He cannot make the emotional identification with the disinherited which is essential to a *sustained* commitment in their behalf.

And this is true even of those undergraduates who are themselves from lower-class homes—as they are in increasing numbers. They may have belonged materially to the underprivileged class, but not psychologically; they may have shared the hardships of poverty, but they did not share the culture of poverty. Their very presence in a college testifies to their own (at the least, their parents') high level of motivation, to their desire to participate in the benefits of the "system" and to their belief that they will be allowed to participate.

It is thus no surprise to find that most undergraduate members of SDS come not from lower- but from middle-class backgrounds. Reversing the situation of their lower-class campus contemporaries, these middle-class SDS members have managed an emotional identification with the deprived without in their own lives having actually experienced any material deprivation. How this emotional identification became established is the question of central importance. Could we answer it, we would be a long way toward a psychology of social protest. But we cannot answer it—not now, and probably not ever. There are (and will always be, I believe) two chief obstacles to achieving an answer: the reasons for "identification" are probably as varied as the number of individuals involved; and further, any investigator attempting to analyze those reasons will be hampered by his own assumptions, often unconscious, about protest activity. Given this double subjectivity we must expect a range of "explanation" running from "unresolved authority problems" to "natural compassion for suffering humanity."

The central point, in any case, is that even fewer undergraduates

have experienced the psychological sufferings of the underprivileged than have experienced the material ones. The large majority on any campus, including those from "deprived" backgrounds, has known little despair. Most undergraduates are self-confident, energetic, untried, undefeated. The world does lie before them like a land of dreams. They have not known enough private pain to identify on a gut level with the underclasses. And by the time they have—by the time, as adults, they do meet with their natural portion of affliction—they will spend their energies trying to deny and conceal it, for in America calamity is not considered part of the human condition but rather the result of personal inadequacy. Thus our adult population, even after encountering its private tragedies, is no more likely a candidate for protest activity than the campus population which has not.

One cannot wish pain upon the undergraduate; it will come soon enough. But until that experience, one cannot expect deep compassion for suffering or deep commitment to its eradication—other, that is, than in its intellectual, which is to say, its attentuated form.

Michael Harrington

1. Yes, it makes a difference who is in the White House—and particularly in the area of foreign policy.

There are obviously enormous institutional continuities in American life, as Dwight D. Eisenhower discovered when his 1952 campaign promises to repeal the New Deal were shattered by the resistance of the "system" itself. And any fundamental change in American life will require, of course, massive social and political movements and not just a charismatic personality in the Presidency. Yet, the Chief Executive makes a discernible difference and we should not let a pseudo-Marxist fatalism obscure it.

The most important expression of this difference is in foreign policy. On the domestic front, what is possible is determined by the relative political strength of the contending interests and the President will look like a fine leader if he has an absolute majority for his programs, as in 1965, and he will appear much more timid when he confronts a Dixiecrat-Republican coalition, as in 1961 or in 1967. But there is no such precision of alignment when it comes to international questions and the President can create, rather than obey, his consensus. Thus, Eisenhower could

end the Korean War, refuse the Nixon-Radford proposal of nuclear intervention in Indochina, invite Khrushchev to the United States, etc. And John F. Kennedy was able to persuade the Senate to agree to the nuclear test-ban treaty. In each of these instances, I submit, another man could have acted differently and with momentous consequences.

In saying this, I do not pretend to great optimism. My analysis suggests that it is difficult, if not impossible, to mobilize domestically in order to change a President's mind on how he should act internationally. Yet, I am convinced that Lyndon Johnson *could* end our tragic commitment in Vietnam if he wanted to. He is not the victim of his fate, or of History, but, in this instance, of his own judgment and temperament.

2. The problem of inflation was created by federal policy to a large extent and the way in which this was done makes it unlikely that the crisis will be resolved in a progressive fashion. The poor, as usual, will lose.

In 1961 when President Kennedy sought to get the economy moving again, he was persuaded by the "moderates" within his Administration (Walter Heller, Paul Samuelson) to take the route of fiscal stimulation through tax cuts. He turned down his more liberal advisers (Galbraith, trade-union economists) who argued for direct social investments in housing, schools, hospitals and the like. This decision gave the Kennedy boom its peculiar quality. Roughly twenty billion dollars a year in various types of tax cuts were distributed and, given the income structure of America, the overwhelming bulk of these funds went to the rich (both individuals and corporations). In addition, a handsome investment tax credit and a new method of computing depreciation powered a lopsided surge in capital goods production. In this setting, big business increased its profits at a rate more than double that of wages. So instead of a vast expansion, from the bottom up, of the social consumption of the people there was this top-down stimulation of the economy through profits, capital goods and private consumption.

When, however, the war in Vietnam began to escalate, the Administration faced a problem. It had made a modicum of economic progress by helping the rich to get richer. Could it now completely reverse direction and demand "equality of sacrifice" from those very corporations which it had so generously encouraged to profiteer? The answer, in Lyndon B. Johnson's Washington, was obvious. So inflation was combatted in the same way that prosperity was promoted: by securing the interests of the best-off. As a result, it suddenly turned out that 4 per cent unemployment was as far as we could go, social spending was cut back and some hundreds of thousands at the bottom of the heap were declared to be unemployable.

Meanwhile, the failure to make social investments has intensified the misery of the poor in the rotting central cities and vitiated much of the effort of the "war" on poverty which has had to contract its program of ameliorating the intolerable.

3. White America is certainly not going to "grant" equality to the Negroes. Civil rights is now an issue which challenges the economic and social premises of the nation in areas like employment, housing and education; it is no longer a confrontation with the sectional prejudices of the Old Confederacy. To provide decent, integrated housing for the black (and white) poor, meaningful jobs for all (black and white), quality, integrated education, etc., demands planned and massive social investments throughout the society. Such a radical policy will come as a result of a militant Negro movement allying itself with liberals, trade unionists, religious people in a gigantic political thrust for general change. A. Philip Randolph's "Freedom Budget" provides a program for such a movement but I suspect we will see more fratricidal conflict within the potential coalition—organized against unorganized, escapee from the white slum against those seeking to break out of the black ghetto—than unity in the near future.

4. I doubt that our tragic foreign policy will, in the immediate future, lead to World War III, primarily because China's internal crisis will not permit such a showdown. Therefore, we will perpetuate the killing in Vietnam, increase our commitment in Thailand, infuriate most of the rest of the world which will not be able to do much about its outrage, encourage ultrapatriotism and even McCarthyism within the United States, and the bill for all these accomplishments will, in effect, be presented to the black and white poor.

5. All of the foregoing is rather pessimistic. What hope I do have takes the form of this strange scenario:

The war in Vietnam will come to an end, not through the efforts of the peace movement, but because *Realpolitik* in either Washington, Hanoi or Peking demands it.

The détente with Russia will then proceed at a faster rate and result in significant disarmament moves.

Within the United States, the outbreak of relative peace will be the occasion for a fierce debate on economic and social policy. Henry Ford, the Business Advisory Council and others will propose another thirty billion dollars or so in tax cuts. The civil rights coalition, including the Reuther wing of the labor movement, will demand the construction of a new urban society. Thus, a frontlash unity will be created when the black and white poor and the organized and unorganized workers realize that their immediate self-interest can only be guaranteed through a somewhat idealistic coalition (as, for instance, the hostile national and

religious blocs within the industrial working class learned out of necessity to join together in the CIO during the thirties).

By creating a more radical and democratic atmosphere within the United States, this new political-social movement will tip American foreign policy to the democratic Left.

6. In all of this, the huge increase in the numbers, education and activity of the young will be a growing and dynamic force. It could mean, to end on a wildly optimistic note, the creation of the first mass constituency for "conscience" politics in American, or world, history.

Tom Hayden

1. There was a short period in 1963-64 when it seemed possible that necessary changes in American life might be made with at least partial, though often reluctant, cooperation from men in ruling positions. During that time Kennedy had called for a Cold War thaw and détente, the test-ban treaty was signed, civil rights and anti-poverty legislation were passed, and, in general, a more rational liberalism—with which dialogue was possible—seemed to be replacing the conservative policies of the postwar years. Certainly, the fresh new atmosphere was one of the factors motivating students—I was twenty-one at the time—to take direct action against racial injustice.

I stress, it seemed only *possible*; the promising signs even then were never more than token responses to intransigent problems. As Arthur Schlesinger's history makes clear, Kennedy was firmly committed to maintain the Soviet-American "balance of terror"; he invaded Cuba with second thoughts mainly about the practicality of the enterprise; was prepared to send troops to Laos if a political compromise was impossible; and made the fatal decision to send "advisers" to Vietnam. On the domestic side, action was always too little, too late and administered through the wrong people: it took the death of children to pass the 1963 civil rights bill; Johnson's War on Poverty has been mostly a political pork barrel.

The (symbolic) turning point, after which these tiny hopes were extinguished, came in Summer 1964 when the Mississippi Freedom

Democrats were rejected by the national Democratic party while the Tonkin Gulf "incident" was prompting the first air strikes on North Vietnam. Until that time, as Jean-Paul Sartre recalled in his 1965 letter to the anti-war movement, it was possible to envision an "imperialist recession" in American policy and, I would add, a thaw in domestic politics. Sartre felt the possibilities of reasoning with the U.S. Government were canceled out by the commitment to escalate the war. Sartre went on to suggest that a widening war might be accompanied by a continued liberalization of domestic American society (one of the few points on which Sartre and Lyndon Johnson agree). However, it now seems clear that both Sartre and Johnson misjudged, for although McCarthyism has not set in, there is a definite regression, a kind of social poisoning, taking place with each day of continued war.

The problem is that social revolution cannot be met with napalm in Vietnam and with positive support in the United States. The war may not tax the economy severely but it taxes the time and imagination of policy-makers and forces other issues into secondary importance. The war attracts support from the most fierce anti-Communist forces in the country; Johnson cannot antagonize the military-oriented congressmen by urging civil rights legislation on them. In the earlier period, New Frontier and Great Society rhetoric encouraged and supported people who wanted to do something about poverty and civil rights; the present period gives free rein to those who want an American empire.

2. In the context of the Vietnam War, America's internal colonial tendencies become more pronounced. The Negro community, once an imported colony of slaves, now is subjected to "neocolonial" control. Virtually no one living in a ghetto has power. Business, politics and social service originate "downtown." The dominant white attitude is opposed to integration, or pro-integration only when the kind and degree is determined by whites. With the preoccupation of foreign war, the white response to Negro demands is becoming more hollow and irritable. It is difficult to conceive of this society being mobilized internally for full racial equality while being bogged down abroad in wars against nonwhite people. It is more likely that a white backlash will grow at home when it is rampant in American foreign policy. ("These VC's are the toughest people we've fought since the Indians," an American commanding officer told newsmen in Vietnam this week.) And as the American presence in Vietnam becomes completely colonialist in effect, the colonial status of the ghetto is bound to be reinforced at home. The riots and "Black Power" ideology are more like anti-colonial movements than like the integrationist civil rights movement of the early sixties.

3. Many believe that the U.S. may be so affluent and powerful that it can accomplish whatever it sets out to do, be it the destruction of Vietnam, the pseudosatisfaction of the American people, the pacification of the ghetto. As put into theory by Herbert Marcuse, this view takes us a long distance intellectually beyond the traditional Marxian optimism which finds a dialectical silver lining in every cloud of oppression. However, one's sense of American power can itself become overpowering, a damper on the will to protest. In the case of Vietnam, most anti-war critics assume that the American government is capable of ending the war through a devastating escalation. I am more and more convinced, however, that no matter what kind of escalation is attempted, the U.S. will fail in its present aims in Vietnam and Asia. The National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese are too resourceful on the political and military fronts; the South Vietnamese too unstable and corrupt; the Cambodians, Laotians and Chinese too powerful a "rear" to ever be subdued. International opinion, even in non-Communist Asia and parts of Europe, generally opposes the U.S. (U Thant's position seems to reflect that of most countries in the General Assembly; Johnson was unable to draw either India or Japan into his Manila conference.) Much as the Soviet Union and European Communists may fear an expanding war, they are not in a position to check the Vietnamese revolution as they were at Geneva in 1954. Finally, I believe that most Americans, including some of the most powerful, are becoming disgusted with the war and, as escalation continues to fail, will move to force a settlement before the American position worsens. The human cost of this gradual process is terrible; but, as an NLF representative told us in Moscow, the American policy "has to become hopeless." Then withdrawal will occur.

4. The pace of this bloody process, and the situation within the United States *after* the defeat in Vietnam, depend very much on what the American protest movement does from now on. One by-product of the Cold War is that the American people are unprepared, psychologically, to accept the possibility of legitimate "communist expansion" (I share with Carl Oglesby the feeling that the revolution in Vietnam is as legitimate and decent as any in history).

The radical's dilemma is that the situation calls for defiant individual action against an unjust war (draft resistance, tax refusal, civil disobedience), but the action must be taken in a way that somehow reaches widening numbers of American citizens. This combination of defiance and dialogue, both contained in the tradition of radical direct action, is most difficult to achieve. But it is the only means to build a large body of Americans able first, to mount pressure to end the war and,

second, to interpret communism, revolution and America's "interests" in a new, more realistic light than the bitter and dangerous right-wing interpretations which are sure to accompany an American loss.

But in addition to developing wider opposition to the war, I think we must also build up pressure for solutions to domestic problems. The demand of domestic priorities will in fact be one of the major considerations of those who decide the war must be ended. If the pressure for domestic reform is great enough, it can help to bring many Americans out of the quite likely postwar trauma. We should demand that America rely more on the force of *example* than the force of arms in foreign policy and, with that, turn to democratic construction at home.

5. There is the possibility that an American nuclear attack might somehow subdue the Vietnamese while not drawing the Chinese into the war. In that case, American arrogance would be unbearable and jail would be perhaps the only honorable place to go. There is also the possibility that, rather than face a political-military defeat, the American leadership will follow the last-ditch route of General Custer and try to kill as many of "them" as possible before losing. That would turn protest into a permanent nausea. The most desirable solution, an American withdrawal based on a reluctant change of attitude, is only possible if we continue and step up protest on domestic and foreign policy issues, so that we keep open the possibilities of enlightenment of American attitudes while adding to the pressures that make change imperative.

Nat Hentoff

1. To begin with, what is "the system?" A particularly relevant description is Joseph Lyford's in *The Airtight Cage*:

> If the two circles of power, public and private, once functioned as countervailing forces against each other, they are now in important respects each other's agents. The corporation on one hand has become to a greater and greater degree a producer for government, and as part of the arrangement it professes a new sense of responsibility for the public welfare. On the other hand, the government agency has adopted the organization and technical innovations of

> the private sector and tailors its welfare programs and regulatory activities to conform to the accumulating pressures of a vast array of private interests, . . . Far from cutting away the base of the private sector, the governmental bureaucracy has become a means through which private power—from banks to labor unions—has strengthened its grip on the development of the city, and has subordinated the general welfare to the private interest.

Abroad, this symbiotic relationship is equally and pervasively clear. An example is the degree to which private interests affect the nature and focus of the American government's "aid" to Latin America.

Obviously the precedents and pressures endemic to "the system" would greatly affect any President who could be elected now. However, on certain specific issues—most notably Vietnam—the name of the man in the White House could matter. If it were Mark Hatfield, for example. Or perhaps Robert Kennedy. The reason is that in this sphere, Johnson has been driven by an irrationality that is against the essential interests of "the system." Consider the nonpublic statements of members of the economic establishment in Seattle who hope fervently the Vietnam War will end so that the time will be closer for that booming city to start trading with China.

In sum, "the system," though it hardly gives priority to human over material values, is not by its nature impelled to destroy us all, physically. Johnson may be.

2. Inflation can and probably will be managed through more resourceful and more long-range fiscal policy in contrast to the bumbling overemphasis on monetary policy remedies in recent years. As for poverty, I am surprised anyone can still ask how serious the problem is. And it's getting worse as the children of the poor, in large part, are also being left out of the economy.

The problem is certainly soluble if the nation's resources were allocated differently. (See, as a primer, the A. Philip Randolph/Leon Keyserling "Freedom Budget.") It doesn't have all the answers, and it omits a number of basic questions, but it does indicate the difference between confronting the problem and gilding it. In any case, for real change to take place in the allocation of our resources, there will have to be a new politics to elect those who will support what has to and can be done.

3. The meaning is that Johnson is not to be trusted. Nor are Rusk, McNamara, Shriver, etc. A more interesting question might be why this split did not occur with such force during the administration of Johnson's predecessor. Many intellectuals then were beguiled by style over substance. Since Johnson's style is so unattractive, it has been easier for them

to recognize the hollowness of "The Great Society." But "The New Frontier" was not that dissimilar.

4. Of course not. As some Negroes begin to move beyond civil rights into the need for radical changes in education, housing and employment policies, the fundamentally racist character of the majority of the white adult population is unmistakably revealed. In September, 1966, Senator Eastland observed: "The sentiment of the entire country now stands with the Southern people." There wasn't much hyperbole in his satisfaction. Certainly there are class elements in white resistance to "granting equality to the American Negro," but most adult Americans are also racist. Therefore, equality of opportunity is not going to be "granted." It will be achieved, if it is achieved at all, by counterpower, starting with Black Power.

5. On the assumption that Johnson will be our leader until 1972, our foreign policies will lead us—in Asia and in Latin America—into an increasing neo-imperialist role. The cant will be different from that of nineteenth-century imperialists—though not all that different—but the result will be persistent attempts to manage the political and economic directions of the underdeveloped countries. In this conflict with nationalistic imperatives—a more crucial factor than China's capacity for expansionism—there will be more killing. And the unthinkable will be increasingly possible. We may be able to save ourselves and much of the rest of the world through new politics. A refusal, for one thing, to vote for anyone who supports the Vietnam War or its equivalent—no matter how "enlightened" the rest of his record. If there is to be a New Left of any effectiveness, it will have to be based on a politics of confrontation, not accommodation. I would not, for example, have voted for Paul Douglas in 1966. As for 1968, although I do not think the concept of a third party is viable in the long run, there ought to be a candidate for the Presidency—perhaps Benjamin Spock—who could at least clarify and dramatize the extent of opposition to our present foreign policies.

6. What I hope might happen is the politicalizing of dissent on the basis of confrontation politics with basic alternatives for foreign and domestic policies. As for what is "likely" to happen, I expect more dispiriting, poorhouse welfarism at home and more messianic miiltarism abroad, with the vast majority of our citizenry being "the good Germans" of these decades.

7. Most of what hope I have is in the activities of young people today. I would be more heartened—and I recognize how presumptuous it is for someone over forty to make this point—if there were mass refusals to cooperate with the draft in any way whatsoever. But more and more

of the young at least are sensitized to public lies. The question now is the degree to which they can politicalize their revulsion. And the degree to which we can.

H. Stuart Hughes

In thirty years of concern with American politics and American society, I have never been so close as I am now to despairing of my country. The war in Vietnam has brought to the surface the latent ugliness in American life—the scorn for the weak and racially diverse, the acceptance of violence as something normal, the lack of imagination about the suffering of others—in short, a profound emotional and ethical insensitivity. When pressed, nearly every American of discernment will admit that the war is wrong; but he will add that there is nothing that can be done about it. Our people seem to be settling into a protracted neocolonial conflict as though it were their natural habitat.

Which is not to say that the war in Vietnam cannot be defended in rational terms. The Johnson-Rusk line of reasoning makes perfect sense if one grants its assumptions. And by these I do not mean the dubious analogy with Munich or the domino theory of subversion. I mean, rather, the idea that there must be a leader of the world and that this position, by right of both power and virtue, belongs to the United States. Now that the Soviet Union has fallen behind in the armaments race—and has simultaneously turned toward moderation in its foreign dealings—China remains as the only challenger. In the Administration's reasoning the real point of the Vietnam struggle is not the defense of a small people against Communism; for the President and his advisers are quite prepared to see that people sacrificed in the process. The real point is that Vietnam marks the first round in a contest with China for world leadership.

In such a perspective, major reform at home has to be slowed down—as it has been in our country during all four of our twentieth-century wars. In the name of national unity, the existing system of economic power must be endorsed; the "Great Society" (if the goal indeed still exists) must slip as best it can into the interstices of a going concern;

poverty and Negro rights must come second to national assertion on the foreign scene.

There can be scarcely any meeting ground between this perspective and a way of thinking such as my own, in which the problem of poverty —at home and in the underdeveloped countries—takes first place, in which the notion of world leadership is heady nonsense and in which the idea of holding an American bridgehead in Asia ranks as an affront to nonwhite peoples everywhere and a dangerous anachronism in the third quarter of the twentieth century.

To the extent that American intellectuals think as I do, the lack of understanding between them and the Johnson Administration is perfectly natural. We and the President are living in two different ideological worlds.

This radical incompatibility was obscured for a time by the mediating rhetoric of the Kennedy era. Particularly in the last months of his presidency, when he sketched a new foreign policy in his American University address and when he signed the limited test-ban treaty, Kennedy seemed to be coming around to the point of view of his peace-minded critics. But the Kennedy rhetoric never cut deep enough. In what his biographers have described as his finest hour—the Cuban missile crisis—he was more concerned about winning a trial of strength with the Soviet Union than with the military threat the missiles posed to the security of his country. And his insistence on American primacy in the space race suggested that he was not above treating this vast expenditure of funds and scientific effort as an international sporting event.

The continuity of the space program from one administration to another and the fact that so few Americans find anything wrong with it epitomize the nationalist reflexes that seem to have become second nature among our countrymen. They further explain why it was comparatively easy for Johnson to shift over from the cautious approaches toward peace which he had inherited from his predecessor to a policy of steady military escalation. Nationalism among small peoples—and especially among recently humiliated and newly liberated peoples—may well be an emotional necessity; for a country as rich and as strong as ours it is a luxury that the world cannot afford.

I am writing this from Paris. From here the United States looks very big and very threatening. I had occasion the other day to talk with a French friend just returned from America; his last trip to our country had been two years ago. Besides his anxiety about the war, what had now struck him most was the great leap forward—in power, in riches, in self-confidence—that the United States seemed to have made in the brief

interval between his two visits. He, as I, had the impression of a productive and scientific machine of unparalleled strength and complexity, which was under the guidance of men of little wisdom, and in grave danger of going out of control.

Such a prospect is not new in our history. Several times in the recent past our national power has gotten ahead of our ability to manage that power. But these periods in which we have thrown our weight around on the international scene have been followed by pauses for reflection and for bringing official thought abreast of a new reality—such were the final months of Kennedy's Presidency. Today, when the last intellectual dissenters have left the Administration, it is hard to see where a similar corrective will come from.

Possibly from our young people—but I doubt it. America's radical youth prefers to opt out of the national consensus rather than to find realistic ways of influencing it. And in the present situation I cannot blame them. While the violent rhetoric of so many of the young grates on my nerves, I appreciate the desperation behind it. To be a young and sensitive and intelligent American today is not an easy experience. Or rather, it is so easy to join the national rat race and swallow the national bilge, and so difficult to find an alternative that has real promise for the future. As a teacher and a father I can think of no reassuring answers to offer the young. I can suggest only that they not be frightened, that they stick to what they believe and that they try to live in such a way that the world outside will know that the America of President Johnson is not the only America there is.

Paul Jacobs

Madness surrounds us on all sides. In New York City, 60 per cent of the population expressed their deep racist fears by voting against a Civilian Review Board which called for only the mildest form of accountability from the police. Across the country, in California, one-third of the population in the state voted, frantically, against those State Supreme Court justices who had ruled unconstitutional a referendum repealing a law against housing discrimination.

The Negroes are becoming frantic, too, in response to what they

perceive, correctly, as the refusal of the white world to allow integration in housing and schools. During the very worst days of the Los Angeles uprising, for example, the schools in the ghetto areas remained untouched. Indeed, less damage was done to the school buildings than happens in a normal weekend. But today the schools of California have become battlefields with students fighting students and teachers demanding that the police be stationed in the hallways.

Domestically, the country is out of control on the racial question, embarked upon a collision course, a heading for disaster. The Mexican youth are getting restless in their barrios inside the cities and out in the country the Indians on the reservations have started thrashing about, making demands for equity from the white society which has suppressed them for so many years.

Can it be that we are becoming an American version of South Africa as the notion of integration seems to disappear from the national discussion? Perhaps, Harlem and Watts, the South Side of Chicago and Hunters Point in San Francisco are to be the American version of the townships from which the poor, unskilled Negroes travel out to work in the white sections of the cities. And standing between the American townships and the whites will be the police, more frightened than they have ever been, quicker to shoot. (Only a few months ago, in Los Angeles, two police officers had to be rescued from an angry crowd in a housing project by the project police. The crowd had torn the microphone out of the police car so the officers couldn't radio for help and were getting ready to beat up the officers for allegedly shooting a boy. If they hadn't been rescued, they might have been killed by the crowd and if they had been killed, isn't it possible that a massacre, an American Sharpsville, might have taken place afterwards with the police and the Negroes intent on wiping each other out?)

For the poor in America, the gap between them and the rest of society grows greater. Anyone who is still unemployed today during the Vietnam War has very little possibility of ever being employed in any job which is not at or below the poverty level. And gradually, the phony "war" against poverty is dying out as the real war in Vienam escalates. Now, the minority poor of America must remain in their enclaves, with the old tradition of upward mobility at an end, for there are no unskilled jobs to provide the first exit out, as the stockyards once did for the Poles, the railroads for the Chinese, the garment trades for the Jews and the docks for the Irish. In fact, the Negroes and Mexicans are worse off in 1965 than they were in 1960.

But in the meantime, the TV commercials for detergents still urge

all of us to "Think White! Get White! Stay White!" as they plug the chemicals which will make our clothes whiter and therefore better.

Years ago, in a flight of fantasy, I conjured up the notion of getting rich by glamorizing the rectal goods industry. I wanted to do for rectal ailments what the Modess company had done for sanitary napkins so that the millions of people now suffering from hemorrhoids would no longer need to slink into drugstores and whisper, out of the corner of their mouths, that they wanted to buy some product called "Preparation H." My product was going to be called "Gallant" and for the truck driver market, a sizable one in this area, I was going to sell the same ointment under the name "Thug."

But today, reality is wilder than my fantasy. A product is being manufactured called "Cornhusker, the hand lotion for men whose hands are as rough as the work they do." "Cornhusker," I'm assured, "isn't a sissy smelling lotion" but one for "real men."

Yes, America has an extraordinary capacity to absorb, vulgarize and corrupt everything, including its political and psychic opposition. The newscast denouncing the "professional rebel," Mario Savio, is sponsored by one auto company advertising its latest model, "The Rebel," or another company, featuring a pretty girl shouting, "Join The Dodge Rebellion!"

And "Take A Trip! Buy a Psychedelic Dress!" proclaims the department store just as no deb party today can be counted a success without a quota of leatherjacket hippies brought in to entertain the guests with their queer antics. Indeed, no hippy affair is a success today without its quota of straights, standing on the fringes and imitating genteelly what is done in the center of the stage. So, the Frug moves up to the top from the bottom and then seeps down through the middle, and the whole country is caught up in the new mode within days. Tim Leary is a success everywhere, a socko in the Village and in Brookings, South Dakota, too.

Thus, New York tries to follow San Francisco where men queue up to get their shoes shined by girls with bare breasts and in a nightclub women queue up to bare their breasts in the nightly "Amateur Topless Contest." And when in San Francisco, the Mayor tried to crack down on the topless craze, it was the businessmen of the city who put the pressure on him to let the clubs alone; for the good people, the Rotarians, Lions and conventions of doctors, real-estate salesmen and bankers, were flocking to the city from all over America to have weak drinks served them by girls with tiny pasties on their nipples.

The madness of the country is reflected, too, in its President, who exhorts the soldiers in Vietnam to bring home the coonskin to put on the country's wall while piously speaking of peace. Violence in our cities

must be eliminated, for such violence solves no problems, says the President in the very same speech calling for a greater effort made to destroy the foreign enemy. And the white Communists of the world become our allies against the yellow ones; together, the white Communists and capitalists treat with contempt the few brown cohorts they have and the black nations who remain outside the conflict.

The war in Vietnam has brought about other possible parallels, too: on an island off the coast of South America, an ex-Nazi who admits responsibility for the death of thousands of Jews explains to a TV interviewer that if he were tried now as a war criminal in the U.S., he would be acquitted for now the Americans would understand better what he had done since their soldiers are doing somewhat the same kinds of things, too.

The analogy is one which, obviously, isn't accurate and yet a gnawing doubt remains, for in South Africa the liberals always deplored Apartheid but ended by choosing it as the lesser evil over black rule. And in Germany, many decent people deplored how the Nazis behaved but believed they had no choice but to support their country against its "enemies."

What might happen in America, also, if we lost the war in Asia? Most of us never think of that possibility, always assuming it will just drag on and on until we win and a compromise peace is arranged. We have never lost a war yet but perhaps we will this time, perhaps this is a war we cannot win. Then? How would the country take such a defeat? Would it turn on those inside for whom there is such a deep hate?

I am deeply pessimistic about the U.S. today. Partly, this pessimism has been brought on by what I have been learning about how internalized and institutionalized are racism and contempt for the poor. But while I am politically pessimistic, for I believe the will to change is missing, I am personally optimistic about the youth: I believe the young are healthy and hopeful despite their lack of ideology, despite their arrogance as they come *de nova* to the world of politics, despite their rudeness, despite their romanticizing of the poor and the Negro. And if they have done nothing else, they have been a constant reminder to their elders about the need to consider and make moral decisions, and some of their elders, including me, needed such reminders.

Tom Kahn

What is happening in America seems to be a retreat on the racial front combined with a resurgence of economic conservatism, albeit within the framework of a Keynesian consensus. A sadder conjunction of forces at this point in our political life is hard to imagine. And it is all the more tragic because, despite arguments about cycles, it was largely avoidable.

When Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick contend that there has always been a backlash—or that there never was a frontlash—they are right and wrong. True, the Negro's claims have always been resisted; and true, the frontlash never went far enough. Still, there is something qualitatively distinctive about the current counterrevolutionary drift: it does not bespeak a weariness with the Negro, as did Northern sentiment following the Civil War; nor is it a simple surfacing of anti-Negro racism.

Rather, if the elections are a sign, we are seeing the Negro and the poor getting the short end of a stick wielded by a curious spectrum of discontented forces.

On the one hand are the backlashers. They may have been around in 'sixty-four, but they were smashed politically. This time, they made gains under the Republican banner—not only in California and Georgia, but in Illinois and New York. Where they could not vote directly for a racist, the backlashers simply voted anti-Johnson—against "centralization of government," in Wallace's words, against "moving too fast," in Reagan's. They wanted to cut Lyndon Johnson down to size.

And in this, they had help from the Left. To say that Stokely Carmichael and the Black Power advocates caused the debacle is silly; they don't have that much power. It is enough to say that what they could do, they did. In the process, they fed a deep social hunger, not for racial equality and peace but for conservatism and selfishness. Ironically, the New Left won in California and Illinois but lost badly in Lowndes County, where 80 per cent of the population is black. Black Power did not create the riots, but to the extent it justified them, it compromised and fragmented the civil rights movement—which may be a partial explanation of why one-third of the Negro vote in Alabama reportedly went to Mrs. Wallace.

Elements in the peace movement also wanted to cut Johnson down

to size, some convinced that the Vietnam War is the outgrowth of his personal egomania, others, anarchistically oriented, sharing Wallace's view that power and society have to be broken into smaller, more manageable pieces. Having badly misunderstood what the election and the country are about in the first place, the "New Politicians" have merely demonstrated anew the ineffectuality and disorientation of much of what passes for a Left in America.

What will be the net results of this blind revolt against Johnsonism?

A real clamping down on the Negro is unlikely. A slight slowdown in administration and enforcement of civil rights legislation is possible, but the legislation will not be repealed. Congress can get away with withholding further legislation but not with cutting back.

The Negro will feel the squeeze less as a Negro than as an "Other American." That is, he has been hit along with the general progressive movement, with the various groups that benefit from pushing the Great Society programs. With a Republican gain of forty-seven House seats (a vote switch of ninety-four), what happens to the Great Society voting balance in the Ninetieth Congress?

In this election, there was one fundamental issue, one basic difference between the Johnsonites and the anti-Johnsonites: Will we have social programs despite the Vietnam War or must these programs be cut back in the interest of the war? The Johnsonites said we can have guns and butter. The anti-Johnsonites said that while the war is on, we have no money for a Great Society. For some time now, New Leftists and sections of the peace movement have essentially sided with the anti-Johnsonites on this issue: both insist that the War on Poverty must be dependent on the war in Vietnam, that we must choose one or the other. To subject the black and white poor to such a referendum is a cruel and dangerous course, especially when no very clear program for peace is put before the voters. Not surprisingly, this course played straight into the hands of the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition.

Your editors ask, "How serious is the problem of inflation?" It is profit inflation, not any shortage of goods in great demand. It eats at the wages of blue-collar workers and the working poor; it redistributes income upward. What will the bright new faces of the Republican Party do about it? Who—Rockefeller, Romney, Reagan *or* Brooke?

You ask, "How serious is the problem of poverty?" Very serious. And if we can ever, after this election, get a debate going, not on *whether* we can abolish poverty but *how*, we will discover that we have installed in office a new breed of conservative Keynesians (liberal only in comparison to their grandfathers) to whom massive tax cuts rather than massive

social investment are the ultimate in government responsibility. How tragic that, at precisely the moment when the Negro community has developed a strong economic consciousness—witness A. Philip Randolph's *Freedom Budget for All Americans*—there is a Republican upsurge to which some liberals and radicals lend themselves. (*Note*: In case further documentation is required for a theme which the reader may find tiresome, note that Columbia's Seymour Melman, aided by Robert Scheer, whose "Community for a New Politics" played such an inglorious role in the California disaster, has mounted a small campaign against the Freedom Budget because it makes no independent judgment regarding defense expenditures in the next ten years. If the poor would have the support of Messrs. Melman and Scheer, they must first support these gentlemen's foreign policy line.)

You ask, "What, in general, do you think is likely to happen in America." My answers to your other questions can be summarized in this reply.

I do not know what is likely to happen, but I have a pretty good idea of what had better happen if this country is going to resolve any of the crises that prompt this discussion. The prerequisite for positive change is the reconstruction of the liberal coalition that has suffered internal and external damage in this election. This is also the prerequisite for the building of a genuine democratic radical movement—without the kooks, for their price is too high. Negroes, the poor, the slum-trapped, and other truly hurt people in America cannot afford them. They need the Freedom Budget and a broad movement to get it, the kind of movement represented by the 1963 March on Washington. The possibilities are there.

It is my guess that the political situation will be different in 1968. I can bring nothing new to the many speculations as to the consequences of the war's continuing until then. But it seems probable that in 1968 Lyndon Johnson will wish to retain the Presidency and that, if the Ninetieth Congress lives up to our dismal expectations, he will go to the American people with a message something like this: "In 1966 you made a mistake and saddled yourselves with a do-nothing Congress. I know that you don't like this war any more than I do. But the Republicans are taking the cost of it out of your hides. Let us renew the task we began four years ago. Let us get America moving again—war or no war!"

If the war ends before then, so much the better for Johnson, and the rest of us. The point is: 1968 will be a new watershed in American politics. The restoration and strengthening of the liberal–labor–civil-rights coalition, of the Democratic Left, will be decisive.

Leon H. Keyserling

1. Our whole history as a nation and a people shows that it matters tremendously who is in the White House. The argument that any given President at any given time is bound to respond in only one way to the problems confronting him is mistaken, and dangerous in the extreme. It defies the whole theory of a democracy—which is that the actions of any President shall be subjected constantly to the watchful evaluation of an informed people. Such an evaluation would be meaningless if it were to be assumed that the President had no choices.

Insofar as your question implies that President Johnson should not act as he is acting if he were not "forced" to do so, I do not want my answer to imply criticism of what the President is now doing. An evaluation of the particular policies of President Johnson is beyond the scope of my answers to your questions. But those who may disagree with any part of current policies, after responsible examination of them, should not be stopped from criticism on the spurious ground that there is no room for policy choices.

2. The problem of inflation is a real one, but I think that it is being grossly exaggerated. Far more important than what is happening to prices is what is happening to real per capita production of goods and services, whether this growing volume of goods and services is being divided equitably among our people, and whether a sufficient portion of them is being allotted through national policies to the great priorities of our domestic social needs. The exaggerated stress upon the problem of inflation is doubly injurious because, in the name of fighting inflation, we have actually been adopting policies, such as the rising interest rates policy, which inflate the fat and starve the lean.

With 34,000,000 Americans now living in poverty, with far less progress being made toward its reduction than our resources would permit, and with the programs thus far launched in the war against poverty being so tragically inadequate, the problem of poverty is by far the greatest single problem confronting the nation and the people at large.

3. My first comment in response to this question is that the split is being greatly exaggerated, especially by some leading intellectuals who are behaving very irresponsibly. Some of them, as indicated by their writings and their speeches, have been misusing their intellectual capabilities to magnify every accomplishment and obscure every shortcoming in the

Kennedy Administration which they served, and this does a disservice to the late President Kennedy, whose place in history can stand the test of objective analysis. Correspondingly, some of the same people are indulging in the most disingenuous kinds of attacks upon the Johnson Administration, inconsistent on their face. I have been very disappointed to observe this performance on the part of some of the academic intellectuals, whose passing experience in the public service seems to have robbed them at least temporarily of the capacity for the dispassionate observation which should be their main contribution on the American scene.

By this I do not mean to imply that there is not some conflict between the Administration and the intellectual community. If conducted fairly and objectively, this conflict, taking the form of reasoned criticism of specific Administration policies, is a great asset in a democracy. Kept within appropriate bounds, it should not be discouraged.

4. In theory white America is committed to granting equality to the American Negro, and heartening progress has been made on this front in recent years, on the front of civil rights and liberties proper, but relatively little progress thus far on the equally important front of economic opportunity and social justice.

The difficulty, especially with respect to the second front, is that the programs needed to move forward on this front touch immediately and closely upon the economic interests and ideologies of those who are relatively well positioned; and when they are thus put to the test, they do not respond as generously as when they are asked to commit themselves only in theoretical terms.

Perhaps the most important point to be made is that adequate progress on the economic and social front requires struggle, peaceful to be sure, and cannot be accomplished merely by an easy consensus. This is the whole history of this kind of progress in this country.

5. Broadly speaking, there are too many imponderables in foreign policy for some people who are quite remote from responsibility to be as sure as they profess to be that their views are correct. Our foreign policies, like our domestic policies, should always be subject to critical evaluation by those who take the trouble to inform themselves adequately before they speak. In the main, I feel that our policies in the international sphere reflect the genuine desire of the American people for enduring peace, and that we are painfully and slowly making some progress in this direction. We may all wish that the progress were more certain and more rapid, but it is easier to say this than to accomplish it.

6. I remain entirely optimistic about the future of America. No na-

tion, either with or without bloodshed, has made anything approximating the progress that we have registered during the past generation. We have made the greatest progress toward lifting living standards, toward improving income distribution, toward enlarging the liberties of repressed minority groups, and toward maintaining not only political democracy but also an economic and social democracy in which people on the basis of their efforts and abilities can move upward and are less hampered than elsewhere by class, caste or original status.

This is not to say that we are doing as much as we should be doing now, that we are planning adequately for the future, or that we should rest on our oars. But if we take courage in what we have done, and learn from experience how to do better, the combination of our economic strength and institutions should continue to carry us forward in the years ahead.

7. There is always promise to be found in the activities of young people. They are less inhibited than others, less bound by the past, fresher and more fertile in their thinking, and more concerned about the future because they have more future to look forward to. Their activities, including those critical of the status quo, should be encouraged.

At the same time, being young does not excuse from the exercise of responsibility. There is a considerable tendency, among a substantial portion of our young people, to engage in lazy protests, unaccompanied by sufficient emphasis upon enlarging their store of relevant information and fusing their protests with affirmative programs. It is easy to understand this trend, particularly in view of an international situation which makes young people particularly dissatisfied with what the future holds in store for them. Nonetheless, I believe that, as they assume the task of citizenship, they should prepare themselves better for these tasks than many of them are now doing.

Robert Lowell

1. Yes, nothing could matter more than who is in the White House. It's not like the arts. Two very foolish novelists with opposed beliefs or temperaments would write equally foolish novels, but two equal-

ly foolish presidents would have widely differing effects on our lives, the difference between life and death. Yet a great president somehow honors his country, even if what he effects is debatable. I suppose Lincoln was our most noble and likable president. The country is somehow finer for having had him, yet much that he accomplished was terrifying and might have been avoided by the run-of-the-mill Douglas. I wish Stevenson had been elected. Maybe he would have done nothing (I don't believe this) but at least he would have registered what he was doing. I can't imagine him not losing a night's sleep over Hiroshima, even if he did drop the bomb. I think he might not have.

2. Inflation is over my head, but I think we can never again forget poverty. Man throughout time has been very lighthearted about poverty in a way that we can never, with decency, be again.

3. I don't know what the split between the President and the intellectuals *means*. Something very horrifying about our country has been brought home to us. I don't know how profound this is, or how much it is a passing twinge of remorse, how much is due to Johnson and how much was almost inevitable with almost any president. We've swallowed worse things than Vietnam, yet it's hopeful that we are now appalled. We may be going through a deep change of heart as to what can be allowed to nation-states, or maybe our present mood is only a sort of temporary, superficial and hangover "profundity."

4. As far as honor goes, I think white America is committed to granting equality to the Negro. How much equality actually will be granted is another darker and unanswerable question.

5. I think our foreign policies are quite likely leading us to the third and worst world war, not right away probably, but over a stretch of time, within twenty or thirty years. When we have said the worst we can about our American foreign policy, and I think as citizens we must say this, still it must be admitted that the future depends on other countries besides ourselves. Who can be happy, when he looks at the great contenders?

6. I have mostly answered this question. I have a gloomy premonition though that we will soon look back on this troubled moment as a golden time of freedom and licence to act and speculate. One feels the steely sinews of the tiger, an ascetic, "moral" and authoritarian reign of piety and iron.

7. Doom or promise must be found in youth. I think perhaps the young hope for things that neither we nor any previous generation dared hope for. But how much like us, and what a slender reed, they often seem!

Jack Ludwig

The President of the United States, a political partisan, whose partisan policies must be passed by a partisan and divided congress, should be, on the level of policy, disinterested (or appear disinterested) and nonpartisan (or appear nonpartisan). He is like a judge pressured by any number of unambiguously partisan advocates—the men in his cabinet, the Senate, the House, governors, industry, unions, Europeans, Asians, South Americans. Ideally he listens to all. And identifies totally with none. Ideally, again, he seeks unanimity but skirts uniformity. Tries to keep unity without muffling dissent. Argues his cause but doesn't claim infallibility. Rewards his supporters but doesn't wipe out his opposition, punish it or starve it. His great asset is a certain mystery: nobody should be able to tell exactly which advocated position the President ultimately will take. Looking for clues one should find the Secretary of State saying something slightly different from the Secretary of Defense, or the Army Chiefs of Staff, or the CIA, or the CIO or, to be ideal again, the Vice-President. Those who do disagree with the President must not be classed as children (who need paternal education), or fools (who need wising up) or knaves (who need public chastisement). Nor must dissent be taken as proof of brainlessness, gutlessness or Nervous Nelly eunuchoidia. A student on any campus must be able to act foolishly or speak outrageously without inviting the President's scorn, the Vice-President's responsibility speech or a local fink's mimeographed-in-Washington bore job.

There is nothing ideal about Lyndon Johnson as President. He is at once partisan, cranky, brutal and castrating. His "Nervous Nellies" speech belongs to an old American archetype, the clean good unswayed unmuddled decisive man-of-action rounding up a posse of real men for an unquestioned right cause. That the Chicago speech carried overtones of a lynch mob was certainly not Johnson's intention, yet the signs were unmistakably there. Nor, when he says he will not force the American boys in Vietnam to fight with one or two hands behind their backs is he trying to sound like MacArthur trying to cross the Yalu; but that's where we are with Johnson now; that's where we've been ever since the decision to escalate was made. Once, let me recall, Rusk was buried to the nostrils in a no-waves posture—I mean before Johnson became President; now Rusk makes that speech about the rape of Czechoslovakia, and

Munich, and barely holds himself back from unleashing Chang Kai what's-his-name. Once, let me recall again, McNamara was an eager beaver businessman delighted to be part of a team, and put his good know-how to work streamlining the services, and computerizing materiel and closing navy yards; now he and Lodge huddle periodically in Saigon, and the result is another one or two hundred thousand men sent to interdict, punish aggression, pacify, defoliate or die. Once, too, the Pentagon, the escalation and deterrence theorists, the weapons experimenters, the lunatics preferring to see their war games played with real rather than digital men were a rather fierce extreme on the margin of viable alternatives; now reality has shorn them of their dreams: North Vietnam may soon be, as LeMay hoped, bombed back into the stone ages, and many a young officer may yet weep that nothing was left for him to burn. Not even a gentle fuzzy open-minded detailman for ideas could be countenanced: he had to be classified as Lady Bird's culture boy, not Lyndon's, and his place had to be taken by a Philistine like Roche, whose position on Vietnam, if nothing else, read good—to the CIA if not to intellectuals and academics he might be expected to liaison with.

Two clichés about Lyndon Johnson are around: one, that he is an arm-twister, the other, that he has no style (i.e., no Kennedy style). He *is* an arm-twister, and he has plenty of style. Blinder than most to civil liberties, he has accomplished more than any other president for civil rights. His Gettysburg Address of a few years back was as unambiguous and passionate a declaration (of the need for justice, and not patience) as any politician has yet made on the Negro revolution. His attack on the white backlash a day or so before the recent elections was courageous and tough. Whether he is or isn't genuine in his feeling for the Mexican-American and Indian kids he taught and evidently lived with, his tears have helped push through a poverty and an education program they and others will benefit from. When his demagoguery calls for the "boys" to bring back "a coonskin they can nail to the wall," his sentimentality over "the old folks" helps pass medicare legislation.

I don't know if John Kennedy could have done as well with his Congress. No one will ever know if the strategy of biding time till the end of a session neared, and an election was imminent, and the President's help was needed, and could be guaranteed only by a series of right votes for his causes—nobody will be able to demonstrate that Kennedy's Congress would have ended (as he thought it would) with a whirlwind of accomplishments and triumphs connected to a simple causality. You vote *with* me, I campaign with you. Kennedy's style could have no other strategy, I submit. That mystery I referred to earlier was the essence of Kennedy's Presidency: he was skeptical, even cynical, hid his hand, kept

partisan advocates off balance, never lost his cool. Though Johnson was, like Kennedy, born into the twentieth century, it's to be doubted if Johnson *and his style* would have *chosen* to be born at this time (as Kennedy in his inaugural claimed). The arm-twist, the buddy-buddy hug, the aside-whisper, the power press, the threat open, the threat veiled, are as old as cloakrooms, and not really in and of this time. Kennedy's cool might have prevented Congress from knowing what he really wanted, or, more accurately, I think, might have allowed Congress to pretend it didn't know what he really wanted. Going to a Rusk or a McNamara or a Freeman or a Vice-President Johnson, a Mansfield or a Humphrey might have given one a clue, but might conceivably have revealed significant shades of difference.

Lyndon Johnson's boys speak with one voice. Not only the unnecessarily abject and voluntarily self-effacing Hubert Humphrey prates the OK word. Vietnam has wrought a monolith. The results are bad enough already: the Right has identified itself with bombing and escalation, the invasion Ky talks about, the nuclear attacks poor sad dreary old Ike wakes to prattle. Johnson has not backed the latter two policies, yet it's clear that the analogies the deterrence-minds find in "Chicken" and "Minsk-Pinsk" must never exclude the possibility of extreme tactics. We must never *tell* the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese that we won't invade, or drop the bomb, otherwise we lose an important deterrent; at the same time we must never let invasion and the bomb be only words and threats, and must never disallow the possibility of actually *doing* the thing we can't possibly *conceive of doing,* etc., etc., etc.

On the principle of "those of you who are not with me are against me" Johnson has rallied the right-wing lunatics to his side, whether he wants them there or not; on college campuses it is they who throw eggs and manhandle the "Vietniks," the beards, the "unwashed," the draft-dodging neophyte Nervous Nellies. I heard an NCAA commercial between halves of a football game point to collegiate athletics as an excellent counterforce to protest movements on college campuses! Lyndon Johnson didn't write the commercial, of course; his destructive partisanship did, I suggest, encourage its being written.

Kennedy's style could deal with something as nerve-shattering as a Cold War; time and time again he cautioned against impatience, against seeking solution in violence which, as every Pentagon man knows, is the shortest distance between any two points. When he said he would not have chosen to be born into any other century but this one he meant it to include the tensions of a cold war, the pressures of an anticolonial revolution, a Negro revolution, a technological revolution, population escalations, the whole bit. And his cool could deal with hysterics, inflated

budgets and rhetorics. Now the rhetoric, the hysteria, the lack of cool, is concentrated on winning, or not-losing, on leaving-while-forever-committed, on talking peace, firing up for war, mentioníng eventual troop withdrawal while boasting of kill ratios, the permanence of installations, the vast numbers who might yet be brought into the battle in Vietnam. A short while ago two hundred thousand men would have seemed inconceivable, yet four to five hundred thousand may be in Vietnam by this time next year. In the President's counsels not a voice has questioned any figure, no matter how high. And the commitment to Vietnam is equated with loyalty, love of country, responsibility, manliness, constructive policy, maturity, true understanding of the Communist conspiracy—everything, in short, the Right has been saying all along.

The cliché of "responsible alternatives" has been used (by Humphrey, of all people) to try to kill, or mock, dissent. The frat boy, the jock, the crewcut, the YAF are Johnson's boys now. I need not point out where that leaves the young. The bright question-asking anti-jingo easy Kennedy-worshipping young man will do what his counterpart did in the bad McCarthy-Eisenhower days—say screw you to the Establishment. His dissent will be ridiculed and may go underground, or, if things get worse, be stilled. His mind will not be available to those government departments which need independent tough criticism most. Unanimity, uniformity, infallibility, partisanship need Moyers; if there hadn't been a Moyers, Johnson's style could certainly have created one. That is Johnson's effect upon the young.

Jack Newfield

1. I think that within a narrow policy range it matters only slightly who is in the White House. Greater powers reside in nonelective elites like the mass media, industry, unions, the church and the permanent technocratic bureaucracy. But I think it does matter considerably in the realm of character and style who is in the White House. Existence alters essence. The personal, nonpolitical qualities of Castro, Churchill and de Gaulle have had a profound effect on their countries. Johnson's personal qualities—his egotism, his deceitfulness, his pettiness, his vindictiveness, his provincialism—are poisoning the country. To see the President

on the seven o'clock news each night, and know he is lying again, does more damage to us than any specific policy. I don't know whether Robert Kennedy would end the war, wage a more grass-rootsy War on Poverty, or send more federal registrars into the rural South, but I do think his intelligence, candor, wit and activism would have a beneficial effect. His (or John Lindsay's) style and character could unify, inspire, energize people, rather than disgust, alienate and embarrass them. The System, since only a fraction of its decision-making power is democratically elected, would limit any President; but Johnson's low personal character and morality are exacerbating the crisis.

4. No. I think America—like most nation-states (Israel, the Soviet Union, South Africa)—is racist in some degree. By racist I mean specifically that Julian Bond would have been allowed his Vietnam dissent if he were not black, Adam Powell allowed his corruption if he were not black, Muhammad Ali allowed his loquaciousness if he were not black. Negroes are treated differently in America because whites set the reality, from Snow White to devil's food cake. Therefore I think white America's commitment to black equality stops at the point that commitment intercepts its own self-interest. Once, at the time of the March on Washingon, white America was committed to full equality, when the issue was moral and Southern. Now it is national and economic, and white self-interest has dissolved that majority. Riots and Stokely's rhetoric have helped, but basically America is racist. I think the ghetto situations will get worse, Negro unemployment continue twice as high as white unemployment, and the big cities become more and more cages for the poor. The civil rights movement was a reform movement that failed. The backlash is now, I fear, a permanent fixture in our body politic. It may take an American equivalent of the Sharpsville massacre, in Atlanta, Birmingham or Oakland, to make the Negro once again the victim instead of the perceived executioner. It is only as victims that America can accept the Negro.

6. My only instinct here is to chant "Amen" to Mailer's prophesy: "There is a shitstorm coming." The war, inflation, riots, alienation, affluence, are pushing the country to the right. The freedom movement is bloodied and the struggle now seems to be to prevent the erosion of gains already secured. The War on Poverty seemed an election gimmick from the start, and the more conservative 1967 Congress will only rip away the mask of rhetoric. Almost all of America's moral capital in the Western democracies is being squandered by our Vietnam policy. Johnson seems to have no program except the Marines to cope with the inevitable revolts in Latin America. I think there will be continued ghetto upheavals and anti-war protests, and these, in turn, will only serve to energize the

backlashers and Birchers. Racist Louise Day Hicks will run for Mayor of Boston in 1968 and probably win. George Wallace will run for President in 1968 and probably get 100 electoral votes. Polarization seems to be the coming trend in American politics. Intransigent, emotional radicalism on the Left, confusion in the middle, and growing muscle on the Right.

7. Yes. Along with the southern Negro and the alienated white-collar worker (teachers, social workers) I think the generation under thirty is the most hopeful portent for the future. There is a lot of simplicity and silliness in the New Left, but the best of the kids know things—crucial things—the older radicals and liberals don't know. They know, for example, that mechanistic anti-Communism is now irrelevant and only contributes to the general paranoia. They know that decentralization and a democracy of individual participation are the best answers to bureaucracy, technology and urbanization. They know that the labor movement has become a full partner in Mills's Military-Industrial complex. They know that ethics and politics have become totally segregated, and that this must be changed, not lamented or accepted. They know we must make fundamental structural changes, starting at the grass roots, and that the Bell-Kristol view that all we need is a little adjustment here, a little tinkering there, is too sanguine.

Additionally, I think the culture-heroes of the alienated young—Dylan, the Beatles, Lenny Bruce, Camus, Joseph Heller, Ginsberg, Stanley Kubrick and Kenneth Anger—are, in most ways, more healthy than the heroes of either high culture or masscult.

Finally, a coda to the Left over thirty. Go talk to the kids. Listen to Dylan's lyrics, read Fanon, visit some SDS campus chapters, even try a little pot. Empathize with the Movement, and then criticize fraternally, because the kids need it, and they are important. Then, hopefully, they will listen to you, when you tell them truthfully that Tim Leary and Stokely are not the names of their desires.

Harold Rosenberg

Proletarianization is spreading. It now extends far beyond the category of factory workers. Each profession detaches itself from general intellectual and human concerns and asserts its autonomy. Since the out-

break of the Cold War, the vacuity of individuals and the supremacy of their métier have become the central theme of American culture. Whether in physics or in oil painting the "responsible" practitioner is the one who comes closest to resembling the computer. The arts are being "programmed" and an empty mind has become a credential of both artists and critics.

In politics there has dawned the terrifying era of the comedian. The President of the United States imprints his monogram on roads, lakes, forests, cattle, towns in order to provide confirmation of his existence and as a talisman against oblivion. He tries out his style of handshaking in the Far East, convinced that mankind is a Texan who hasn't yet made it.

The United States today is governed by professional illusionists. Not only are officials elected through campaigns of image-building based on fiction and caricature, but once in office their actions are decided not by anticipating consequences to the nation and/or humanity but by the kind of image those actions will enable them to present to the public. Washington acts by putting on an act. The same is true of every state capitol and city hall. With sheriffs behaving like movie actors, movie actors aspire to the highest offices.

Politics increasingly takes on the forms of mass culture, in which the picture of a thing, or the publicity about it, achieves precedence over the thing itself, since the latter is seen by very few people. This is saying nothing less than that the American public is out of its mind, lucid at moments but subject to fits of apathy and nose-thumbing. If the country doesn't collapse or blow up it is because strings pulled from different angles behind the scene cause a temporary balancing of stresses. It has yet to be proved, however, that this balance can last for any appreciable period of time (in spots all over the country it has not lasted), or that the string pullers themselves are adequately innoculated against the mirages they release into the atmosphere.

Actually, the public wackiness is most likely an epidemic spread from the top. The French with their genius for formulas have two terms that go to the heart of the matter: one is the *"société anonyme,"* which means a corporation, the other is *"aliéné,"* which means a madman. Our corporation-controlled society is a society controlled anonymously by men who in their actions are alienated from themselves and respond to the ventriloquist voices of the abstract entities which they serve. They personify their *sociétés anonymes,* and personifying in real life is a species of madness. One is dominated by an emblem—e.g., the big yellow Shell—from which issue incontrovertible commands. In their professional, i.e., their active, power-laden lives, the fetishists who decide things for us are

utterly mad, though privately, as individuals like ourselves, they may be very nice fellows.

Here in the U.S. our orgmen check one another. Outside America, however, they tend to see as a group. What they visualize are forces like themselves but with possibly less power. To speak to these personifications about humanity is senseless. Humanity is simply another abstraction, but an unorganized one—something like nature, which needs the tractor.

LBJ has *chosen* to represent the consensus of corporate personifications—political, economic, military (including the civil rights movement in so far as it is abstract). I italicize *chosen* to emphasize that his behavior is not forced upon him and that he is responsible for his actions. No one could be forced to act as Johnson has been acting. LBJ is an original creation, a self-contrived source. He could insist that all decisions include consideration of human beings. Instead he is concerned only with abstractions. He listens only to the consensus of humanly vacant personifications. For this concept of the nation he will have to answer to the future.

Returning to our politics of illusion—events are contrived out of the whole cloth in order to provide occasions for actions or statements of policy. Events are made to happen for the sake of words, instead of words being used to give an account of events. History has been turned inside out; writing it takes place in advance of its occurrence, and every statesman is an author in embryo. (We have seen the results of rule by failed painters and divinity students.) To complicate the farce, professional historians are brought in to participate in the action, and wind up by getting into fights with politician-historians as to what actually took place.

Current events may be defined as the means by which privileged authors —Presidents, Generals, heads of secret intelligence agencies—confirm their fictional creations by means of putting pressure on foreign governments and by invasions, bombings, etc. The philosophy taught by the modern superstate is that events are nothing but propaganda.

Naturally, this puts the government into unfair competition with novelists, playwrights, critics, who have to be convincing through words alone. Literature has the same complaint against Washington as any other business or profession whose field of activity has been encroached upon by the government's superior resources. If all lies are to be socialized what chance has individual enterprise? To make matters worse, like all image-makers the government demands an end to criticism—it wants "constructive suggestions," in a word, assent. Those who personify abstract aims have no use for people with doubts and who are professionally dedicated to raising questions. The White House finds the intellectuals a nuisance for the same reason that the Communist party did. The government would

like them to back up its fictions but its best offer is: Sing, then shut up. The intellectuals are willing to sing but if they shut up they lose their identity as intellectuals. As Valéry said: "This species complains; therefore it exists." There is an impasse here. To the White House the intellectuals are not so different from the Vietcong. If only they'd come out, fight like men and get it over with.

In sum, what the *PR* questionnaire calls the "split between the Administration and the American intellectuals" is a split between competitors. The government started the battle by moving into literary territory. It declared war on the Indians. It wants to take us over. 'Tis the final conflict. If Washington gains complete control of the fabrication of illusions and can prevent the exposure of its bad craftsmanship, it is all up with us.

That integration became a popular idea had nothing to do with Negroes. Integration is a passion of our atomized society in which everybody feels segregated in one way or another. The nuts on the Right oppose Negro integration because through this opposition they can integrate themselves with other right-wing nuts. The blacks, held together by their color, are in the minds of the whites the last cohesive social entity (today, it's harder to say that "Jews stick together"). The white Liberal problem is how to integrate this entity into disintegration. It can be done only by disregarding its color. Treat each Negro as a separate individual. Make the Negro into a social atom like the whites, each in his own sac. Since the civil rights movement cannot of itself overcome the cultural breakdown that has been a feature of American life since the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, Negroes must be, and will continue to be, of two minds about integration and so will whites.

The activities of young people always contain "promise," by definition. The New Left, however, is barking up the wrong tree. It imagines that the Old Left was too much ridden by ideology; to avoid this trap it sets itself against systematic social analysis. This is merely to substitute one form of futility for another. The essential question in politics is the question of power. The Old Left veiled this question by its faith in Communist clichés. It thought it was interested in the working class—actually, each Leftist was concerned with his own identity. The Communists gave their adherents a uniform and a set of ideas through which they could obtain group cohesion. Today, the same effect is achieved through blue jeans, beards, marches, electronic music. One could be anonymous as a Party member and at the same time superior to outsiders. But uniforms and ideology are magical substitutes for thinking about the problem of political power. So are uniforms and anti-ideology.

Richard H. Rovere

1. Of course it matters who is President. Had Goldwater won in 1964, the country would have been plunged into a Constitutional crisis and an international crisis. He was ready to renounce the test-ban treaty. Johnson has escalated the war in Vietnam but not in the way that Goldwater promised to. He proposed to turn all strategy over to the military. A month before his nomination, he told *Der Spiegel,* "I would turn to my Joint Chiefs and say, 'Fellows, we made the decision to win, now it's your problem.' " I think he would have done it—and I dreaded at the time to think of the sort of men he would put in the Pentagon. Johnson has not surrendered the principle of civilian control of the military. Goldwater could have won only by exploiting those anomalies of the system—disenfranchisement in the South, the workings of the Electoral College—that make a minority President possible. As President, he would have served without the confidence of labor, the racial minorities, most of the press, the intellectual communities, most of the churches, even of most of the leaders of his own party. I'm not sure he could have governed at all.

2. Serious but not unmanageable. Part Two: same answer.

3. Presidents and intellectuals—taken as a class, that is—rarely hit it off. They have different and frequently conflicting interests, though I must say that if the intellectuals conceived their interests the way other people do, they would be very well pleased with Johnson. If education is a cause for which the intellectuals wish to gain governmental support, Johnson is their man. And by next year this time, we should be getting the first of the books and operas and canvases and what not subsidized by the federal government under legislation bulled through by Johnson.

4. I would say that white America is resigned, not committed, to equality. The better educated sections of the middle class may be committed rather than resigned. It was ever thus. The despised American middle class has provided the only dependable allies the Negroes have ever had. Even the support they are now getting from some parts of the labor movement was won mostly by the efforts of white middle-class liberals to shame the unions into it.

5. Neither to bliss nor to extinction. I think that by and large Amer-

ican foreign policy in the last twenty years has been intelligent and productive. Vietnam has been an exception, the Dominican intervention another. But on the whole I am proud of the way my country has behaved in recent years. I might add that I think the Soviet Union has also displayed admirable responsibility.

6. What a silly question! I guess we'll go on pretty much as we have been going. Maybe the Chinese will blow us up. Maybe we'll blow ourselves up. On the whole I am rather hopeful for us.

7. Sure, though I'm not clear as to what is meant by "activities." Students for a Democratic Society? LSD? Young Americans for Freedom? Black Power? White power? Peace Corps? War Corps? I am in my fifties and have children in their twenties. From what I've seen of their generation, I think it somewhat superior to my own.

There are many things about American life I find it hard to stomach. But I am unaware of the present "deterioration" of which you write. I think it vulgar to cite as evidence your contention about the economy being "out of control." In fact, our economy is probably more "under control" today than most economies have been throughout most of modern history. Nor am I much impressed by the other formulations. I'm not sure that "our problems can be solved within the terms of our current methods and policies." How could one be? But I think we have as good a chance as anyone and that our "current methods and policies" are for the most part as good as those that any large, diverse, human society could come up with.

Richard Schlatter

Does it matter who is in the White House? Of course it does. History is made by men, especially men in positions of power. Great power is never unlimited power; even an absolute monarch, or a Lyndon B. Johnson, who has greater power than any other person in the world, cannot command the impossible. But the President does influence American policy.

For example, the split between the Administration and the intellectuals and the universities is clearly a matter of Presidential choice. The

intellectuals are willing; Kennedy understood and respected them. Johnson does not understand or respect them. The country is the loser.

More important, the President cannot end the war in Vietnam overnight. But the decision to escalate is his.

You ask if "white America" is committed to granting equality to the American Negro. What is "white America"? Surely the majority of Americans of white skin have never had any intention of establishing equality with their Negro neighbors. The question should be: Are those white liberals, students, intellectuals, and religious leaders who have shown some willingness in the last decade to follow the moral leadership of the Supreme Court going to keep on? At the present all these groups seem to be confused by the cry of "Black Power" and frustrated by failure. Segregation and racial violence have *increased* in the last ten years. Men are appalled by the seeming hopelessness of the struggle. The battle for racial justice, like the war in Vietnam, seems to many thoughtful persons unending, with no prospect of victory and with the possibility of total catastrophe. It now appears that no one really knows how to go about ending inequality: reports on REAP and other programs of education are discouraging; urban renewal makes matters worse; Negro unemployment is increasing; *de facto* segregation increases faster than *de jure* segregation declines. Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King do not agree on either means or ends—what is the equality that Negroes really want? So once-militant leaders become tired and discouraged, even the optimistic young—the college students—have begun to lose interest in the civil rights struggle, a struggle which has been for them until recently *the* great moral issue, *the* great alternative to apathy and indifference.

Somehow indifference and apathy have quite suddenly replaced the measured optimism that once looked for some progress in solving the problems of urban blight, suburban mediocrity, transportation, pollution, mass education and mass entertainment. Much has been accomplished, and our apathy is to some extent the boredom of spoiled children: we are richer and freer than any other people in history, and we have a magnificent art and literature and music and science and scholarship. Nevertheless, at the moment the prospect is not wholly bright and the mood is one of discouragement. Too much of what we have is as banal and dead as Lincoln Center, that magnificent mausoleum of the arts, that costly marble palace which has the smell of Versailles before the Deluge.

Over all is the shadow of an irrational war which has no end in view. We cannot win since we do not know what we are fighting for, and we do not seem to be able to withdraw. So long as the war lasts, poverty, civil rights, and the promise of the Great Society inevitably take a back seat.

Perhaps the most obvious result of the war is the feeling of helplessness. Everyone wants the war to end, but it goes on. Optimists become apathetic, indifferent, quizzical, ironical, skeptical, pessimistic. Frustrated and helpless, the intellectual turns to cultivating his private gardens: friends, family, the private arts, the tasks immediately to hand, and, since we are all embarked on the "Lusitania," we might as well travel First Class. "What's happening to America?" Better to ask: "What's happening this evening?"

Susan Sontag

Everything that one feels about this country is, or ought to be, conditioned by the awareness of American *power*: of America as the arch-imperium of the planet, holding man's biological as well as his historical future in its King Kong paws. Today's America, with Ronald Reagan the new daddy of California and John Wayne chawing spareribs in the White House, is pretty much the same Yahooland that Mencken was describing. The main difference is that what's happening in America matters so much more in the late sixties than in the twenties. Then, if one had tough innards, one might jeer, sometimes affectionately, at American barbarism and find American innocence somewhat endearing. Both the barbarism and the innocence are lethal, outsized today.

First of all, then, American power is indecent in its scale. But also, the quality of American life is an insult to the possibilities of human growth; and the pollution of American space, with gadgetry and cars and TV and box architecture, brutalizes the senses, making grey neurotics of most of us, and perverse spiritual athletes and strident self-transcenders of the best of us.

Gertrude Stein said that America is the oldest country in the world. Certainly, it's the most conservative. It has the most to lose by change (60 per cent of the world's wealth owned by a country containing 7 per cent of the world's population). Americans know their backs are against the wall, that "they" want to take it away from "us." And I must say America deserves to have it taken away.

Three facts about this country.

America was founded on a genocide, on the unquestioned assumption of the right of white Europeans to exterminate a resident, technologically backward, colored population in order to take over the continent.

America had not only the most brutal system of slavery in modern times, but a juridically unique system (compared with other slaveries, say in Latin America and the British colonies) which did not, in a single respect, recognize slaves as persons.

As a country (as distinct from a colony), America was created mainly by the surplus poor of Europe, reinforced by a small group who were just *Europamüde,* tired of Europe (a literary catchword of the eighteen forties). Yet even the poorest knew both a "culture," largely invented by his social betters and administered from above, and a "nature" that had been pacified for centuries. These people arrived in a country where the indigenous culture was simply the enemy and was in process of being ruthlessly annihilated, and where nature, too, was the enemy, a pristine force, unmodified by civilization, that is, by human wants, which had to be defeated. After America was "won," it was filled up by new generations of the poor, and built up according to the tawdry fantasy of the good life that culturally deprived, uprooted people might have at the beginning of the industrial era. And the country looks it.

Foreigners extol the American "energy," attributing to it both our unparalleled economic prosperity and the splendid vivacity of our arts and entertainments. But surely this is energy bad at its source and for which we pay too high a price, a hypernatural and humanly disproportionate dynamism that flays everyone's nerves raw. Basically it is the energy of violence, of free-floating resentment and anxiety unleashed by chronic cultural dislocations which must be, for the most part, ferociously sublimated. This energy has mainly been sublimated into crude materialism and acquisitiveness. Into hectic philanthropy. Into benighted moral crusades, the most spectacular of which was Prohibition. Into an awesome talent for uglifying countryside and cities. Into the loquacity and torment of a minority of gadflies: artists, prophets, muckrakers, cranks and nuts. And into self-punishing neuroses. But the naked violence keeps breaking through, throwing everything into question.

Needless to say, America is not the only violent, ugly and unhappy country on this earth. Again, it is a matter of scale. Only three million Indians lived here when the white man arrived, rifle in hand, for his fresh start. Today, American hegemony menaces the lives not of three but of countless millions who, like the Indians, have never even *heard* of "The United States of America," much less of its mythical empire, "the free world." American policy is still powered by the fantasy of Manifest

Destiny, though the limits were once set by the borders of the continent, while today America's destiny embraces the entire world. There are still more hordes of redskins to be mowed down before virtue triumphs; as the classic western movies explain, the only good Red is a dead Red. This may sound like an exaggeration to those who live in the special and more finely modulated atmosphere of New York and its environs. Cross the Hudson. You find out that not just *some* Americans, but virtually all Americans feel that way.

Of course, these people don't know what they're saying, literally. But that's no excuse. That, in fact, is what makes it all possible. The unquenchable American moralism and the American faith in violence are not just twin symptoms of some character neurosis taking the form of a protracted adolescence, which presages an eventual maturity. They constitute a full grown, firmly-installed national psychosis, founded, as are all psychoses, on the efficacious denial of reality. So far it's worked. Except for portions of the South a hundred years ago, America has never known war. A taxi driver said to me on the day that could have been Armageddon, when America and Russia were on collision course off the shores of Cuba: "Me, I'm not worried. I served in the last one, and now I'm over draft age. They can't get me again. But I'm all for letting 'em have it right now. What are we waiting for? Let's get it over with." Since wars always happen Over There, and we always win, why not drop the bomb? If all it takes is pushing a button, even better. For America is that curious hybrid—an apocalyptic country and a valetudinarian country. The average citizen may harbor the fantasies of John Wayne, but he as often has the temperament of Jane Austen's Mr. Woodhouse.

To answer, briefly, some of *PR*'s questions:

1. I do *not* think that Johnson is forced by "our system" to act as he is acting. For instance, in Vietnam, where each evening he personally chooses the bombing targets for the next day's missions. But I think there is something awfully wrong with a *de facto* system which allows the President virtually unlimited discretion in pursuing an immoral and imprudent foreign policy, so that the strenuous opposition of, say, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee counts for—exactly nothing. The *de jure* system vests the power to make war in the Congress —with the exception, apparently, of imperialist ventures and genocidal expeditions. These are best left undeclared.

However, I don't mean to suggest that Johnson's foreign policy is the whim of a clique which has seized control, escalated the power of the Chief Executive, castrated the Congress and manipulated public opinion. Johnson is, alas, all too representative. As Kennedy was not. If there is

a conspiracy, it is (or was) that of the more enlightened national leaders hitherto largely selected by the eastern seaboard plutocracy. They engineered the precarious acquiescence to liberal goals that has prevailed in this country for over a generation—a superficial consensus made possible by the strongly apolitical character of a decentralized electorate mainly preoccupied with local issues. If the Bill of Rights were put to a national referendum as a new piece of legislation, it would meet the same fate as New York City's Civilian Review Board. Most of the people in this country believe what Goldwater believes, and always have. But most of them don't know it. Let's hope they don't find out.

4. I do not think white America is committed to granting equality to the American Negro. So committed are only a minority of generous and mostly educated, affluent white Americans, few of whom have had any prolonged social contact with Negroes. This is a passionately racist country; it will continue to be so in the forseeable future.

5. I think that this administration's foreign policies are likely to lead to more wars and to wider wars. Our main hope, and the chief restraint on American bellicosity and paranoia, lies in the fatigue and depoliticization of Western Europe, the lively fear of America and of another world war in Russia and the Eastern European countries, and the corruption and unreliability of our client states in the third world. It's hard to lead a holy war without allies. But America is just crazy enough to try to do it.

6. The meaning of the split between the Administration and the intellectuals? Simply that our leaders are genuine Yahoos, with all the exhibitionist traits of their kind, and that liberal intellectuals (whose deepest loyalties are to an international fraternity of the reasonable) are not *that* blind. At this point, moreover, they have nothing to lose by proclaiming their discontent and frustration. But it's well to remember that liberal intellectuals, like Jews, tend to have a classical theory of politics, in which the state has a monopoly of power; hoping that those in positions of authority may prove to be enlightened men, wielding power justly, they are natural, if cautious, allies of the "establishment." As the Russian Jews knew they had at least a chance with the Czar's officials but none at all with marauding Cossacks and drunken peasants (Milton Himmelfarb has pointed this out), liberal intellectuals more naturally expect to influence the "decisions" of administrators than they do the volatile "feelings" of masses. Only when it becomes clear that, in fact, the government itself is being staffed by Cossacks and peasants, can a rupture like the present one take place. When (and if) the man in the White House who paws people and scratches his balls in public is replaced by the man who dislikes being touched and finds Yevtushenko "an interesting fellow," American intellectuals won't be so disheartened. The vast

majority of them are not revolutionaries, wouldn't know how to be if they tried. Mostly a salaried professoriat, they're as much at home in the system when it functions a little better than it does right now as anyone else.

A somewhat longer comment on the last question.

Yes, I do find much promise in the activities of young people. About the only promise one can find anywhere in this country today is in the way some young people are carrying on, making a fuss. I include both their renewed interest in politics (as protest and as community action, rather than as theory) and the way they dance, dress, wear their hair, riot, make love. I also include the homage they pay to Oriental thought and rituals. And I include, not least of all, their interest in taking drugs —despite the unspeakable vulgarization of this project by Leary and others.

A year ago Leslie Fiedler, in a remarkably wrongheaded and interesting essay (published in *PR* and titled "The New Mutants") called attention to the fact that the new style of young people indicated a deliberate blurring of sexual differences, signaling the creation of a new breed of youthful androgens. The longhaired pop groups with their mass teen-age following and the tiny elite of turned-on kids from Berkeley to the East Village were both lumped together as representatives of the "post-humanist" era now upon us, in which we witness a "radical metamorphosis of the western male," a "revolt against masculinity," even "a rejection of conventional male potency." For Fiedler, this new turn in personal mores, diagnosed as illustrating a "programmatic espousal of an anti-puritanical mode of existence," is something to deplore. (Though sometimes, in his characteristic have-it-both-ways manner, Fiedler seemed to be vicariously relishing this development, *mainly* he appeared to be lamenting it.) But why, he never made explicit. I think it is because he is sure such a mode of existence undercuts radical politics, and its moral visions, altogether. Being radical in the older sense (some version of Marxism or socialism or anarchism) meant to be attached still to traditional "puritan" values of work, sobriety, achievement and family–founding. Fiedler suggests, as have Philip Rahv and Irving Howe and Malcolm Muggeridge among others, that the new style of youth must be, at bottom, apolitical, and their revolutionary spirit a species of infantilism. The fact that the same kid joins SNCC or boards a Polaris submarine or agrees with Conor Cruise O'Brien *and* smokes pot and is bisexual and adores the Supremes, is seen as a contradiction, a kind of ethical fraud or intellectual weak-mindedness.

I don't believe this to be so. The depolarizing of the sexes, to mention the element that Fiedler observes with such fascination, is the natural, and desirable, next stage of the sexual revolution (its dissolution, perhaps) which has moved beyond the idea of sex as a damaged but discrete zone of human activity, beyond the discovery that "society" represses the free expression of sexuality (by fomenting guilt), to the discovery that the way we live and the ordinarily available options of character repress almost entirely the deep experience of pleasure, and the possibility of self-knowledge. "Sexual freedom" is a shallow, outmoded slogan. What, who is being liberated? For older people, the sexual revolution is an idea that remains meaningful. One can be for it or against it; if for it, the idea remains confined within the norms of Freudianism and its derivatives. But Freud *was* a Puritan, or "a fink," as one of Fiedler's students distressingly blurted out. So was Marx. It is right that young people see beyond Freud and Marx. Let the professors be the caretakers of this indeed precious legacy, and discharge all the obligations of piety. No need for dismay if the kids don't continue to pay the old dissenter-gods obeisance.

It seems to me obtuse, though understandable, to patronize the new kind of radicalism, which is post-Freudian and post-Marxian. For this radicalism is as much an experience as an idea. Without the personal experience, if one is looking in from the outside, it does look messy and almost pointless. It's easy to be put off by the youngsters throwing themselves around with their eyes closed to the near-deafening music of the discothèques (unless you're dancing, too), by the longhaired marchers carrying flowers and temple bells as often as "Get Out of Vietnam" placards, by the inarticulateness of a Mario Savio. One is also aware of the high casualty rate among this gifted, visionary minority among the young, the tremendous cost in personal suffering and in mental strain. The fakers, the slobs and the merely flipped-out are plentiful among them. But the complex desires of the best of them: to engage and to "drop out"; to be beautiful to look at and touch as well as to be good; to be loving and quiet as well as militant and effective—these desires make sense in our present situation. To sympathize, of course, you have to be convinced that things in America really are as desperately bad as I have indicated. This is hard to see; the desperateness of things is obscured by the comforts and liberties that America does offer. Most people, understandably, don't really believe things are that bad. That's why, for them, the antics of this youth can be no more than a startling item in the passing parade of cultural fashions, to be appraised with a friendly, but essentially weary and knowing look. The sorrowful look that says:

I was a radical, too, when I was young. When are these kids going to grow up and realize what we had to realize, that things never are going to be really different, except maybe worse?

From my own experience and observation, I can testify that there is a profound concordance between the sexual revolution, redefined, and the political revolution, redefined. That being a socialist and taking certain drugs (in a fully serious spirit: as a technique for exploring one's consciousness, not as an anodyne or a crutch), are not incompatible, that there is no incompatibility between the exploration of inner space and the rectification of social space. What some of the kids understand is that it's the whole character-structure of modern American man, and his imitators, that needs rehauling. (Old folks like Paul Goodman and Edgar Z. Friedenberg have, of course, been suggesting this for a long time.) That rehauling includes Western "masculinity," too. They believe that some socialist remodeling of institutions and the ascendance, through electoral means or otherwise, of better leaders won't really change anything. And they are right.

Neither do I dare deride the turn toward the East (or more generally, to the wisdoms of the nonwhite world) on the part of a tiny group of young people—however uninformed and jejune the adherence usually is. (But then, nothing could be more ignorant than Fiedler's insinuation that Oriental modes of thought are "feminine" and "passive," which is the reason the demasculinized kids are drawn to them.) Why shouldn't they look for wisdom elsewhere? If America *is* the culmination of Western white civilization, as everyone from the Left to the Right declares, then there must be something terribly wrong with Western white civilization. This is a painful truth; few of us want to go that far. It's easier, much easier, to accuse the kids, to reproach them for being "non-participants in the past" and "drop-outs from history." But it isn't real history Fiedler is referring to with such solicitude. It's just *our* history, which he claims is identical with "the tradition of the human," the tradition of "reason" itself. Of course, it's hard to assess life on this planet from a genuinely world-historical perspective; the effort induces vertigo and seems like an invitation to suicide. But from a world-historical perspective, that local history which some young people are repudiating (with their fondness for dirty words, their peyote, their macrobiotic rice, their Dadaist art, etc.) looks a good deal less pleasing and less self-evidently worthy of perpetuation. The truth is that Mozart, Pascal, Boolean algebra, Shakespeare, parliamentary government, baroque churches, Newton, the emancipation of women, Kant, Marx, Balanchine ballets, *et al.*, don't redeem what this particular civilization has wrought upon the world. The white

race *is* the cancer of human history; it is the white race and it alone—its ideologies and inventions—which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself. What the Mongol hordes threaten is far less frightening than the damage that Western "Faustian" man, with his idealism, his magnificent art, his sense of intellectual adventure, his world-devouring energies for conquest, has already done, and further threatens to do.

This is what some of the kids sense, though few of them could put it in words. Again, I believe them to be right. I'm not arguing that they're going to prevail, or even that they're likely to change much of anything in this country. But a few of them may save their own souls. America is a fine country for inflaming people, from Emerson and Thoreau to Mailer and Burroughs and Leo Szilard and John Cage and Judith and Julian Beck, with the project of trying to save their own souls. Salvation becomes almost a mundane, inevitable goal when things are so bad, really intolerable.

One last comparison, which I hope won't seem farfetched. The Jews left the ghetto in the early nineteenth century, thus becoming a people doomed to disappear. But one of the by-products of thir fateful absorption into the modern world was an incredible burst of creativity in the arts, science and secular scholarship—the relocation of a powerful but frustrated spiritual energy. These innovating artists and intellectuals were not alienated Jews, as is said so often, but people who were alienated *as* Jews.

I'm scarcely more hopeful for America than I am for the Jews. This is a doomed country, it seems to me; I only pray that, when America founders, it doesn't drag the rest of the planet down, too. But one should notice that, during its long elephantine agony, America is also producing its subtlest minority generation of the decent and sensitive, young people who are alienated *as* Americans. They are not drawn to the stale truths of their sad elders (though these are truths). More of their elders should be listening to them.

Diana Trilling

Before addressing myself to the substance of your questionnaire I should like to pause over the formulation of your first question. You ask whether or not it matters who is in the White House. In general your questions have the virtue of directing this symposium to political actualities. But not this question. If you are speaking of the actual conduct of affairs, how can it conceivably *not* matter who is in the White House? Would you seriously suggest that there is no basis for choice among Presidents, that Harding and Franklin Roosevelt were for all practical purposes interchangeable; that Kennedy's handling of the Cuban confrontation was so natural and inevitable, given our system, that we must suppose that Eisenhower or Johnson would have performed no differently? In the phrasing of such a question you express, I think, the special hopelessness to which intellectuals seem to have fallen prey precisely because Johnson is the kind of President he is. But you also reveal the present-day intellectual's taste for ultimates, by extension his insufficiently recognized taste for absolutes. One understands, of course, that the purpose of your question is to bring under examination the democratic process itself, to inquire whether there are forces in American life, inherent either in capitalism or in the complex democratic organization, which are so powerful and so remote from our control as individual citizens that they are inescapably determining, a negation of the democratic possibility. But the extravagance with which you open this pertinent inquiry surely derives from the continuing wish of intellectuals, ever since the ideological thirties, to reconstitute a "scientific"—that is, an entirely coherent, rationalized and invulnerable—structure for political life and thought such as Marxism was once thought to be; only the state as it is conceived by Marxism proposes the idea that it makes no difference who its officers are: the system is all. But in addition your disregard for political actuality points to the reliance of present-day intellectuals upon sensibility as a mode of political comprehension. The formulation, "Does it matter who is in the White House?" pertains not to an intellectual life in which we define ourselves by our manifest responsibility to reason and to the consequences of our thought, but to a world in which we define our sensibility by our apocalypticism.

The most primitive expression of our current politics of sensibility is the application of criteria of personal style to the making of political judg-

ments. I am not implying that there is no truth to be arrived at by this mode of judgment. But such truth is limited in its usefulness, sometimes misleading, and likely to paralyze discourse. And when sensibility takes over the entire work of reasoned argument, when—say—the acute issues involved in the Vietnam War are let disappear in observations upon Johnson's personal style, intellect has deserted politics. We are properly contemptuous of an Administration unable to make a cogent statement of its Vietnam position. But has the intellectual opposition done much better? The fact is that the American intellectual has always lived at such a far remove from power that he has developed a peculiarly grim imagination of power, to which he can relate himself only in angry passivity. This hostile separation from government has no doubt played its part in creating our famed American rigorousness in matters of culture; indeed it is an aspect of this rigorousness that we virtually exclude from our meaningful life of mind anyone who participates in public affairs. We reserve for culture and deny to politics our best energies of discrimination, now more than ever needed in our political judgments.

In particular they are needed as we direct ourselves to the difficult problem of democracy itself, and especially as we bring to bear upon it recent developments in the civil rights movement. Obviously were the whole of white America committed to Negro equality it would have been achieved. (The truism is not to be avoided if your Question 4 is to be noticed.) What we now see rather more dramatically than we have before is that even when an Administration commits itself to equality, it can be defeated by opposition from certain sections of the population. Does this represent a failure of the democratic system? Yes, certainly it represents a failure. But *a* failure of democracy, grave as it may be, does not represent *the* failure of democracy, unless by democracy we mean a system of government—and when has there ever been one—which guarantees the achievement of our best social goals. I can see no reason for Negroes themselves to be patient with the small progress that has been made in racial equality in this country. Their moderation up to now has been phenomenal. But those of us whose anger at racial injustice is supposed to be in the control of reason—that is, held in check by understanding of the many conflicting forces involved in racial bias and by our commitment to the national interest as a whole—have not the privilege of desperation; we have the onerous duty of patience. By patience I most distinctly do not mean retreat or the countenancing of any diminution of governmental effort. Building on what gains in civil rights have already been made, and they are considerable, we must force new efforts in legislation and education, new programs for economic and social betterment. Except the intellectual is prepared to name,

and commit his energies to, the system with which he proposes to replace a faulty democracy, his despair can only make itself felt in regression or as inertia.

Myself, I know nothing better to substitute for a faulty democracy. I wish I did, and not merely because ours is a system which has not eradicated racial inequity or even because it offers us so little connection with government but because of my extreme distaste for the dominant American culture. (Yet, obviously, to ascribe our culture to the American "system" is to ignore the similar movement in culture everywhere in the modern industrialized world, including the Communist countries.) One term, but one term only, of American democracy is capitalism. Socialism as an alternative to capitalism would, one could hope, go some distance toward removing the economic motive in racial inequality. But important as this undoubtedly would be, it still would leave unaltered many other factors involved in racial bias, including original sin. Too, what we often forget is that socialism is an alternative to capitalism, it is not an alternative to democracy. If by socialism we mean democratic socialism we have to realize that in a vast and complex country like ours it would take more than a reorganization of the economy to put the individual citizen in a closer, more potent relationship with government. Only an enormous decentralization could accomplish this—which would create its own problems, not least a grave divisiveness in the national life. There is no easy answer to the questions pressed upon us by what has happened in the civil rights movement; we have to rate our values in the order of their importance to us. And at the top of the scale, for me, are the prerogatives of democracy: a multiparty system, the right to vote, work, speak and move about as I will, all the benefits Americans can afford to belittle because they have them. Or at any rate, some of us have all of them, all of us have some of them. It makes poor sense to be bitter over the fact that Negroes are deprived of rights that we ourselves hold cheap.

As to our foreign policies. I have found it extraordinary, the ease and speed with which most intellectuals have come to their stands on the Vietnam War; it would have seemed to me that decision between support of or opposition to the war could be this quick only for the conscientious objector to all war. It has been extremely difficult for me to come to a "position," when there has been such substantial argument to marshal both for and against the war. And if, finally, I am opposed to it, it is not because of an ingrained distrust of American motive or even Johnson motive, and certainly not because I am indifferent to the spread of Communism, but because I have come to the opinion that the best interests of America and of democracy are not served by the kind of war

we are fighting. I think that there were other better ways to help the South Vietnamese resist Communist aggression—with money, technical assistance, arms—without our proclaiming ourselves, as we have, the far-reaching nation of the sword, and without this overt control of a regime of our choice. The overt military stance seriously injures us with those very elements in the non-Communist world—democratic, liberal, socialist—which we must most count on if the independent nations are to develop programs of internal health which are yet resistant to Communism; I have in mind Latin-American democrats, liberals, socialists, no less than those of Asia: the Russians fight wars all over the world without such self-exposure. In addition, I don't see how we can implement a military victory.

Now, writing shortly after the Manila conference, my worry about the Vietnam war is immeasurably increased by the promise of its possible multiplication. America has in these last days been committed to a most active future role in Asia, and one in which we apparently mean to bypass our European allies. At least, such was the position Johnson described. (And how was I supposed to vote against this at the polls? I did not say my option for democracy makes things simple.) Johnson's statements seemed to me as if designed to intensify the already all-too-eagerly grasped-at image of America as an imperialism, to be feared equally with Communist imperialism. Hailed in some quarters as a triumph of statemanship, I regard them as quite the opposite: an insult to our European allies and a refusal to hold our place as one among the community of democratic nations throughout the world; a vaunt of military power in a political situation which calls for endless strategies, of a sort that are substantially hampered, if not frustrated, by military overtness. I am of course acquainted with the argument which says that it is the presence of our troops in Vietnam which encouraged the overthrow of Communism in Indonesia. This is conjecture, there is no proof, and I am not convinced; at any rate, I offer the counterargument that the presence of American troops ninety miles from Cuba has not brought about the overthrow of Castro, because Cuba is not internally prepared to make this overthrow; and if a country *is* ready, as Indonesia must have been, this implies an internal opposition of sufficient scope to promise success without external intervention. I am also not convinced that Johnson's statements on Asia were required or useful as a deterrent to China or even as an encouragement to the independent Asian countries. The possession of military strength is obviously an adjunct of political strength. The proclamation of military intention is something else again, and fixes us in a stance that I think abets the Communist powers in their political war against us, with an eventual increase in military danger. And this

is not to speak of the damage Johnson's extreme and unnecessary overtness has done to the very concept of the United Nations.

Your remaining questions. Concrete economic problems like that of inflation are not within the competence of any literary intellectual I know, certainly not within mine. I'd only be communicating my ignorant alarm. I also have no competence in prophecy. I could wish, though, that I had saved space for comment upon the activities of young people today beyond merely stating my belief that there are few aspects of the contemporary disturbances of youth in which the parent generation fails to conspire, whether in manifest or hidden ways. Many of the forms taken by their idealism are more their own, and I am all for them.

Albert J. Guerard

THE JOURNEY

I, Harold Marichal: operator of the radio station (on behalf of an entrepreneur four thousand miles away, who has not written me for months, and who may even have forgotten such a small investment as the *Agracorinth*). And virtual captain of the unmoving ship, since its three officers keep to their beds. Resident at times of the ship hovering offshore, at times of a villa five miles away—who see myself at twenty-nine with the slackness of limb of a man of fifty, yet possessed of hidden energies. What else shall I say? The face is crafty, dissipated, indolent, capable of brutality and scorn. The eyes green, the copper hair neglected and curling, the teeth neglected too. A "sensual expression of remorseless curiosity," I once was told. So be it. The breasts swell slightly with scant reddish hair between, there is a roll of fat at the waist.

Details of no great relevance these, since this is the ship's story not mine. Who knows I might have had my major place in someone else's narrative of these events? But in these pages I merely report the things I have seen and to some degree instigated. Still I do not like to seem a quite bodiless voice, who in fact have my own history and flesh, my lusts and dying aspirations, and who at least feel obligated —yes, obligated—to comment on my times. What motives beyond that? A delight in folly perhaps, a compulsion to evoke follies and exhaust them: an ex-intellectual and ex–part-time writer who likes to play games. Three evenings a month, on an average, my typewriter still wildly clatters, to the alarm of those listening at my door.

But that is enough of myself, except to mention my genuine affection for the ship. And that I see the *Agracorinth* hovering in blazing waters as a "force"—female, brooding and contemplative—

the very last, I think, of the pirate radio ships: a true child of the declining century, of its "ideals," its concepts, its wars.

Few of my readers will have seen these places, or any part of the great curving Mediterranean littoral. But these notes will give some idea of the conditions under which we live. It will, for instance, take us six days and over a thousand miles to go these scant five miles from ship to shore, Seguros and I. This because not only the Free City but the Provisional Republic behind and surrounding it forbids any provisioning of the ship, "any embarking or disembarking of personnel for whatever purpose," any cutting of tapes or records or printing of speeches to be broadcast. The *Agracorinth,* 4350 tons, ancient and obscene and listing some five degrees, immobilized in its own filth, lies in plain sight of the city and of the green and olive coast: interdict and repudiate, broadcasting on five hundred watts, twenty-four hours a day. Call the white unruined Free City what you please: Nizza, Heraklion, Villafranca, Carthage. Almost a hundred thousand people still live there (once there were a quarter of a million), and many of these are exiles, the victims of revolutions or coup d'états in small baked seaports or smoldering jungle capitals. There remain, for them, the Municipal Casino (though no gambling after dark, when the puritanic *Forces Libres* take over) and several decaying luxury hotels.

Seguros, fund-raiser and recruiter of revolutionaries, is as much concerned with these exiles as I: he out of political conviction, I for the successful operation of my ship. So on our recent journey we watched the listing *Agracorinth* and the white city recede under a midsummer haze: saw our precise near destination dwindle, dislimn, vanish; then waited for the first appearance, to the south, of our supply island and its volcanic cone. Our journey to cover five miles would take us south, then east, then north, then west: by trawler and schooner, on foot, by a tramp train engaged in the barter of parched crops (flagged down by anyone with produce to sell, and crawling at last to a stop at the border of an intransigent city-state, the very tracks going under the barrier of barbed wire); by an old plane, to overfly a Zone of Interdiction; and again by tramp train, by gasogène truck, by smoking autobus, and on foot once more—to reach at last my villa on the green cape. Five miles in six days!

First then Sangiorgio's trawler, the weekly supplier of the *Agracorinth*. Through the long afternoon little Seguros crouched at the

front, surrounded by his political equipment: the typewriter and small ditto machine, his sack of leaflets and roll of Caribbean maps. And a tiny black cardboard suitcase for clothing. He held a transistor close to one ear and stared eagerly ahead. Meanwhile I lay propped against the wheelhouse, with Sangiorgio above me, taking advantage of the sun. I lay with my head in shade, my body exposed. The sun poured down on my slack loins. I waited for energies to return: longings, the old wild excitement of plunging onto the mainland and its chaos. But first there would be the island. All afternoon we watched the volcano approach, and the great cone as of snow, but girdled by a low brownish haze. Odd: on this summer day the volcano grew larger, receded, disappeared, returned. And the trawler lurched and wallowed, laboring on a flat sea. By five o'clock the haze was gone, and the volcano's snow became great quarries blazing in the sun.

So we have the first night of our journey on the island. A still moment for reflection, and to catch one's breath between the ship's disorder and the disorder of the continent. And another breath of sulphur, garlic, figs, wine. I jot down a few notes. I write at a rough table facing the open door of the inn, the dock and miniature harbor in the dusk. Meanwhile Peralda tumbles and thrashes with Serafina in our room upstairs. Serafina! In her widow's black she is as ancient as this wall of rock breaking the surface of the sea. Triremes and feluccas should be anchored here: on the breakwater a faint lantern burns, gift of an Iberian chief. According to Sangiorgio, the volcano presages calm. "When the wind blows from the North or Northwest, the smoke is faint, white and thin. But if from the South or Southeast, the smoke is black and opaque, concealing the summit." The augury is clear. He speaks with authority, as from a book. The schooner (for Sangiorgio's trawler is forbidden there) will take us to the mainland tomorrow.

I reflect at my table on this peaceful ashen place abstracted from time. Triremes and feluccas: the breakwater sheltered Phoenicians. This island with its innkeeper who is also the collector of customs and onetime jailer, and its one blind priest, and its one whore: this pumice isle of figs and currants and olives, sprouting from clinkers and shale—I think this must be the most ancient place in the world. Even the convicts are old. The two convicts roaming in their black and yellow stripes are men under a curse, reduced to snuffing like dogs for food:

still held on the island entranced, though the imprisoning mainland government no longer exists. They met the trawler, wearing porter's caps, and carried our bags and equipment to the inn. Then they watched us hungrily from the sidewalk. They come from a long lineage. There have always been prisoners here, the enemies of Dukes, also pirates and impious wanderers. The island has no transmitter. Yet it will be here, the inn and the volcano and the figs, when all the radio voices are stilled—the muezzin cry from Tunisian stations, the infidel longings and desert pipings, the cacophony of Malta, the wail of cracked Balkan recordings. Raw Albanian cries, the Greeks. And, yes, the thin five hundred watt voice of reason of the *Agracorinth*, insistent, far over the horizon to the north.

I asked the innkeeper to turn off the radio and I sat alone (the whore Serafina had left her meal unfinished when Peralda rushed in; her figs and wine remained), staring at the falling night. I still faintly saw the darkening nipples of the island goddess offshore, two miniature volcanoes. The great volcano murmured behind and above us in the dusk.

Only a few islands are permitted to our crew for a day's leave, and chiefly this supply island with its one inn, its volcano and its whore. Once we risked Elba on a wild windswept day, once Lipari, once also a tiny priest-ridden island, a barren shelf of volcanic rock with no trees at all and one miserable *locanda* serving a syrupy wine. Sardinia, Corsica, Mykonos, Crete, the outlying Balearics—all must be considered unsafe, each likely to produce a launch full of swarthy men in uniform, limping out to threaten quarantine or to exact some fantastic tribute. Only this island is safe. Here for a few hours the men may wander among shuttered houses or cluster at these rough tables. But the white mainland cities are forbidden. It is the crew's old complaint. They stare sullenly at the Free City and the green and olive coast, and by night at its lights and fires. Lights mean half-forgotten pleasures, magnified in the telling. The great cauldrons of Neapolitan alleys, the mountainous pasta of a Palermo waterside café! Lights are tavernas, where a man may dance on the tops of tables or, as he chooses, fumble in a barmaid's blouse. One sailor remembers the sounds of a scuffle in an unlighted urinal: a man being crippled there. Another speaks of the death of a whoremaster slashed by his own bladed cane. A third remembers a blind whore in the

Piraeus, and a girl whose limbs had been stunted and broken to a straight-backed simian crouch. Pleasures half-forgotten! Though there are a few seamen (especially the black Cravan, stateless, his papers cheaply forged) who are glad not to go on shore. I think of the moment he came up to me with his soft effeminate voice, looming gigantic in his blackness, in that dark Piraeus bar, to say he understood I was looking for seamen who did not mind going many months without touching land.

One more hour of calm, while Peralda lies locked between cold flanks: the inexhaustible ageless veined and marble whore, clothed in widow's black, her bed linens stiff as shroud. The vineyard is as old, a rich malmsey from gnarled growths. There is liparite ash on the glass, a volcanic taste to the wine. The whore Serafina returned, I conjecture, to the place of her birth after many wanderings, but her first lovers had been here. She had been raped, still a young shepherdess, by Barbary pirates; scarcely nubile, was kidnapped by Saracens; was paid by Angevins in the odd indecipherable coin of plundered African cities. Later, the drunken old Prince of Ustica would have paused, I think, on a visit to the shrine: to thrust her against a wall, before the jeering of his men. Her black skirts hang stiff, are scarcely ruffled on wild sirocco days by winds that shake the inn. She is old. Her breasts sag with the weight of political oppression, shake from the dark conflicts of convicts and priests, from tragic family quarrels and the death of fishermen at sea. Moreover she is faintly bent at the waist, from the lifting of great stones in the sulphur mine. She tears at her food indignantly, having been a child at the invention of the fork.

I think of her as placed here to delight the wanderer. She looked at me once, when she descended from Peralda, darkly and with a calm expectancy. On past visits to the island I have always been in a great hurry to get to the continent or back to the *Agracorinth*. But now, she knows, I have the night before me. The schooner will not return before dawn. She sits there, silent and craggy, an obstacle in my path. So I too, out of piety and the wanderer's obligation, I too briefly take my place at that dark stall, between those cold thighs, taste the bruised mouth of olive and wine, hold up the great breasts and black nipples, leave my token seeds as a traveler drops a single coin or at most two into the beggar's cup, at the cathedral's dusty portal. I

lie engulfed, foundering beneath the slow rustle and thrash. And who will not have preceded me between those stiff sheets, at that stall! What bearded old adventurer escaped her?

The innkeeper hovers over me, lamenting the days of the penal colony. The great drunken times are gone, the Saturday nights of orgy when the convicts squandered their week's pay. As jailer, he would give them their weekly coin for subsistence in the morning; as innkeeper he took it back before dark. In those days the convicts bought wine and roamed the one street hammering on barricaded doors, calling for the fishermen's wives. The cottages shook as beneath the wildest winds. Inside, their pensioners the political exiles (Freemasons, lawyers, professors, liberals, madmen, ideologues) lay trembling in the dark. It was an island of priests and fishermen then, and of political prisoners in dark glasses and double-breasted suits; and the convicts in their stripes. The fishermen were gone from April through July, hovering off Spanish and African shores, for sponges especially. In those months the convicts were allowed to work the mines, and so earn a few coins. But the exiles were restricted to the town.

Now only the two convicts remain, scavengers of despair. They have no other clothes than the striped ones, no resources to take them to the mainland.

The smell of sulphur becomes abruptly more intense, as though the volcano had relieved itself quietly through a hillside fissure. A thin layer of ash lies on the table, on the dish holding olives and figs. It blends with the dust. The pumice isle: coating streets, floors, dishes, hands, tongues. In the dim prehistoric past (of the earliest convicts) it rained twice in a single month. That was also a year of wild eruptions. In the church are many ex-votos, affixed to a painting of the erupting volcano: white stuffed arms and legs and eyeballs covered with patches. The little rain here is collected on the roofs scooped out to receive it. The vineyards cling to a soil cracked by drought. Gashes of rust, sulphur yellow, and the blinding white quarries: the stone ripped by hand then crushed to powder. The land is split and cleft by earthquake and drought, has been vomited by eruption. Veins of lava, dark, obsidian and serpent green, emerge from the barrancas and creep to the sea. And everywhere the dust and ash.

So I go up to Serafina, to the room where Peralda still lies asleep

and snoring. Later we go back to our separate tables downstairs. She returns to her scant but still unfinished meal. Almost immediately (he must have been waiting in the dark, hiding from his companion) one of the two convicts appears at the door. He looks at me steadily with the same expectancy as Serafina. So I toss him a coin, which he scarcely acknowledges. Only a bitter nod. Then he is talking past me scornfully to the innkeeper, in the old times his jailer. He is back at his familiar complaints. What does he care that the mainland government has collapsed? It was a contract, the obligation remained.

—". . . the obligation of the Prefect to return me to the mainland, to my province if not my city, at the end of the term. It is also normal, everyone knows, to issue civilian clothes. The Prefect of Police . . ."

—"There is no Prefect, my friend. No prefect, no province, no carabinieri, no officers, no judge. I who for two years watched over you with compassion . . ."

—"I ask for justice not compassion. My term was three years. Then a clean start. A new life freed of accusation and taint, and with decent civilian clothes."

—"And if you were to reach the mainland, where it is said everyone will starve?"

—"My term was three years. It would be my privilege to discover for myself a profession."

—"It would be your privilege, my friend, to die."

The convict still stands in the door for a while: mute, a living accusation. He turns then to Serafina in a silent appeal. But she leans back, lifting her chin and preparing to spit. The convict walks off into the night.

The innkeeper has bandit earrings and a gold tooth as handsome as Seguros'. I have admired it on each trip to the island. And he insists it is true the two convicts, if they returned to the mainland, would starve. Indeed, he thinks it is foolish for me to leave the ship and go back to the villa. Where can we be more comfortable than on the ship, with Sangiorgio to bring us provisions? As for the mainland: all chaos. It had taken him days, in exchange for wine and a fine small cargo of figs, to get a single miserable goat. The taste of other meat was a rank and dazing memory. Chaos. And it is true I myself wonder about the broadcast voices: the self-sufficient, auto-

nomous sovereign mad voices of the multiplying city-states. I ask myself whether they really exist. Tursi, Heraclea, Dolcedorme, Orsaz-ja? Are they only names, or obliterated segments of a map? Is an "independent socialist democratic republic" perhaps no more than a mobile transmitter concealed in an attic, fondled by a trembling ideologue: one as futile as Seguros?

And I am ready for sleep at last; the blood seems to sink to my feet. In the privy there is still a faint light. I stand and piss against the wall: a queer urine burning, relic of the volcanic wine? Standing with patience I examine the names and the phallic drawings: the faded socialist slogans and the indecipherable Greek. Sailors' obscenities no doubt. Graffiti, thighs cracked open in emulation of the fissured volcano, a carefully-drawn schooner. And I notice again (I had seen it several times on my last trip, and in various cities) the strange face that seems to stare at me, recently engraved: a Byzantine face, yet Negroid too. The eyes are mismatched, one higher than the other; there is a small triangular beard. Beneath the face is a thumbless hand: three fingers slightly curled around a thin tube—a shepherd's pipe, an oddly thin phallus, a sailor's great rope? Scrawled beneath this odd face, perhaps by the same hermetic scribe, are a few words in Italian. Unusual words, I cannot make them out.

Then the mainland and Bari. The schooner left us three miles south of the city. It swung inshore before dusk for a surreptitious landing watched only by a small child, a girl gravely burned on the left side of the face. An unnecessary precaution, one that compelled us to scramble the last yards through water and up the beach. No carabinieri walked this beach; there was only the silent child. The old city was white and African on its promontory, and the fortress cathedral squatting among terracotta palazzos, beyond the ruin of the harbor.

Seguros walks ahead of me, small and indomitable, burdened by his mission. His equipment is elaborately trussed to his back and extends well above his head. The ditto machine rises there, and the long roll of maps, while the sack of leaflets and proclamations bulges from between the shoulders: a brown and fleshless lump. He carries the typewriter in one hand, the cardboard suitcase in the other. Seguros: the little man of burning faith, who expects even here in Bari to come upon Latin compatriots who will offer both money and adherence

to the cause. The cost of running off the leaflets is small, he insists, considering the amplitude and generosity of their claims. He walks toward the city: toward the fated misadventures and insults of his life, the arrests and betrayals. There are great moon stains at the armpits of his coarse suit. He is destined to be ravaged and exploited by all those he intends, in his patriotism, to exploit—the destiny surely visible in the stubborn optimist's gait. A sturdy implacable crawl. And visible too in the innocence of a face burnished and Indian, glowing with political hope—innocence, in spite of the great razor slash.

So we walked toward Bari, on the long swing back to our Free City. For it is there I must find men rich enough to air their grievances from the *Agracorinth* and Seguros find men not so rich, yet willing to finance the Committee's zeal. But in Bari there is only scum: the ruined driven southward by lemming hope, or who would rather starve under blue skies than freeze in northern alleys among unattainable sausages. I note that no progress has been made with the Porto Vecchio. None ever will be made until all is leveled by a greater explosion, possibly a miscalculated orange flare: some single unmalicious blow, definitive as an earthquake. The long warehouse adjoining the dogana still topples on its side, but now picked clean to twisted ribs. And nearby looms, exactly where it hung months before (but with more of the superstructure gone), a freighter as large as the *Agracorinth*. It pullulates with refugee life. Smashed upward quite onto the dock, even its great rudder hangs free of the water. Thin smoke issues from wounds in its sides, and strips of laundry from the dark portholes. There are swarms of children on the deck; more children on the dock, barefoot and chanting, holding hands in a ring; still others among the rusted cranes at the water's edge, where a long row of men fish, black and patient as crows.

A single carriage-taxi waits at the end of a long and empty avenue. But the driver refuses to take us, since we have no food for the market, of which he could have a share. What, he asks, is money to him? The lean horse seems upheld by the shafts, rather than holding them up; on the seat beside the driver, a transistor whines patriotic tunes. He advises us to get to the cathedral before dark. But that is easier said than done. The old town surrounding the cathedral is a labyrinth for the foiling of pirates, and the escape of neighborhood

thieves. We are ten minutes or more in the vicinity of the cathedral without finding our way. And it is already the hour for reprisals and the rooftop sniper, with the police gone into hiding for the night.

The basilica of St. Nicholas of Bari. Going inside, we are met by an unbelievable stench, a breathing smoky murmuring darkness. It might have been the low echoing chant of many priests. Yet we saw only two priests the whole time. The vast nave seemed even larger because of the fires flickering in darkness. Those who all their lives had cooked in the street now made fires on the cathedral floor. And there was one great fire beneath a vast tureen of boiling water and squid. A waving rubbery tentacle of the creature would be cut to measure before the customer's eyes, and sprinkled with precious salt and oil. There were also two rival stands where water was sold by the glass. There must have been over a thousand living in the cathedral: living, cooking, eating on the floor and among the tombs, and in all but two of the chapels, and in their divers odors of living—the urine damp and secret excrements, and the charcoal odors of the fire. The odors of the very old.

Only two priests. One was saying mass in a small chapel, attended by ragged acolytes, and with a few ancient crones. The proceedings were furtive, surreptitious. We might have been witnessing the quiet death throes of a proscribed or eccentric faith. But in the crypt—I went down there looking for Peralda, who had disappeared at once—there was a larger gathering. Twenty persons or more were sprawled at the very entrance to the crypt, among the first dark tombs. Many of them were holding hands. A quiet guitar strummed in the darkness. A man was speaking in Italian very softly: rhythmic phrases, they might have been aphorisms learned by heart. The only lantern in the crypt was behind him. It lit one side of his face in a bland innocence, but left the other side dark as a great scar or burn. A peaceful face, a voice with a message of quietness beyond despair. I began to make out a few bearded faces, and one girl close to the speaker. They all seemed to be young. And in the morning I saw them again, but in the outside glare. They were, except for the leader, seventeen or eighteen. Blond and northern. They squatted on the sidewalk in a compact ring, while water or food was heating. No one talked; I expected but did not hear the guitar. The leader sat quietly with his knees hunched against his beard, staring into the fire.

For a moment I thought I caught the eye of a girl whose hair hung in matted threads. It was a soft unformed face without burns or scars, also without passion or malice. She looked at me and saw nothing. I was only an alien object in her field of vision, on the screen of a repudiated world.

In the morning I awoke with a pain beneath the shoulder blades, nauseating as from a blow. My back was flat on the cold stone floor. I lay beneath a great monument, and the stone effigies in repose of some Sigismund or other and his pious chaste wife: a magnificent porphyry tomb. I might even have slept between them, one more sacrilege, one more alien intruder in the long scroll of unfaith. On the granite pediment and the rough stone pillar nearby I began to make out writings, the names of tourists, numbers of soldiers too, and the slogans of the various wars. And I was waking too, shaking now with cold, to last night's stench and the bodies strewn like corpses, or huddled against each other, or accepting a pillar's embrace. In this gray dawn the cathedral with its shattered windows and bricked up doorways was itself a ruin, not the fortress and sanctuary it had seemed by night of indestructible stone.

We left Bari behind. On the third day we took one of the tramp trains, scrambled with a hundred others into an empty freight car while the engineer was making his bargains. The train crept all afternoon through the green and silver countryside, stopping twice to take on olives and for three hours in a small city to sell. At ten o'clock under a piercing searchlight we reached the end of the line: Mantegna, the borders of a closed city-state. The tracks ran under the barbed wire and into concrete blocks. The next morning we went around the city on foot. We had camped with the others in the field. All night we could hear the loudspeakers proclaiming the city's independence, and its devotion to democratic principles.

And then the Zone of Interdiction. I wonder why people would enter a Zone, not singly but as one of a group, not blundering but of free will; and so elect to die? There are swifter and less painful deaths, if that is what one is after.

To be precise: After Mantegna, the little closed "republic" we had to walk around, I had my first real look at one of the Zones—a good look, since our coughing old plane overflew it at less than a thousand feet. It was madness to fly so low, since the Zone was over

thirty miles wide. What if we had had engine trouble, and been forced to land? The plane cast its shadow on the abandoned brown earth. Near one farm (where a cluster of farm buildings still stood), the skeletons of eight cows were ranged in an almost perfect circle around a tractor, itself hunched forward: a beast that had died on its knees. No grass grew through those bones. A little farther on, the skeletons were of trees. Then we saw the husks of the Zone's one city a few miles ahead of us and to the right. At first the cathedral looked intact. The bare walls of the nave still held, supported by massive buttresses, though the towers were gone, and of course the roof. The plane was going to take us directly over the cathedral. We were coming up on it from behind. The dead city lay there beneath us in its silence. The plane seemed to creep more slowly still. Its shadow was now wide enough to cover what had once been a modern street carved through the warren of the medieval town. One could still make out, from the ruins, the geography of the place.

Then the cathedral was behind us, and a man at the front of the plane shrieked. He was standing at the front of the plane, pointing down. Then everyone was at the windows to look.

In the center of a great square, where the basin of a fountain was still visible, a band of young people—there must have been twenty or more—were lounging or sleeping in the sun. Their sacks were scattered over a wide area of crushed stone. They scarcely seemed to notice the plane. A few stared up but didn't wave.

Then as we looked back—for the pilot was banking as to turn back to check the reality of this ghastly vision—we saw one of the men stand and aim a rifle at the belly of the plane. But it must have been only to scare us. He did not fire. I even think he was laughing as, abruptly, he passed out of our sight. Then everyone on the plane was talking, loud and very fast—as if to separate himself, who might live a number of years yet, from these silent young people on the ground. Ten minutes later we had landed at a large airport. And here the only dead were the great jets of the old times, abandoned and rusting at the end of the runway, where the hangars and repair shops used to be.

I think of these bands of youngsters. There are many more about than three months ago: the groups of fifteen and twenty threadbare adolescents, traveling in a pack. In the hill regions where we pushed

after leaving Ancona (unirradiated ruins these, left by antiquated bombs and one freighter of explosives, the harbor littered with sunk or split hulls) we saw youngsters who obviously were traveling together for safety, with one or two guns protecting the lot and perhaps a few grenades. But how can one know at a glance?

Near the old quarter of Genoa we looked into a narrow alley and quickly looked away. A gang rape appeared to be in progress in the afternoon shadows while two men with revolvers stood guard. Or was it only a robbery with the victim stripped of her clothes to obviate an easy hue and cry? We had only the moment's vision of a white body pinned against the wall, only the moment's hearing of a muffled scream and a loud volley of male abuse. There was nothing at all we could do.

Not all these experiences were so grim. Even in Genoa or at the border, that very afternoon:

Seguros, bereft of nationality and with only the one document improvised and issued by the Free City (by the police of the Legitimacy, that is), had difficulty at each border and roadblock. His birth certificate had years since been confiscated by one country, his permits and letters of introduction by a second, his passport by a third. He was the more suspect because he knew a large number of Italian words. As a rule I found it prudent (with my hated blue passport and its memories of American power) to know no Italian at all. The Genoese authorities, for instance. . . . At the drab stucco outskirts (which had escaped destruction, as did the Old Town, while the rest of the center was a catacomb) the authorities insisted on emptying Peralda's sack of leaflets. All the pleas and confrontations and pronunciamentos tied in bundles, two or three hundred sheets each. They were nearly all in Spanish. The customs officer went thoughtfully through each pile, using a wet thumb. Then he pushed the mass of leaflets to the police officer beside him, who undid all the strings.

The roadside table was sheltered from the sun by a shed with a tin roof. Before it Peralda stood at attention. The sweat trickled down his thick neck and under the collar. He watched with alarm this scrutiny of his one remaining identification paper. The police officer dangled it between thumb and forefinger. A paper evil and dirty to the touch:

—"This document is invalid, I have never seen another one.

It only accords you permission to travel into and out of the Free City. Moreover, it indicates no nationality."

—"My nationality was snatched from me."

—"Snatched?"

—"By a debased, corrupt and interloping power, acting without legality. In my homeland citizenship is conferred by birth and cannot be taken away without violation of universally recognized first principles. As for my passport, it was confiscated by the Cuban police after I was already on the plane leaving that country for Mexico. It was an act of political malice leaving me naked to the world."

—"These are big words you throw at me, friend. Corrupt, legality, malice! Naked! Tell me frankly your purpose in visiting Genoa. Tourism, I suppose? The seduction or purchase of our women? To incite discontent among the unemployed sailors who speak Spanish? Yes, no doubt that is it."

—"We are only passing through, sir, on our way to the Free City."

—"This document gives no place of birth. Where were you born?"

—"In Guatemala."

—"Why did you not stay there?"

—"I was deported."

—"And you think to go through our city without passport, nationality or citizenship, disseminating leaflets of hatred."

—"I am a citizen of the world. Also of the Caribbean fraternity of nations."

—"The Caribbean fraternity? I have not heard of that. And these leaflets you intend to spawn and scatter on our streets—what do they say?"

Seguros' face was twisted in the anguish of a man unwilling to betray his principles.

"The concepts of democracy, the fraternal aspirations, the idea of federation with specific plans, the taxation of the rich . . ."

—"Basta! Silence! Did I ask you for a speech?"

—"No, officer."

—"Do you intend to seek employment in Genoa?"

—"No, your honor."

—"And you will leave the city within twenty-four hours?"

—"Yes, excellency."

—"Very well. I will seal this abominable sack. See that it remains unopened when you reach the border at the other side. Otherwise you will be our guest under disagreeable circumstances, and for an indefinite period."

The sealing of the sacks—the affixing of large staples through customs cards—was quickly done. Then the policeman waved us on. He had given only a glance at my passport, a cursory and scornful glance.

But Seguros was not so lucky at our own border.

Yes, our own border. For it is time to bring these random notes to an end, which can give a fleeting impression of the continent we fling our voice at. One cannot describe everything: the last of the tramp trains we took, or the fires and the plasticages, or the fixed stare of a man lying dead of starvation on the main street in Savona. So, instead, home: the last miles on foot in the moon-drenched night, since the bus had to leave us at the border. The two Forces Libres guards passed me after a long inspection of my passport. One of the few American ones they must have seen since my last passing here: unrenewed, worn and the stitching precarious, every page crowded with stampings and inked angry scrawls. Yet a bona fide passport, after all, with the ten-year-old photograph of a face still unsensual, unbrutalized and unlined, hopeful then, wearing the shaved haircut of a college trip in "an interval between wars." Moreover, these guards knew who I was. I did have my notoriety as manager of the hovering visible ship, though more offensive to the daytime Legitimacy than to the Forces Libres who ruled by night. The *Agracorinth* was an unmoving obscene eyesore by day, but only riding lights after dark. But Seguros was stopped. Stopped because his only document was this improvised one issued by the Legitimacy: that is, by the one authority the Forces Libres could not recognize. He would have to cross the border by day, when the police and customs authorities of the Legitimacy would be in charge.

So I came home alone, and it was long after midnight when I reached the villa. The man on guard at the bottom of the garden was fast asleep, with his rifle across his knees. I was tempted to wrench it from him or even wake him by firing it myself. Instead I crept past him and up through the garden and the terraces. The trees were ghostly and unstirring, as at the bottom of the sea.

And everyone in the house was asleep too. In the decanted blue light I crept past the men sleeping on the floor. The place was littered like an army billet from one of the old wars. Clothes flung over chairs, bottles, rifles stacked on marble-topped tables, ammunition belts hanging from the wall. And the smell of tobacco and stale food. For I do after all support a small army here (I think we are eighteen): its only function to defend the house, to defend Delphine, Odile and me, and to do the shopping or scouring for food, with always at least one man to guard the car. (Yes, Delphine: who did at last leave Louis Guilloux in an act of complex loyalty, hoping he would be helpless without her and would give up the broadcasting—"the rebellion"—after she was gone.) I support them? To be precise: my American employer supports them unknowingly, who would doubtless be outraged by so much disorder. But what for that matter would he think of the *Agracorinth* herself, its arrangements a paradigm of anarchy?

I am tired; then suddenly much more tired, having taken off my shoes. All this time to go five miles! In the blue half-darkness I hesitate between looking for Delphine and looking for the girl Odile. It seems wrong to come "home" and speak to no one. The one forty, the other fifteen; I am fond of both. I trust Delphine (who preceded me by a week) has found a room to herself, perhaps even a room that can be locked. But if not? Could I go to her and lower myself onto her so quietly she would experience my body entering her as a dream? But no. Moments later she would be alert and full of questions, and her nervous hands digging at my back.

And Odile? We would share a cigarette in the dark. It is for her, always, a child prostitute's game: the struck match in the dark and her cretin soft eyes turned inward to the flaring light. And now I do want her, and search for her through one room after another. I find her in one of the bedrooms upstairs. The man she is with is truly anonymous, since he has turned to the wall with the blanket over his head. Her soft untroubled face, the small nose and mouth, her shoulders two bulbs of bone, and under the blanket her small breasts that do not stir—she is half in the moonlight, half in shadow. The shadow hides her arm and hand with the terrible burn.

I rub her forehead gently; her eyes stir, she is dreaming. And then I hear, pure as a bird's call, the sound of a flute. I think it must be from one of the bodyguards at the Villa Lou Macart next door, lonely

on the terrace, or perhaps from the bedroom of the Prince. The flute stops. At once a bird responds, then the flute again. And I leave Odile with a strange anxiety. I go out onto the balcony. The taste of risk calling? To hold Odile outside on the hillside and weeds; or, no, to creep barefoot through those weeds and over the barbed wire to silence that guard and his flute?

And suddenly I wonder about my ship, which would be invisible from down here. I rush up past my office to the roof.

The *Agracorinth* is there, just off the darkness of the cape. Far out the lights are where they should be: but very faint. She must have swung with her prow either south or north. Yet can one be sure? Could it not be a stranger? I go to my office, quickly turn on the radio, which is already tuned to our station; and hear, reassured, Beetrare's nasal whine as he announces a record; and the weird clearing of the throat.

It is all right; no announcer on earth has a voice resembling his. He too is still talking.

And reassuringly the next morning she still floats: a small ugly black blotch on the calm sea. I think of my first odd interview in which a minor bureaucrat threatened me, at first politely, at last with a grim reminder of power. He spoke as though even the neighboring Provisional Republic's navy (its fast cutters) would be brought into play. His complaint was that the old ship's hovering presence was "disagreeable." Moreover, there was still some suspicion that the ship was being provisioned from the mainland, not from the island as I claimed. Anyway, he said, "Your ship finds itself in a very precarious situation. That is my candid opinion." He dismissed with these few words the niceties of obsolete international law: an amiable but firm warning. Who was I to talk of international waters when the registering country would not even adhere to the basic communications codes? Angry, he marched up to his wall map of Africa, and crushed his cigarette methodically against the small blue square of the sponsoring nation: the brand new flag of convenience.—"*Voilà*! That's what I think of your sovereign autonomous republic!" The smudge, an inch or so across, almost blacked out the whole new and insubordinate country, and its one river curving briefly inland feeble as a pinworm. "I don't care what you broadcast. Your ship is an offense to the eye, however. The presence of your ship is an insult, I warn you action will be taken!"

How seriously did he mean these threats, whose own office and "department" gave every impression of having been forgotten by higher-ups? Empty desks and dust everywhere, a wild scatter of files. Did an officer of the Forces Libres go through them every night? Braggadocio, these warnings. All the same each morning, when at the villa, I look out at once to see whether the *Agracorinth* is still there, four or five miles at sea. Or had she been sunk—silently, without explosion—during the night? There were mornings she still floated, but hidden by the summer haze. Other days she stood out so clearly I thought I could even see the lonely lank figure of Beetrare on the forward hatch, and his laundry out to dry. I even fancied I could also see, hundreds of miles away, the cone of the volcano on the supply island: a tip just above the horizon. A gray and white cone, faint and evanescent as smoke. And occult in its changing visibility, like the ship, but free from the menaces of the shore.

Roland Barthes

I.

THE STRUCTURALIST ACTIVITY

What is structuralism? Not a school, nor even a movement (at least, not yet), for most of the authors ordinarily labeled with this word are unaware of being united by any solidarity of doctrine or commitment. Nor is it a vocabulary. *Structure* is already an old word (of anatomical and grammatical provenance), today quite overworked: all the social sciences resort to it abundantly, and the word's use can distinguish no one, except to engage in polemics about the content assigned to it; *functions, forms, signs* and *significations* are scarcely more pertinent: they are, today, words of common usage, from which one asks (and obtains) whatever one wants, notably the camouflage of the old determinist schema of cause and product; we must doubtless go back to pairings like those of *significans/significatum* and *synchronic/diachronic* in order to approach what distinguishes structuralism from other modes of thought: the first because it refers to the linguistic model as originated by Saussure, and because along with economics, linguistics is, in the present state of affairs, the true science of structure, the second, more decisively, because it seems to imply a certain revision of the notion of history, insofar as the notion of the synchronic (although in Saussure this is a preeminently *operational* concept) accredits a certain immobilization of time, and insofar as that of the diachronic tends to represent the historical process as a pure succession of forms. This second pairing is all the more distinctive in that the chief resistance to structuralism today seems to be of Marxist origin and that it focuses on the notion of history (and not of structure); whatever the case, it is probably the serious recourse to the

nomenclature of signification (and not to the word itself, which is, paradoxically, not at all distinctive) which we must ultimately take as structuralism's *spoken sign*: watch who uses *signifier* and *signified, synchronic* and *diachronic,* and you will know whether the structuralist vision is constituted.

This is valid for the intellectual metalanguage, which explicitly employs methodological concepts. But since structuralism is neither a school nor a movement, there is no reason to reduce it a priori, even in a problematical way, to the activity of philosophers; it would be better to try and find its broadest description (if not its definition) on another level than that of reflexive language. We can in fact presume that there exist certain writers, painters, musicians, in whose eyes a certain *exercise* of structure (and not only its thought) represents a distinctive experience, and that both analysts and creators must be placed under the common sign of what we might call *structural man,* defined not by his ideas or his languages, but by his imagination—in other words, by the way in which he mentally experiences structure.

Hence the first thing to be said is that in relation to *all* its users, structuralism is essentially an *activity,* i.e., the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations: we might speak of structuralist activity as we once spoke of surrealist activity (surrealism, moreover, may well have produced the first experience of structural literature, a possibility which must some day be explored). But before seeing what these operations are, we must say a word about their goal.

The goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an "object" in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the "functions") of this object. Structure is therefore actually a *simulacrum* of the object, but a directed, *interested* simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object. Structural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it; this appears to be little enough (which makes some say that the structuralist enterprise is "meaningless," "uninteresting," "useless," etc.). Yet, from another point of view, this "little enough" is decisive: for between the two objects, or the two tenses, of structuralist activity, there occurs *something new,* and what is new is nothing less than the generally intelligible: the simulacrum is intellect added to object, and

this addition has an anthropological value, in that it is man himself, his history, his situation, his freedom and the very resistance which nature offers to his mind.

We see, then, why we must speak of a structuralist *activity*: creation or reflection are not, here, an original "impression" of the world, but a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the first one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible. Hence one might say that structuralism is essentially *an activity of imitation,* which is also why there is, strictly speaking, no *technical* difference between structuralism as an intellectual activity on the one hand and literature in particular, art in general on the other: both derive from a *mimesis,* based not on the analogy of substances (as in so-called realist art), but on the analogy of functions (what Lévi-Strauss calls *homology*). When Troubetskoy reconstructs the phonetic object as a system of variations; when Dumézil elaborates a functional mythology; when Propp constructs a folktale resulting by structuration from all the Slavic tales he has previously decomposed; when Lévi-Strauss discovers the homologic functioning of the totemic imagination, or Granger the formal rules of economic thought, or Gardin the pertinent features of prehistoric bronzes; when Richard decomposes a poem by Mallarmé into its distinctive vibrations—they are all doing nothing different from what Mondrian, Boulez or Butor are doing when they articulate a certain object—what will be called, precisely, a *composition*—by the controlled manifestation of certain units and certain associations of these units. It is of little consequence whether the initial object liable to the simulacrum-activity is given by the world in an already assembled fashion (in the case of the structural analysis made of a constituted language or society or work) or is still scattered (in the case of the structural "composition"); whether this initial object is drawn from a social reality or an imaginary reality. It is not the nature of the copied object which defines an art (though this is a tenacious prejudice in all realism), it is the fact that man adds to it in reconstructing it: technique is the very being of all creation. It is therefore to the degree that the goals of structuralist activity are indissolubly linked to a certain technique that structuralism exists in a distinctive fashion in relation to other modes of analysis or creation: we recompose the object *in order* to make certain functions appear, and it is,

so to speak, the way that makes the work; this is why we must speak of the structuralist activity rather than the structuralist work.

The structuralist activity involves two typical operations: dissection and articulation. To dissect the first object, the one which is given to the simulacrum-activity, is to find in it certain mobile fragments whose differential situation engenders a certain meaning; the fragment has no meaning in itself, but it is nonetheless such that the slightest variation wrought in its configuration produces a change in the whole; a *square* by Mondrian, a *series* by Pousseur, a *versicle* of Butor's *Mobile,* the "mytheme" in Lévi-Strauss, the phoneme in the work of the phonologists, the "theme" in certain literary criticism—all these units (whatever their inner structure and their extent, quite different according to cases) have no significant existence except by their frontiers: those which separate them from other actual units of the discourse (but this is a problem of articulation) and also those which distinguish them from other virtual units, with which they form a certain class (which linguistics calls a *paradigm*); this notion of a paradigm is essential, apparently, if we are to understand the structuralist vision: the paradigm is a group, a reservoir—as limited as possible—of objects (of units) from which one summons, by an act of citation, the object or unit one wishes to endow with an actual meaning; what characterizes the paradigmatic object is that it is, vis-à-vis other objects of its class, in a certain relation of affinity and dissimilarity: two units of the same paradigm must resemble each other somewhat *in order* that the difference which separates them be indeed evident: *s* and *z* must have both a common feature (dentality) and a distinctive feature (presence or absence of sonority) so that we cannot, in French, attribute the same meaning to *poisson* and *poison;* Mondrian's squares must have both certain affinities by their shape as squares, and certain dissimilarities by their proportion and color; the American automobiles (in Butor's *Mobile*) must be constantly regarded in the same way, yet they must differ each time by both their make and color; the episodes of the Oedipus myth (in Lévi-Strauss's analysis) must be both identical and varied—in order that all these languages, these works may be intelligible. The dissection-operation thus produces an initial dispersed state of the simulacrum, but the units of the structure are not at all anarchic: before being distributed and fixed in the continuity of the composition, each one forms with its own

virtual group or reservoir an intelligent organism, subject to a sovereign motor principle: that of the smallest difference.

Once the units are posited, structural man must discover in them or establish for them certain rules of association: this is the activity of articulation, which succeeds the summoning activity. The syntax of the arts and of discourse is, as we know, extremely varied; but what we discover in every work of structural enterprise is the submission to regular constraints whose formalism, improperly indicted, is much less important than their stability; for what is happening, at this second stage of the simulacrum-activity, is a kind of battle against chance; this is why the constraint of recurrence of the units has an almost demiurgic value: it is by the regular return of the units and of the associations of units that the work appears constructed, i.e., endowed with meaning; linguistics calls these rules of combination *forms*, and it would be advantageous to retain this rigorous sense of an overtaxed word: form, it has been said, is what keeps the contiguity of units from appearing as a pure effect of chance: the work of art is what man wrests from chance. This perhaps allows us to understand on the one hand why so-called nonfigurative works are nonetheless to the highest degree works of art, human thought being established not on the analogy of copies and models but with the regularity of assemblages; and on the other hand why these same works appear, precisely, fortuitous and thereby useless to those who discern in them no *form*: in front of an abstract painting, Khrushchev was certainly wrong to see only the traces of a donkey's tail whisked across the canvas; at least he knew in his way, though, that art is a certain conquest of chance (he simply forgot that every rule must be learned, whether one wants to apply or interpret it).

The simulacrum, thus constructed, does not render the world as it has found it, and it is here that structuralism is important. First of all, it manifests a new category of the object, which is neither the real nor the rational, but the *functional,* thereby joining a whole scientific complex which is being developed around information theory and research. Subsequently and especially, it highlights the strictly human process by which men give meaning to things. Is this new? To a certain degree, yes; of course the world has never stopped looking for the meaning of what is given it and of what it produces; what is new is a mode of thought (or a "poetics") which seeks less to assign completed mean-

ings to the objects it discovers than to know how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means. Ultimately, one might say that the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings, but man fabricating meanings, as if it could not be the *content* of meanings which exhausted the semantic goals of humanity, but only the act by which these meanings, historical and contingent variables, are produced. *Homo significans*: such would be the new man of structural inquiry.

According to Hegel, the ancient Greek was amazed by the *natural* in nature; he constantly listened to it, questioned the meaning of mountains, springs, forests, storms; without knowing what all these objects were telling him by name, he perceived in the vegetal or cosmic order a tremendous *shudder* of meaning, to which he gave the name of a god: Pan. Subsequently, nature has changed, has become social: everything that is given to man is *already* human, down to the forest and the river which we cross when we travel. But confronted with this social nature, which is quite simply culture, structural man is no different from the ancient Greek: he too listens for the natural in culture, and constantly perceives in it not so much stable, finite, "true" meanings as the shudder of an enormous machine which is humanity tirelessly undertaking to create meaning, without which it would no longer be human. And it is because this fabrication of meaning is more important, to its view, than the meanings themselves, it is because the function is extensive with the works, that structuralism constitutes itself as an activity, and refers the exercise of the work and the work itself to a single identity: a serial composition or an analysis by Lévi-Strauss are not objects except insofar as they have been *made*: their present being *is* their past act: they are *having-been-mades*; the artist, the analyst recreates the course taken by meaning, he need not designate it: his function, to return to Hegel's example, is a *manteia;* like the ancient soothsayer, he *speaks* the locus of meaning but does not name it. And it is because literature, in particular, is a mantic activity that it is both intelligible and interrogating, speaking and silent, engaged in the world by the course of meaning which it remakes with the world, but disengaged from the contingent meanings which the world elaborates: an answer to the man who consumes it

yet always a question to nature, an answer which questions and a question which answers.

How then does structural man deal with the accusation of unreality which is sometimes flung at him? Are not forms in the world, are not forms responsible? Was it really his Marxism that was revolutionary in Brecht? Was it not rather the decision to link to Marxism, in the theater, the placing of a spotlight or the deliberate fraying of a costume? Structuralism does not withdraw history from the world: it seeks to link to history not only certain contents (this has been done a thousand times) but also certain forms, not only the material but also the intelligible, not only the ideological but also the esthetic. And precisely because all thought about the historically intelligible is also a participation in that intelligibility, structural man is scarcely concerned to *last;* he knows that structuralism, too, is a certain *form* of the world, which will change with the world; and just as he experiences his validity (but not his truth) in his power to speak the old languages of the world in a new way, so he knows that it will suffice that a new language rise out of history, a new language which speaks him in his turn, for his task to be done.

II.

THE DISEASES OF COSTUME

I should like to sketch here not a history or an esthetic, but rather a pathology, or if you prefer, an ethic of costume. I shall propose a few very simple rules which may permit us to judge whether a costume is good or bad, healthy or sick.

I must first define the basis I assign to this ethic, to this health. In the name of what shall we decide to judge the costumes for a play? One might answer (as whole epochs have done): historical truth or good taste, faithfulness of detail or pleasure of the eyes. For my part, I propose another ideal for our ethic: that of the play itself. Every dramatic work can and must reduce itself to what Brecht calls its social *gestus,* the external, material expression of the social conflicts to which it bears witness. It is obviously up to the director to discover and to manifest this *gestus,* this particular historical scheme which is at the core of every spectacle: at his disposal, in order to do so, he has the ensemble of theatrical techniques: the actor's performance, movement and location, the setting, lighting and, specifically, *costume.*

It is therefore on the necessity of manifesting, each time, the social *gestus* of the play that we shall base our ethic of costume. This means that we shall assign to costume a purely functional role, and that this function will be of an intellectual rather than a plastic or emotional order. The costume is nothing more than the second term of a relation which must constantly link the work's meaning to its "exteriority." Hence everything in the costume that blurs the clarity of this relation, that contradicts, obscures or falsifies the social *gestus* of the spectacle, is bad; on the contrary, everything in the forms, the colors, the substances and their articulation that helps us to read this *gestus* is good.

So, as in every ethic, let us begin by the negative rules; let us see first what a costume must not be (granted, of course, that the premises of our ethic are accepted).

In a general way, the costume must on no account be an *alibi,* i.e., a justification; the costume must not constitute a dense and brilliant visual locus to which the attention may escape, fleeing the essential reality of the spectacle, what we might call its responsibility; then too, the costume must not be a kind of excuse, a compensatory element whose success redeems, for example, the silence or the indigence of the work. The costume must always keep its value as a pure function, it must neither smother nor swell the play, it must avoid substituting independent values for the signification of the staged action. Hence it is when the costume becomes an end in itself that it becomes condemnable. The costume owes the play a certain number of *prestations*: if one of these services is exaggeratedly developed, if the servant becomes more important than the master, then the costume is sick, it suffers from hypertrophy.

The diseases, errors or alibis of costume, whatever we call them, I divide into three categories, all very common in our theater.

The basic disease is the hypertrophy of the historical function, what we shall call an archeological verism. It should be recalled that there are two kinds of history: an intelligent history which rediscovers the profound tensions, the specific conflicts of the past; and a superficial history which mechanically reconstructs certain anecdotic details; costume has long been a favorite realm for the exercise of this latter history; we know the epidemic ravages of the veristic malady in bourgeois art: costume, conceived as an accumulation of true details, absorbs, then atomizes the spectator's entire attention, which is dispersed far from the spectacle, in the region of the infinitely small. The good costume, even when it is historical, is on the contrary a total visual fact; there is a certain scale of truth, beneath which one must not proceed, or else one destroys this fact. The veristic costume, still to be seen in certain operatic productions, achieves the climax of absurdity: the truth of the whole is effaced by the exactitude of the part, the actor disappears beneath the scruple of his buttons, his drapery and his false hair. The veristic costume infallibly produces the following effect: we see perfectly well that it is true, and yet we don't believe it.

In recent productions, I should give as the example of a good victory over verism Leon Gischia's costumes for *The Prince of Hamburg* (Vilar's T.N.P. production). The play's social *gestus* rests on a certain conception of *the military*, and it is to this argumentative datum that Gischia has subjected his costumes: all their attributes have been made to sustain a semantics of the soldier rather than a semantics of the seventeenth century: the clear forms, the severe yet bold colors, above all the substances—an element much more important than the rest (here, the sensation of leather and broadcloth)—the entire optical surface of the spectacle has assimilated the argument of the work. Similarly, in the Berliner Ensemble's *Mother Courage*, it is not at all a history–as–dates which has dictated the truth of the costumes: it is the notion of war, of an overland, interminable war, which is sustained and constantly made explicit not by the archeological veracity of a certain shape, a certain object, but by a dusty and plastery gray, by the threadbare state of the fabrics, the dense, stubborn poverty of wicker, rope and wood.

It is, moreover, always by substances (and not by shapes or colors) that we are finally assured of rediscovering the profoundest version of history. A good costumer must be able to give the public the tactile sense of what it sees, even from a great distance. I never expect much from an artist who elaborates forms and colors without proposing a really thought-out choice of the materials to be used: for it is in the very substance of objects (and not in their planar representation) that the true history of men is to be found.

A second disease, also frequent, is the esthetic one, the hypertrophy of a formal beauty without relation to the play. Naturally it would be pointless to neglect the strictly plastic values in costume: taste, felicity, balance, the absence of vulgarity, even the search for originality. But too often these necessary values become an end in themselves, the spectator's attention is distracted from the theater, artificially concentrated on a parasitical function: we may then have an admirable esthete's theater, but we no longer have quite a human theater. With a certain excess of puritanism, I should say that I regard as a disturbing sign the phenomenon of applauding the costumes (this is quite frequent in Paris). The curtain goes up, the eye is bewitched, we

applaud: but what do we really know, then, except that this red is beautiful or that drapery clever? Do we know if this splendor, these refinements, these discoveries will suit the play, will serve it, will concur in expressing its meaning?

The very type of this deviation is the Bérard esthetic, employed today without rhyme or reason. Sustained by snobbery and worldliness, the esthetic avatar of costume supposes the condemnable independence of each of the elements of the spectacle: to applaud the costumes within the performance itself is to accentuate the divorce of the creators, is to reduce the work to a blind conjunction of virtuosities. It is not the duty of costume to seduce the eye, but to convince it.

The costumer must therefore avoid being either a painter or a couturier; he will mistrust the flat values of painting, will avoid the relations of space proper to this art, precisely because the very definition of painting is that these relations are necessary and sufficient; their wealth, their density, the very tension of their existence would greatly exceed the argumentative function of the costume; and if the costumer is by profession a painter, he must forget his condition as soon as he becomes a creator of costumes; it is an understatement to say that he must subject his art to the play: he must destroy it, forget pictorial space and reinvent all over again the woolly or silky space of human bodies. He must also abstain from the *grand couturier* style which today prevails in our vulgar theaters. The *chic* of costume, the studied casualness of an antique drapery one might suppose came straight from Dior, the fashionable distortion of a crinoline, are disastrous alibis which blur the clarity of the argument, make the costume an eternal form, and one "eternally young", divested of the contingencies of history and, evidently, this is contrary to the rules we posited at the beginning.

There is moreover a modern feature which summarizes this hypertrophy of the esthetic: it is the fetishism of the designer's sketch or model (exhibitions, reproductions). The sketch usually teaches nothing about the costume because it fails to afford the essential experience, that of the material. To see on stage these sketches-as-costumes cannot be a good sign. I am not saying that the sketch is unnecessary; but it is an entirely preparatory operation which should concern only the

designer and the dressmaker; the sketch should be entirely destroyed on the stage except for some very rare spectacles in which the art of the fresco is to be deliberately striven for. The sketch or model must remain an instrument, and not become a style.

Lastly, the third disease of costume is money, the hypertrophy of sumptuosity or at least its appearance. This is a very frequent disease in our society, in which the theater is always the object of a contract between the spectator who pays his money and the manager who returns it to him in the most visible form possible; now it is quite obvious that in this case, the illusory sumptuosity of the costumes constitutes a spectacular and reassuring restitution; vulgarly speaking, costume *pays* better than emotion or intellection, always uncertain and without manifest relations to their condition as merchandise. Hence once a theater becomes vulgarized, we see it constantly heightening the luxury of its costumes, visited for themselves and soon becoming the decisive attraction of the spectacle (*Les Indes Galantes* at the Opéra). Where is the theater in all this? Nowhere, of course: the horrible cancer of wealth has completely devoured it.

By a diabolic mechanism, the luxurious costume adds mendacity to what is already base: ours is no longer an age (as Shakespeare's was, for example) when actors wear rich but authentic costumes from seigneurial wardrobes; today, wealth costs too much, we content ourselves with an ersatz—that is, with lies. Thus it is not even luxury, but fakes that happen to be hypertrophied today. Sombart has suggested the bourgeois origin of the imitation substance; certainly in France it is particularly the petit-bourgeois theaters (Folies-Bergère, Comédie-Française, Opéra-Comique) which indulge in such pseudo-substances most determinedly. This supposes an infantile condition in the spectator who is denied simultaneously any critical spirit and any creative imagination. Naturally we cannot entirely banish *imitation-wealth* from our costumes; but if we resort to it, we should at least *signify* as much, should refuse to accredit the lie. In the theater, nothing must be hidden. This notion derives from a very simple ethical principle, which has always produced, I believe, a great theater: one must have confidence in the spectator, must resolutely grant him the power of creating wealth himself, of transforming rayon into silk and lies into illusion.

And now, let us consider what a good costume would be; and since we have acknowledged its functional nature, let us attempt to define the kind of prestations to which it is committed. For myself, I see at least two, which are essential:

First of all, *the costume must be an argument*. This intellectual function of costume is generally buried today under the parasitical functions we have just reviewed (verism, esthetics, money). Yet in all the great periods of theater, costume had a powerful semantic value; it was not there only to be seen, it was also there to be *read*, it communicated ideas, information or sentiments.

The intellectual or cognitive cell of the costume, its basic element, is the *sign*. We have, in a tale from the *Thousand & One Nights*, a magnificent example of the vestimentary sign: we are told that whenever he was angry, the Caliph Haroun al-Rashid put on a red gown. Here the Caliph's red gown is a sign, the spectacular *sign* of his anger; it is empowered to transmit visually to the Caliph's subjects a datum of the cognitive order: the sovereign's state of mind and all the consequences it implies.

Powerful, popular and civic theaters have always utilized a precise vestimentary code, they have broadly practiced what we might call a politics of the sign: I shall merely recall that among the Greeks, his mask and the color of his ornaments proclaimed in advance a character's social or emotional condition; that on the medieval church-porch and the Elizabethan stage, the colors of the costumes, in certain symbolic cases, permitted a diacritical reading, so to speak, of the state of the actors; and that finally in the *Commedia dell'arte*, each psychological type possessed its own conventional clothing. It is bourgeois romanticism which, diminishing its confidence in the public's intellective power, has dissolved the sign in a sort of archeological truth of costume: the sign has deteriorated into a detail, we have taken to producing veridical costumes and no longer significant ones. This debauch of imitation achieved its culminating point in the baroque of the nineteen hundreds—a veritable pandemonium of costume.

Since we have just sketched a pathology of costume, we must now indicate some of the diseases which may affect the vestimentary *sign*. These are, in a sense, the maladies of nutrition: the sign is sick whenever it is over- or underfed on meaning. I shall cite only the

most common diseases: indigence of the sign (Wagnerian heroines in nightgowns), literalness of the sign (Bacchantes signified by bunches of grapes), overindication of the sign (Chantecler's feathers juxtaposed one by one; total for the play: some hundreds of pounds); inadequacy of the sign ("historical" costumes applied without differentiation to vague epochs); and lastly, multiplication and internal disequilibrium of the sign (for example, the Folies-Bergère costumes, remarkable for the audacity and clarity of their historical stylization, are complicated, blurred by accessory signs such as those of fantasy or sumptuosity—here all signs are put on the same level).

Can we define a *health* of the sign? At this point we must be wary of formalism: the sign has succeeded when it is functional; we cannot give it an abstract definition; everything depends on the real content of the spectacle; here again, health is above all an absence of disease; the costume is healthy when it leaves the work free to transmit its profound significance, when it does not encumber the play and in a sense permits the actor to go about his essential business without bearing a parasitical burden. What we *can* say, at least, is that a good vestimentary code, an effective servant of the play's *gestus*, excludes naturalism. Brecht has given a remarkable explanation of this, apropos of the costumes for *The Mother;* scenically one does not *signify* the frayed condition of a piece of clothing by putting on stage a threadbare garment. To manifest itself, the frayed condition must be raised to a higher power (this is the very definition of what in the cinema is called the photogenic), provided with a kind of epic dimension: the good sign must always be the fruit of a choice and of an accentuation. Brecht has given all the details of the operations necessary to the construction of the *sign* of wear-and-tear: the intelligence, scruple and patience involved are remarkable (treatment of the fabric with chlorine, burning the dyestuffs, scraping with a razor blade, maculation by waxes, lacquers and acids, holes made or else darned and patched); in our theaters, hypnotized by the esthetic finality of our costumes, we are still far from radically submitting the vestimentary *sign* to such detailed treatments and especially to such "thought-out" ones (in France, of course, an art is suspect if it thinks); one does not see Leonor Fini applying a blowtorch to one of those lovely red gowns that sets *le Tout-Paris* on fire.

Another positive function of the costume: *it must create a humanity,* it must favor the actor's human stature, must make his bodily nature perceptible, distinct and if possible affecting. The costume must serve the human proportions and somehow sculpture the actor, make his silhouette natural, allowing us to imagine that the form of the garment, however eccentric in relation to ourselves, is perfectly consubstantial with his flesh, with his daily life; we must never feel the human body flouted by the disguise.

This humanity of the costume is largely a tributary of its surroundings, of the material milieu in which the actor performs. The concerted agreement between costume and background is perhaps the first law of the theater: we know all too well, for example, from certain opera productions, that the jumble of painted drops, the incessant and futile parade of motley choristers, all these excessively loaded surfaces, make man into a grotesque silhouette, without emotion and without clarity. Now the theater openly demands of its actors a certain corporeal exemplarity; whatever ethic we attribute to it, the theater is in a sense a celebration of the human body, and costume and background must respect this body by expressing its entire human quality. The more organic the link between the costume and the surround, the more justified the costume. It is an infallible test to juxtapose a costume with natural substances like stone, darkness, foliage. If the costume harbors some of the viruses we have indicated, it will be seen at once that it corrupts the landscape, appears mean, seedy, absurd (this was the case, in the cinema, with Guitry's costumes in *Si Versailles m'était conté,* their limited artifice belying the stones and perspectives of the château); conversely, if the costume is healthy, the open air must be able to assimilate, even to exalt it.

Another agreement difficult to achieve and yet indispensable is that of the costume and the face. On this point, how many morphological anachronisms! How many modern faces naïvely set on false ruffs, false tunics! We know that this is one of the acutest problems of the historical film (Roman senators with the faces of sheriffs, to which we must offer the comparison of Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc*). In the theater, the same problem: the costume must be able to *absorb* the face; we must feel that a single historical epithelium, invisible but necessary, covers them both.

In short, the good costume must be material enough to signify and transparent enough not to turn its signs into parasites. The costume is a kind of writing and has the ambiguity of writing, which is an instrument in the service of a purpose which transcends it; but if the writing is either too poor or too rich, too beautiful or too ugly, it can no longer be read and fails in its function. The costume, too, must find that kind of rare equilibrium which permits it to help us *read* the theatrical act without encumbering it with any parasitical value: it must renounce every egotism, every excess of good intentions; it must pass unnoticed in itself yet it must also exist: the actors cannot, after all, appear on stage naked! It must be both material and transparent: we must see it but not look at it. This is perhaps only an apparent paradox: Brecht's recent example suggests that it is in the very accentuation of its materiality that costume has the greatest chances of achieving its necessary submission to the critical goals of the spectacle.

(Translated from the French by Richard Howard)

FOUR POEMS BY JOHN HOLLANDER

LETTER

Love begins with
light Long
glances at
ladies who
even under
this stony
blue-white
emanations
unwarm and
unalarming
shade form
the lovely
shapes are
the lances
that break
in through
the light-
filled and
resounding
valleys we
lie across
when touch
lengthened
by longing
leads us O
my love to
a darkness
we welcome
Left alone
we can lie
clasping a
gap on two
sides like
the letter
that means -odd
half a square hundred dark places we lay in fifty ~~old~~
remembered times of light unending your beginning O Love

LAST QUARTER

When
parentheses
appear to be
opening then
beware of an
ending Never
misread such
signs as the
bold crescive
Cs of becoming
or of initials
curving toward
the words like
Come Clear Cup
Changes Comedy
Crystal Create
or even Crowns
Their openings
stand only for
closings As if
our cupped left
hands held out
sickle-like to
cradle a round
tower's bulbous
copper top cut
some blue some
room some hope
out of the sky's
fierce surplus
so these C-like
marks close up
But C-creatures
grow yea truly
behind and yet
beyond limits
So unrealities
conclude in an
eclipse of old
moonlights by
the darknesses
of origin Here
where the horn
of light thins
out into what
is almost gone
or lost a new
form starts as
a part of life
begins

ESKIMO PIE

I shall
never pretend
to have forgotten
such loves as those
that turned the dying
brightness at an end of
a child's afternoon into
preludes To an evening of
lamplight To a night dark
with blanketing To mornings
of more and more There deep
in the old ruralities of play
the frosted block with papery
whisps still stuck to it kissed
me burningly as it arose out of
dry icy stillnesses And there now
again I taste First its hard then
it's soft Now I am into the creamy
treasure which to have tasted is to
have begun to lose to the heat of a
famished sun But O if I break faith
with you poor dreadful popsicle may
my mouth forget warm rains a tongue
musty Pauillac cool skin all tastes
I see
sweet
drops
slide
along
a hot
stick
It is
a sad
sorry
taste
which
never
comes
to an
end

VANISHED MANSARD: MEMORIAL HALL

No views from here
but always visions
of it high and red
Even when it still
sprang majestic into
the winter air there
ornate and overlooking
all the green below with
an unattainable top that
leaped into so many raised
glances and crowned nearly
all our final backward gazes
And our first glimpse placed
a heroic symbol surely between
the leaves of remembrance Even
when we said The Albert Memorial
on top of the Albert Hall See it
was in knowing that as we stood in
its long shadow we were waiting at
the brink of its green moment of new
beauty phasing in on our age like an
ease of shading a tower tenders And as
Verena Tarrant confronted her Southern
challenger under its memorial woodenness
momentous Latin lifted her own momentary
air aloft So when like the travelling case
designed for a summit or climax or triumph
or surprise it burns even now backstage in a
decade-old theatre of reminiscences black flourishings
of smoke enfold again the splendid day as an abolished
clock strikes a muffled hour Ours it was And if towers
be owned only by viewing with their eyes all they overshadow
then our dark hearts have had it all as our wide eyes have
overseen from white impatient towers claiming the skys
brightness without thrusting toward it the red of clay
New towers are for climbing This lost peak ascended us

Tony Tanner

THE HOAX THAT JOKE BILKED

In a sense John Barth's fiction takes its point of departure from Wittgenstein's proposition that "the world is all that is the case." This sentence recurs in varying forms throughout his work and often serves to pose a basic problem for his main characters who, in one way or another, are fairly saturated with the author's own existentialist thinking. If the world simply is all that is the case, what clues does it provide for significant action within it? On the other hand, several of his main characters are unusually aware of the power of the mind to think up an infinity of things which are *not* the case, a power which often extends to denying any permanent value and stable meaning to the actual given world. Take these words of the central figure in his latest book, *Giles Goat-Boy*:[1] "I had lived in goatdom as Billy Bockfuss the Kid, now I meant to live in studentdom as George the Undergraduate; surely there would be other roles in other realms, an endless succession of names and natures. Little wonder I looked upon my life and the lives of others as a kind of theatrical impromptu, self-knowledge as a matter of improvisation, and moral injunctions . . . as so many stage directions. . . . Nothing for me was simply *the case* forever and aye, only 'this case.' Spectator, critic, and occasional member of the troupe, I approached the script and Max's glosses thereupon in a spirit of utter freedom." With these words Giles, despite his unusual parentage, reveals how closely he is related to the leading figures in Barth's earlier novels. Todd Andrews (in *The Floating Opera*) decides that the problem of life is mainly "a matter of attitudes, of stances—of masks, if you wish," and throughout the book he reiterates, and exemplifies through incident, the related conviction that "for me at least, goals and objectives are without value." Facts there are, and usually ugly ones—his murder of a German soldier in the mud; the suicide of his

1. GILES GOAT-BOY. By John Barth. Doubleday & Co. $6.95.

father; a first clumsy attempt at lovemaking which, as he happens to see it in a mirror, gives him a lasting sense of the ineradicably animal absurdity of copulation. (The tendency to gaze in mirrors seems to indicate a habit of disabling reflectiveness in Barth's novels. In his latest book Peter Greene only recaptures his ability to live at ease among the rampant contradictoriness of life when he regains his aversion to mirrors. Self-scrutiny and action seem close to being mutually exclusive in Barth.) But the facts do not have any value or significance. Andrews can thus see no real reason for doing this rather than that, or something rather than nothing. "There is, then, no 'reason' for living." In a sense this attitude is a form of total freedom: "faced with the infinity of possible directions which the rejections of absolutes opens to one" is a typical pronouncement. But, as Barth well shows, it is also a form of total bondage, for Andrews is really imprisoned among the adroit negations of his unresting mind. Of all possible directions he chooses suicide. Until, in what seems to me a too manifestly contrived conclusion, the sudden sickness of his (probable) daughter brings home to him the realizations that he is still capable of spontaneous (unreasoning) emotion, that at least there are relative values, and anyway if there's no reason for doing anything that holds good for suicide as well. But the main focus of this witty and clever book is on a mind cut adrift from the matter and life around it, a wry intelligent consciousness which lacks any sense of the value of the context it finds itself operating in. Life itself, in its motley confusion, is a floating opera. ("Adam's Original and Unparalleled Ocean-Going Floating Opera" no less.) Andrews would rather build his own boat (i.e., construct his own philosophical position—he himself draws the analogy). But, just as he never finishes any of the actual boats he sets out to build, so his own structures of ideas never serve to get him afloat and into the stream of things. In the book Andrews finally takes a seat on the floating opera—a gesture of acceptance. But there is something quixotic in the gesture and we never see his new reconciliation to living, instead of thinking, in action.

For Jacob Horner (who sat in a corner?), in *End of the Road,* there is likewise "no reason to do anything" and one character at least is convinced that he is only a series of self-canceling masks with nothing underneath (shades of Peer Gynt and the onion). He suffers variously from recurrent feelings of not existing, moods of inertia, days which seem "weatherless," and occasional attacks of total immobility. His enigmatic doctor seeks to cure him with the advice—"Move! Take a role!"; but such half-hearted participating ventures into reality as he does make tend to cause misery and bring about destruction. After a particularly repellent fatal abortion scene (there is something of a grim relish in the way Barth shows just how messy and repugnant sheer facts can be) Horner is sick-

ened but still detached: "I could not even decide what I should *feel*: all I found in me was anguish, abstract and without focus." It is a bleak and airless book in which ideas are more real than people, and the look in the mirror so much more real and prolonged than any look out into the world. As a study of a certain state of mind it is at times very penetrating, but it is also a distressingly factitious book and this seems to me evidence that both the narrator and his author appear to have what may be called a rather nominal sense of reality. In the book there seem to be no people, only masks; no living, only role playing; no things, only thoughts about things; no world, only a "vaudeville"; no fixed and necessary actualities, only arbitrary verbal constructions. It is as though the dialectic between life and mind has broken down and the dissociated consciousness drifts along in sterile isolation, sealed off in its own circular musings. Such encounters with external life Horner does have seem much more theoretic than real. Horner himself admits only one absolute value: "articulation . . . to turn experience into speech . . . is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man, alive and kicking." One admits the proposition, noting the deliberately pejorative terms (why not as well a clarification, a celebration, an exploration of experience? Does Tolstoy betray life or vivify it?). But in this book the impingement of actual experience seems so muffled and attenuated and the domination of word and thought seems so uninterrupted that one scarcely feels that word and thought have got close enough to experience even to betray it. There is a good deal of existentialist talk in the book ("a man is free not only to choose his own essence but to change it at will"), but it remains talk, a series of propositions entertained but not enacted. What we often get is speculation divorced from circumstance, a severance which tends to make the speculation less immediate and interesting. (In Musil, an author who may well have influenced Barth, the circumstance is rich and thick and the speculation correspondingly relevant and involving.) What it comes to is that in Barth's early work there is something approaching an absence of environment; all those things which condition thought seem to have receded or been excluded and in the resultant emptiness the mind (Barth's via his narrators') runs "free." In a sense this is not so uncommon in American literature, which tends to offer the extreme visions either of man totally released from the molding and limiting powers of environment, or man totally dominated by them—dreams of perfect freedom alternate with nightmares of inexorable forces. (Richard Poirier had some very cogent and subtle things to say about precisely this point in the last issue of *PR*.) Barth is certainly in the line of those who deny the omnipotence of environment; indeed, in his work the

potency of the actual is as nothing to the prevalence of thought. The basic "freedom" so often talked about in these books is not least the ambiguous license enjoyed by minds for whom words are no longer answerable to things.

Which makes his later work especially interesting because in a way it seeks to introduce the central character into an environment so that he is forced to encounter the realities of time and space. The results have been, to say the least, extraordinary—sufficiently so to make Barth manifestly one of the most interesting of contemporary novelists. The brilliance of *The Sot-Weed Factor* is undeniable and the sophistication of the mind that wrote it is clearly formidable. Indeed, in a way that is the point. The book, for all its accumulations of pseudo-historical data, is transparent: we see clear through to the mind that wrote it. It really has little to do with Maryland and the eighteenth century and a great deal to do with the mental world of John Barth. Of course the book is full of all sorts of historical morals. The first human-being the innocent idealistic poet Ebenezer Cooke sees on reaching the brave new American world is a flogged negro; and the last lesson he has to learn is that his innocence was in itself a crime, an agent of destruction (the lesson is sealed and absolution gained by going to bed with his pox-ridden wife Joan—so Cooke embraces a diseased and imperfect world). Much is made of the idea that history is an inextricable tangle of treacheries, and we read of the "strange and terrible energy" of the men who struggle for power on the new continent. But in sum what has happened is that eighteenth-century history has been completely dissolved by Barth's twentieth-century mind. Cooke is subject to the same paralysis that befell Todd Andrews and Jacob Horner, immobilized by a sense of theoretically infinite possibilities ("the moment I grow sensible that I must choose, I see such virtue in each alternative that none outshines the rest"). The mysterious Burlingame is a virtual incarnation of all Barth's thinking about life as a "game," a series of roles, a constant changing of masks. The existentialist wardrobe is all before him from which to choose, and the emphasis given to dressing up in various kinds of clothes throughout the book is a way of underlining the idea that a man is only the role he chooses, the garb he dons. " 'The world's a happy climate for imposture,' " says Burlingame (a modern echo to Simon Suggs's maxim, "It is good to be shifty in a new country"), and his constant metamorphoses are a literal demonstration of his conviction that the self is endlessly fluid and a man may make himself over as many times as he chooses (it also provides Cooke with a lesson in the endlessly equivocal nature of all appearances). It is said of Burlingame that he can "play this world like a harpsichord" and "manipulate its folk like puppeteers"; both self and world are end-

lessly malleable and the reiterated consciousness of this idea contributes to the novel's prevailing atmosphere of insubstantiality. Some of Burlingame's advice to Cooke reflects more interestingly on his author: " 'You must dance to some other fellow's tune or call your own and try to make the whole world step to't.' " Barth makes history dance to his tune with the result that we are always aware that we are listening to one man's music—again we could see it as an assertion of the omnipotence of thought as against the possibility of domination from without. Speaking of American liberty Burlingame makes another important point. " ' 'Tis more than just political and religious liberty—they come and go from one year to the next. 'Tis philosophic liberty I speak of, that comes from want of history. It throws a man on his own resources, that freedom. . . .' " By extension it throws an artist on his own resources, and what Burlingame does *in* the book Barth does *with* the book—i.e., in his American freedom he makes the world dance to his tune; he plays history "like a harpsichord" —and pretty enough music he can make, too. This free sport with history—continually reshaping it according to mental plan, or whim—has an interesting effect on how we respond to his material. When reading, say, Tolstoy's novels we do have the illusion that we are reading about actual people involved in the realities of history; when reading *The Sot-Weed Factor* we are surely much more aware of the formidable mental scope and verbal dexterity of John Barth. The "historical novel" has, inevitably, changed with the times. At one point in the book two women exchange terms of sexual abuse for seven pages—a minor gesture which reflects a major mood of the book, namely, the dominance of words over things, the potent independence of sheer language. Like these good ladies, or rather like the author behind them, you can call each fact a hundred names. Barth plays with the hundred names—and the identity and substantiality of the fact melt away as we watch him at his brilliant conjuring. (Similarly, having mastered the resources of Jacobean prose he rewrites the Pocahontas story in such a way that we are mainly aware of his amused pleasure at inventing *his version* of what happened—history bows before the authoritative mastery of Barth's vocabulary.) The illusions of time and space fade as we become more aware that the book is a hugely entertaining demonstration of the independence, ingenuity and power of John Barth, his mind, his words, his tune. In admiring the book we are really acknowledging our sense that that mind is fairly prodigious.

And indeed it would take a prodigy of a mind to write *Giles Goat-Boy,* though at times one feels that here that mind has run amuck. The book itself wears masks and you have to peel off various letters, disclaimers, introductions, etc., insisting the book should not be published, main-

taining it is not written by John Barth, suggesting it is by "an obscure, erratic wizard whose *nom de plume*, at least, is *Stocker, Giles*," and coyly intimating that it might have been written by a computer. (Similarly it does not end, but recedes via a posttape, a postscript, and "a footnote to the postscript to the posttape.") This calling into question the very status of the novel is an accepted modern tactic (as in Gide or Borges) but it is not often done so laboriously and to so little purpose. One is tempted to fasten on the notion of the computer-author, taking that as an image for Barth's own mind. For clearly his powers of mental absorption are unusual and, like the best computer, he can do almost anything with the vast amount of material that has been fed into him (via books, college, newspapers, etc.). He can produce fairly intricate satire on international politics, the New Testament, contemporary philosophy, racial attitudes, psychology, Greek tragedy—whatever. To arrive at the overall scheme of the book it is as though he has fed into his mind the instruction to exploit down to the last detail all the possible cross-references, relationships, variations and permutations to be derived from seeing the world as a campus—or Universe as University. And his fantastic mind has done just that. To what end I am not yet certain; but to suggest that the book is more about Barth's own mental powers than anything else is not, of course, to deny it interest. And, in the blurred confusion, we can see old themes being developed. Burlingame, in the previous novel, at one point announced himself as "Suitor of Totality, Embracer of Contradictories," and the strange adventures of Giles from goat farm to campus to WESCAC; his elevation from animal to human to hero; thence (almost) to martyr and (vaguely) to prophet-philosopher, finally (perhaps) to a nihilist–pessimist—all are basically motivated by a similar aspiration. Starting from a frisky uncomplicated animal innocence, he gradually becomes acquainted with the more problematical human emotions, appetites, guilts and regrets; his plans to become a hero and tutor and furnish a new healing philosophy for the whole "campus" have to be continually modified or abandoned and recommenced as he confronts and tries to absorb the realities of evil, time, death and love. The deeper he gets into the labyrinthine complexities of human life and the problems of nature, the more equivocal he finds everything, and the harder it gets to sort things out and get them straight. (I need hardly say that masks and metamorphoses proliferate.) So that while one of his earlier convictions is of "the necessity of clear distinctions," his more mature and seemingly more final feeling is that the source of confusion and evil is "differentiation," and the new wisdom is "Embrace!" Pondering his earlier attempts to pass judgments on people (Pass or Fail) he later sees his whole effort as

misdirected—"as if the seamless university knew aught of such distinctions." He decides that "studentdom" is "hobbled by false distinction, crippled by categories" and in his own person as goat-boy (human and animal merged) he decides he is "a walking refutation of such false conceits." Indeed at one point he decides that "all discrimination must go by the board," but apparently that's not quite right either. What happens is that, in trying to juggle and relate the complex concepts by which humans seek to assess and evaluate nature and experience, "paradoxes became paroxysms" and he decides to "let go." One late decision seems to be that, after all, the world simply is all that is the case, and that all things are of equal value, or nonvalue. Indeed they simply *are*. And the final sanctuary beyond all the harrowing divisions, separations and discriminations of existence is found through love, with Anastasia in the belly of the giant computer. "I discovered the University whole and clear. . . . In the sweet place that contained me there was no East, no West, but an entire, single, seamless campus." Indeed it would seem that after that night he passed beyond the whole problem of meaning: "Sense and Nonsense lost their meaning on a night twelve years four months ago, in WESCAC's belly—as did every other distinction, including that between Same and Different." Whether this wisdom, if such it be, is final is, as usual, made unclear by the addition of a further note (perhaps spurious —of course), which suggests that Giles finally moved toward a deeply "tragic view of His life and campus history." His last words suggest that he expects to die like Oedipus at Colonus.

It is, of course, possible to combine fantasy and deep seriousness, and those who want allegories from this book will undoubtedly find them. And yet the atmosphere seemed to me to be one of brilliant frivolity. (Irrelevantly enough it reminded me of *The Wizard of Oz*: various odd characters capering through fantastic landscapes in quest of wholeness, with WESCAC replacing the old fake magician.) It might well be a comic parable of contemporary knowledge; but since everything is called into question, dissolved, turned into its opposite, arbitrarily made over by Barth's all-dominating mind, the main source of interest becomes a sort of uninvolved curiosity as to what Barth will choose to play around with next and how he will do it. Perhaps he is saying—"look what a scrambled wealth of mixed ideas, religions, philosophies, moralities, political systems, etc., etc., beset the modern mind, and what a comic confusion of coping is the result. The most salutary thing to do is to defend yourself by making your own sport out of them." Needless to say, the book contains many potentially serious issues, but they are all caught up in the prevailing tone of anarchy, ridicule and farce. And the exclusive im-

presario of this vaudeville, this floating opera of a book, is John Barth. If we take a seat we may well be entertained (though I thought some of the effects a bit labored, quite a few of them puerile, and parts of the book pretty tedious); but we should be clear that what we are paying to see are the freewheeling inventive prestidigitations of his mind. Clearly a mind like Barth's is well worth the entrance fee and at times we get a dazzling display for our money. But I am nonetheless left with a vague feeling that there is a point at which the arbitrary unimpeded sport of sheer mind damages rather than nourishes a novel, and that in *Giles Goat-Boy* John Barth sails, determinedly, clear past it.

ARGUMENTS

MUCH ADO

MacBird[1] is mildly amusing in a collegiate way, uninventive, prosy, without much dramatic or literary interest. The only reason I can see for pushing this opus is a political one: for this rewriting of *Macbeth* implies—unmistakably, I think—that the Johnsons were involved in the murder of Kennedy, an event from which Mr. Johnson indubitably profited. The whole point and purpose of *MacBird* is to recast Shakespeare's tragedy, and if there is any fun at all in the work, it is probably in its casting: Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird are the murderers, John F. Kennedy is a not nice Duncan, Robert Kennedy an unlikable Macduff; and of the Three Witches one is an old, one a new and one a Muhammed Speaks leftist. Does this add up to anything more than college foolery? Certainly not to a warning against the American way of life, as Eric Bentley suggests. *MacBird* is not about the American way of life, and it is only about the American way of politics if one thinks Mr. Johnson had his predecessor assassinated. Did he? One cannot, I think, dodge this question in reading and judging *MacBird*, as I imagine most of those who have supported the play want the question dodged.

Certainly Dwight Macdonald wants to dodge it. In his piece on *MacBird* in the *New York Review of Books* (Dec. 1), he writes: "The most disturbing and 'controversial' aspect of *MacBird* is that the eponymous villain murders John Ken O'Dunc. . . . If this is taken to be the author's serious—or even satirical—implication, then her play sinks to

1. MacBIRD. By Barbara Garson. Grassy Knoll Press. $.95.

the level of . . . ultra-rightist tracts . . . and it would not be worth reading, let alone reviewing. But I don't so take it. . . ." But if the eponymous villain murders John Ken O'Dunc, this is a *fact*—and not at all an implication to be taken or dropped. Macdonald wants the fact to not be a fact. He writes: "An author who would build a satire on such an insinuation [*sic*] for which no shred of evidence exists save in the addled wits of crackbrains [note how strong Macdonald wants to be on this point] couldn't possibly have written anything as funny as *MacBird,* humor being incompatible with solipsistic fanaticism. . . ." Now if Macdonald had taken the trouble to note who the publishers of *MacBird* are, I think he would not be so sure that the author is not a solipsistic fanatic. As for humor in *MacBird,* I happen to think there is not one real good laugh in it. But let's suppose there are more laughs than I got—doesn't Macdonald remember that there have been humorists, great ones, who were mad? Macdonald argues that while there are parallels between the assassinations of Ken O'Dunc and Kennedy, these could not have been intended by *MacBird*'s author, who was simply casting about for a Shakespearean work on which to base a modern political burlesque: ". . . having picked *Macbeth* as the Shakespearean play that best lent itself to topical satire, she was stuck with the plot line. . . ." Just imagine being stuck with the plot line of *Macbeth!* For my part, I think the whole play an extension of the joke which by this time must have been uttered in every major city of this country. Question: Who killed John F. Kennedy? Answer: Lady Bird Macbeth.

Here is Macdonald once again on Miss Garson, the author of *MacBird;* ". . . while she could (and did) make some changes, the central dramatic action, Macbeth's murder of Duncan, couldn't have been omitted. . . . How onerous she found this necessity I don't know, but it seems clear to me that she constantly signals that it is a mere plot necessity . . . whenever The Problem arises." What seems clear to Macdonald is not at all clear to me. Does Miss Garson signal to her readers that they are to disregard, or to regard, the implications of the plot she, according to Macdonald, accidentally found herself using? Here is Lady MacBird after having received a letter from the Vice-President announcing the witches' prophecy:

> All hail MacBird, the President to be!
> And yet I fear you're not direct enough.
> The naked act would scandalize your eye.
> . . . . . .
> You're not without ambition, but you lack
> The forthrightness to face your own desire.

And when the Ken O'Duncs are about to arrive at the MacBird ranch, this is the exchange between Mac and Lady Mac:

MACBIRD: Not only will I show them round the ranch
But I'll expose them to our faithful followers.
LADY MACBIRD: *Expose* him to the fury of his foes.
MACBIRD: *Expose* him?
LADY MACBIRD: Just expose him. Nothing more.
I mean but what you mean, but what you want
. . . . . .
He that's coming
Must be provided for, and you shall put
The day's great business into my dispatch
Which shall to all our days and nights to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

Now what was the day's great business if not the killing of John Ken O'Dunc? After he is shot, we have this bit:

(A Cop remains on the stage and takes a piece of paper out of his pocket)
COP: It says the shots will be from that way sent.

Isn't this likely to signal to readers of the play that Ken O'Dunc was murdered by conspirators with whom the police were involved? But this is what many people think is true of the murder of Kennedy; some have even said so in print. To be sure, Miss Garson's cop is somewhat Keystone: he reads the directive that has been given him about the shots *after* they have been fired. The important thing to be noted, though, is that he holds in his hand a directive and must have been part of the plot.

Now, did Lyndon Johnson have John F. Kennedy assassinated? Anyone who could think he did would of course not write a political burlesque. But if Miss Garson does not think Johnson involved in the murder, she does not at all mind supporting the rumor that he was. The assumption of the author of *MacBird,* and of her admirers, too, I take it, must be this: no stick is too dirty to beat our President with.

Now I happen to think that the dirt on Miss Garson's stick does not rub off on the President, just as I think the tastelessness of his

rhetoric does not at all justify the tastelessness of her verse. Dwight Macdonald thinks the contrary. He writes: "Although I am no friend of broad comedy, I find broadness here, given this particular subject, exhilarating and somehow liberating. . . ." I wonder. Did Dwight Macdonald need to read this play to feel "liberated" from the cant in Johnson's speeches? But as he notes, Johnson's speeches parody themselves. Macdonald concludes: "In sum, *MacBird* is a tasteless, crude, wholly destructive satire which roughs up everybody and everything . . . and which is extremely funny, especially at its most tasteless, crude, and destructive moments." Tasteless and crude *MacBird* is indeed: and Macdonald's final justification of the work has to be not merely that it is humorous, but that what it is attacking is so bad. If you don't like this play, just think of the President it's about. And what are we to think of the President it's about? That he killed his predecessor? At this point, Macdonald balks.

There are some, though, who will not balk at the implications of this play in applauding it. These people will say, yes, *MacBird* suggests the President is a murderer; why not? Aren't the students chanting, "LBJ, LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?" Why is it worse to have had Kennedy assassinated than to napalm women and children in Vietnam? In fact, President Johnson is so bad that any and all means are fair against him.

Here are my questions: Is our country so horrible? Is our President so evil? At this point the matter of this rather trivial burlesque takes on serious meaning. For if our country is as bad as people are saying, and our President as evil, then questions of art have indeed become irrelevant. Certainly when Robert Lowell says about *MacBird*: "I have nothing to say about the political truth of this play, but I am sure a kind of genius has gone into the writing," he is, to my mind, talking politics, not criticism, and he would only do this if he thought the situation of a kind to make criticism supererogatory. Once again, just how bad is our present situation? Without redemption, according to Robert Brustein, another supporter of *MacBird*. Approving (in the *New Republic*, Dec. 3) of Jean-Claude van Itallie's *America Hurrah*, Mr. Brustein remarks that the playwright has discovered "the deepest poetic function of the theatre," in that his metaphors, which "solve nothing, change nothing, transform nothing," yet show ". . . that it is still possible for men to share a common humanity—even if this only means sharing a common revulsion against what is mean and detestable." Are things so bad in what Mr. Brustein refers to as "Johnsonland" that a common revulsion to our state is all that can now unite us? (I do not believe,

by the way, that people can be united by revulsion: clubs are formed by people who like to eat, and not by people who have to vomit. Come to think of it, though, a club might be formed by people who *like* to vomit.) Nor is Mr. Brustein in favor, that I know of, of any kind of social organization, or reorganization. He is of course entitled to dislike the present state of things, and to describe it as blackly as rhetoric allows: all I want to point out here is that if he is right in his cultural disgust, which is extreme, then art for him can be no palliative. For him it must be absurd to dispraise or commend anything as art; given his views, Mr. Brustein is right to support *MacBird*. Dwight Macdonald is not.

Lionel Abel

EDITORS' NOTE: MacBird *seems to be becoming an intellectual and political* cause célèbre. PR *would be glad to print further comment on the play in future issues.*

Reuben A. Brower

PARALLEL LIVES

Anyone who undertook a series of American *Parallel Lives* in the manner of Plutarch could hardly find two more striking subjects for comparison than Robert Frost and Bernard Berenson, both American "successes," one belonging so intensely to the old world, the other to the new. Together they illustrate perfectly the two ways open to an American intellectual who reached maturity in the eighties and nineties: to return to Europe with Henry James, or stay behind with Twain, an Innocent at Home. The awkwardness of "intellectual" as a term for Frost or Twain brings out the difference between choosing a life of cultivation and quotations and a life of Thoreauvian wildness and hit-and-miss learning. As Lawrance Thompson's biography reminds us, we must not suppose because of Frost's Yankee manner (in part consciously acquired) that he *was* an innocent, or intellectually less sophisticated than contemporaries who went to England or the Continent. If we could imagine some celestial testing day in which Frost and Berenson were set to work on a problem demanding native wit rather than familiarity with cultural objects, it would be safer to bet on Frost, in part because he was such a winner. Nothing brings out more sharply the contrast between the two men and their lives than their reaction to Harvard: Frost barely able to take it for a year and a half, Berenson finding in his university a home of the mind to which he remained loyal throughout his life.

But there are also surprising points of similarity between Berenson and Frost in mind and temperament, though the similarities serve in most instances to mark fundamental differences. It is odd to think, for example, that they both were considerably affected by the philosophy of William James. Both men departed, as people used to say, from the faith of their fathers; and both continued to be fascinated with religious belief in some form or other. The course of the religious life of each reflects the basic

contrast between choosing Europe or America. Berenson, starting from Orthodox Judaism, underwent in his youth a temporary conversion to the Roman church, his final goal being perhaps no certain faith, with a touch of esthetic Catholicism. Frost progressed from his mother's "Scotch–Presbyterian-Unitarian-Swedenborgianism" (!) to atheism, to a home-made Jamesian-Emersonian belief as the necessary "dare" for living. Both Berenson and Frost were shrewd forwarders of their own careers, both not averse to driving a good bargain, and fundamentally conservative in political taste. It was the European Jew who became deeply engaged—in his resistance to fascism—while the American remained "so instinctively thorough" in mending his fences as to enjoy the friendship of Republicans out of office and Democrats in. Both were fine specimens of irritable genius, given to rages on the slightest provocation, both jealous of rivals. One final instructive contrast: for Frost, a single and enduring, though difficult love for the girl he met in high school and later married; for Berenson, a liaison followed by a marriage also sufficiently difficult, but varied by many loves, some more and some less Platonic.

The two books under review are not quite what we might expect in relation to their subjects.[1] *Robert Frost: The Early Years,* the first volume of an authorized biography, is based on most careful research of every kind, a typical product of the American academy. *Forty Years with Berenson* is the fruit of a long and rich experience, a work of love by a born writer agreeably unaware of her talents. Nicky Mariano's attitude to her subject, although sufficiently detached where necessary, is clear and certain; it is less easy to say what impulse was dominant in the writing of the Frost biography.

Although Thompson's tone in his edition of the *Selected Letters of Robert Frost* was at times harsh, there was always the large presence of Frost himself in the letters to offset the commentary. (Frost triumphed similarly over the vanities and inanities of Untermeyer in his collection.) If occasionally there was shrewdness, vindictiveness and meanness in Frost's self-revelation, there was also wit and fun, sensitivity and love, honesty and the power to endure what few would choose to endure. That is, there was greatness and charm, charm sometimes of the sort Frost admired in the Colonial rascal, Stephen Burroughs, "sophisticated wickedness, the kind that knows its grounds and can twinkle." As many who knew Frost can testify, he was a man who could like Berenson make

1. FORTY YEARS WITH BERENSON. By Nicky Mariano. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. $6.95.
ROBERT FROST: The Early Years, 1874-1915. By Lawrance Thompson. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. $12.50.

people love him even in his most outrageous moments. It is not surprising that Elinor White married Frost in spite of his cruel and jealous pursuit of her, a courtship that came near to persecution.

In Thompson's narrative the cruelty is convincingly documented, but the charm, the love, is barely acknowledged, and the marriage seems almost incredible. It is hard to say why this is so, and why in a narrative packed with interesting material about Frost—his strategies as poet, his reading in odd authors, his drifting from job to job, his tragicomic suicidal flight to the Dismal Swamp—we fail to feel that the life matters intensely for the biographer. We think by contrast of Johnson's *Life* of Savage, in which sordid facts are not brushed over, though tenderness is not forgotten. It is as if the author of *The Early Years,* determined not to write an official biography and not to be taken in by a "most deceiving" subject, as Frost said he was, had sacrificed the sense of greatness to candor. The care with which Thompson disentangles conflicting versions of an event or a relationship as described by Frost and by others is admirable, but there is also something missing. Take for example Frost's treatment of his grandfather, who according to Frost gave him the farm in Derry, telling him to "go out and die." That Frost was unfair, that he exaggerated his grandfather's cruelty, is proved well enough by Thompson. But in describing various episodes there is a lack of sympathetic insight or desire to understand why Frost felt as he did. (We might contrast Erikson's handling of similar occurrences in Luther's boyhood.) One example is brief enough to quote:

> Robbie soon made the added complaint that his grandfather was cruel. As evidence, the boy told of watching the old man hide behind a corner of the house, horsewhip in hand, waiting for a bold youngster who kept slipping into the yard, unasked, to pick a few flowers. Robbie had indignantly watched his grandfather creep up on the intruder and lash the child's bare legs with the horsewhip. According to Robbie, another kind of cruelty occurred a few days later.

Frost goes on to tell of the look from his grandfather's "ice-cold gray-blue eyes," a look so frightening that Frost remembered it for years afterward. The ineptness of the prose—"made the added complaint," "As evidence," "kind of cruelty occurred," perhaps intended as humorous, is a sign of the distance and lack of ease in the narrator's point of view. There is scarcely a hint that childhood experiences of this kind are frightening and damaging. Thompson conveys very little of the painfulness of a young poet's doubts and of his attempts at self-assurance. Frost's deliciously arrogant answer to his grandfather's "generous" offer to give him one year

in which to "establish himself as a self-supporting man of letters," is reported with no suggestion that the agitated heart behind the arrogance had a claim to be understood: "But Rob, instead of making a tactfully grateful answer, seemed intent on using the moment as another occasion for insolence." A similarly chill and schoolmasterish tone is heard in the treatment of Frost's persistent obsession with suicide: "His early and purely imaginative play with thoughts of suicide became another lifelong game of indulgent self-pity."

Perhaps some awkwardness of style and uneasiness of tone is unavoidable in writing of a poet's boyhood; but one type of idiom, talk of what Frost or someone else "may have" done or thought, raises a question of method. A biographer's first duty is to state what *did* happen and give the evidence; his second, to speculate on its significance. When the two processes get confused, the result is a blurred twilight reality, irritating and misleading. An illuminating paragraph on the Swedenborgian-Emersonian interests of Frost's mother goes on to say:

> Wordsworth had also helped Mrs. Frost convey to her children the ability to feel in nature a presence which could and should inspire with the joy of elevated thoughts. He further helped her explain to them her belief that whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child does, shall in no wise enter therein. It may have been easy and natural for her to quote to Robbie and Jeanie, while still in San Francisco, the lines beginning, "My heart leaps up. . . ."

It is useless to be told that "it may have been easy and natural" for Mrs. Frost to quote Wordsworth's lyric, though the sentence leaves the vague impression that she did. We cannot determine from the text or the notes whether in fact Mrs. Frost read Wordsworth to convey to her children a feeling of a "presence" in nature, or to explain the gospel injunction to become as a little child, a lesson not strictly speaking Wordsworthian. Speculate a biographer must, but how he speculates makes a difference.

As this example indicates, Thompson has an almost obsessive interest in showing that Frost was always much concerned with religious thought, which he proves, and that in time he arrived at a settled religious belief. Without denying that Frost had some kind of religious faith, we may object to how the case is made, particularly when an impression is created of stronger proof than the evidence warrants. *The Early Years* reflects a tendency, evident in eulogies pronounced at the time of Frost's death, to assure the general public that the poet was not "a wild old wicked man," that he was at least sufficiently pious, that his works could rest on the shelf with

Matthew and Waldo, guardians of the faith,
The army of unalterable law.

But Frost, like the men who most influenced his thinking, Emerson and James, is not to be tied down. He loves contradictions, and he is deeply subversive and experimental. If his most wicked gestures cannot be entirely trusted, neither can his more pious ones.

Thompson's demonstration of Frost's familiarity with the thought of William James is most valuable, confirming as it does what we suspect from the poetry. But in using statements from James in an effort to show that Frost reached a more positive religious belief, Thompson does not always seem to remember how chancy James was, how fond he was of taking the risk of believing, of "sustaining a thought," as he said, "*because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts." In James as in Frost the impressive thing is the assertion of will, the courage to believe, not any commitment to what James calls "Reality with a capital R." In an admirable review of Frost's prose writings, Armour Craig has pointed out that in a favorite parable based on the great Seal of the United States, Frost "proposed a slight though radical change," by dispensing with the eye that completes the pyramid: "Our eyes, not an all-seeing eye above but our eyes, fill out the incomplete structure by imagining an invisible apex." Frost's image of the invisible lines that represent "our faith that the structure has a point" is characteristic, an example of "mental thrust," but hardly a declaration of faith as the term is used of any traditional creed.

Some of the time, Thompson accepts the risky and hypothetical character of Frost's belief; but at other times he infuses a tone of simple piety that goes badly with the evidence. "Throughout his life he would want to associate himself with heroic wanderers among ideas; but his mother's teachings would continue to provide him with a kind of sea anchor, even when his thoughts remained harborless." Another reassuring comment appears in a passage on a poem expressing "the poet's regret that the ideals for which the Union soldiers had fought so heroically during the Civil War had become so nearly forgotten." There is a sudden transition from Frost's faith in the heroic ideal of self-sacrifice to this: "In addition Frost was continuing to write with an increase of religious fervor, now fortified by the Congregational ministers with and for whom he was teaching." "Fervor" is an unlikely term for the attitudes of the tentative thinker Thompson describes elsewhere in *The Early Years*. From the immediate context it is clear that "the Congregational ministers" fortified his faith that he was a poet, rather than his "religious fervor." It is not difficult to produce more examples of this attempt to impart a

reassuring warmth to Frost's pragmatic and Jamesian "will to believe," which Thompson documents with much convincing detail.

Common readers and literary critics will be mainly interested in *The Early Years* for the light it throws on the poetry. In general Thompson's discovery of the biographical setting or occasion of particular poems adds further, rarely conflicting, meanings to what we can infer from the text itself. The references to Frost's mother in "The Lovely Shall be Choosers" and the many allusions to his wife in love poems are justified by all sorts of evidence. But occasionally Thompson presses the biographical reference to the point of distorting or even sacrificing the poem. An important meaning of "Bereft," we are told, is that the poet "had been robbed by the loss of someone dear." The one piece of evidence, Frost's note to the poem, "As of about 1893," Thompson connects fairly enough with the autumn when Frost was left alone after spending a summer with Elinor White and her family. But the speaker of the poem never alludes to love, only to "something sinister" and "a secret." The poem expresses just this vague feeling of guilt and terror in the autumn world, not the "loss of someone dear." If the poem has a biographical meaning, it is more probably of a less public and less syrupy kind.

Thompson's insistence on Frost's "basic piety" leads him to take the dark poem "Design" as an example of "carrying a sentimental notion to an absurd extreme." While admitting that Frost was "perfectly capable of understanding—and even of sympathizing with the possibility that his little study in white could be interpreted as akin" to Melville's "The Whiteness of the Whale," Thompson takes the occasion to assert Frost's desperate need of "the consolation of positive religious belief." The aim of the poem is "to tease and mock those whose religious beliefs seemed to him to be sentimental." We can agree that the poem is a kind of joke and that the last line is open to humorous as well as frightening interpretations, without accepting so drastic a deflation of Frost's vision of "design of darkness to appall." The text from James cited in support of his reading is one of James's trickiest displays of pulling metaphysical rabbits out of pragmatic hats. "Design," says James, "worthless tho it be as a mere rationalistic principle set above or behind things . . . [is] a term of *promise*. A vague confidence in the future is the sole pragmatic meaning at present discernible in the terms design and designer." The life recorded in *The Early Years,* so full of illness, frustration and aloneness, testifies eloquently to the dark vision that the poem discloses with misleading gaiety. That Frost managed to do what he did in the difficult years before the publication of *A Boy's Will* is an achievement little short of heroic.

If *The Early Years* seems to prove that no man is a hero to those who know him best, *Forty Years with Berenson* tends to prove the opposite. Nicky Mariano writes with deep admiration and without any fear of including smaller, uglier and ridiculous details in her total picture. She surveys Berenson's life and social milieu from inside and outside, with a wisdom and good humor worthy of Jane Austen. Her manner and moral stance are right, because they are deeply hers, not because, in American fashion, she has decided what her "position" ought to be. She is simply in confident possession of her world, the Europe to which Berenson returned, and which he loved with a romantic passion that is very American. While keeping her eye on the subject and with not a trace of self-consciousness, Miss Mariano has written a charming autobiography in the guise of a memoir of Berenson.

She begins admirably, speaking humanly and naturally, going straight to the point:

> Where did you meet the Berensons? When were you first introduced to I Tatti? How did it all happen? Innumerable times I have been asked these questions. They were difficult to answer, not because I did not know exactly how it all came about but because it seemed a rather long and intricate story, longer than the questioners were perhaps inclined to listen to. Readers may have more patience.
>
> No bridge, no natural link connected the world in which I grew up with the world of the Berensons.

After a brief sketch of her life in the Baltic provinces before World War I, of which we should like to have heard more, Miss Mariano moves to her sudden and comic entrance into the I Tatti household. Berenson's wife, Mary, in one of her generous and batty impulses, had brought her to the villa to help in the library, a step in a scheme for marrying her to Geoffrey Scott. The marriage did not come off, but Nicky Mariano soon became an indispensable member of the I Tatti ménage, as librarian, research assistant and social diplomat steering a course between the rages of the husband and the whims of his wife.

As other reviewers have noted, the picture of Mrs. Berenson very nearly eclipses the principal subject. Mary Berenson, the sister of Logan Pearsall Smith, emerges as a figure in a Dickensian-Jamesian style, something like the overpowering Mrs. Lowder in *The Wings of the Dove*. American in vigor, Quaker in propriety, ferociously devoted to her children, though she had left their father to become B.B.'s mistress, a woman given to frantic friendships and crackpot experiments, Mary was a match for Berenson in combining in a single nature the most explosive contrasts and contradictions. This formidable woman could also be amusing, charm-

ing and affectionate, and in the extraordinary "death-bed" letter she writes to Nicky, she rises to something like greatness. Miss Mariano's reply to her letter is equally remarkable. There cannot be many times in history when two women, both devoted—in however qualified a sense—to the same man, have written one another with such honesty and tenderness.

No one is ever likely to explain the secret of Berenson, or of any personality so complex and elusive, but though Nicky Mariano does not attempt to explain all, she gives unforgettable glimpses into many of his selves. A number of sides are summed up in a comment made by Mary when she was going through his early letters:

> B. B. at 25 was already exactly what he now is, mystical, ecstatic and scientific as regards pictures, interested in origins and development and influences, anti-democratic, anti-philanthropic, believing in culture above all else.

"Mystical" and "scientific" recall contradictory impulses in Frost, and probing intellectual curiosity is equally characteristic of both men. But "believing in culture above all else," the center if not the secret of B.B.'s life, marks the difference. "Culture" as religion, reminding us in this context of Pater rather than Arnold, is decisively nineteenth-century European. The passion to know objects and ideas of the past, and ideas almost as objects, runs through Berenson's life of study and conversation. Although his collecting days were already over when Nicky Mariano came to I Tatti, he continued to be a tireless traveler. With his entourage he goes from Italy to Northern Europe, Greece, Turkey and North Africa, wearing out his younger companions by his will to *see,* to press the last ounce of sensation from a picture, a building, a landscape. We watch the diminutive figure climbing a ladder to get closer to a fresco, the head bowed over the magnifying glass to catch another detail in order to fix an "attribution" for the famous lists of paintings on which he worked throughout most of his career. If Berenson was heroic, it was in this impassioned going after whatever he wanted to know. The pursuit of less well-known works by the masters had its less delightful side, which Miss Mariano does not attempt to conceal—the business of advising dealers, in particular Sir Joseph Duveen, a man of "unpredictable caprices and tantrums." But there was no escaping this burden, as Miss Mariano ruefully confesses, since the Villa I Tatti, its society of friends, visitors and relations, depended largely on Berenson's income from giving professional advice.

The most charming scenes at I Tatti are of the morning hours when B.B., Nicky, Mary and others are at work on the lists or a learned ar-

ticle—the dream of a scholar's life in a Palace of Art. There are the evenings of reading aloud in books from one of three or four languages, the rambles in garden and countryside, the endless conversations on everything under the sun. There are also the "black serpent days," when B.B. is in a foul mood, and when nothing goes right. There is the constant stream of guests, the "names" that crowd the later pages of this memoir, among them the many women who adored B.B. and by whom he was amused, the members of his "orchestra." In his relations with women as with books and paintings, "culture" was always in the air. The highest praise apparently of a woman was to call her "a complete work of art." We think of Yeats in "Men Improve with the Years" contemplating his "pictured beauty," and of Pater and Gilbert Osmond.

Berenson was completely at home in the society of "culture" as it lives in the fiction of James, and as it existed in fact in great and less great houses in England and on the Continent at the end of the century and a little beyond. Miss Mariano gives a perfect picture of it in her chapter on Edith Wharton, which is easily the masterpiece of the book. There they sit in the twilight—it always seems to be twilight or firelight or candlelight—descanting on art and song, reading aloud from a classic or hearing Edith read from her "latest," criticising and offering improvements, or, books put aside, deep in nuances of gossip. Life in these perfectly decorated rooms, Miss Mariano makes clear, was not free from tensions and ordinary irritations and disappointments. Berenson was a difficult guest, and he knew it, and Edith a demanding hostess. The personage who swooped down on James and carried him off in the "great winged chariot" (Jamesian for a car) is there to delight and direct.

After this final impression of Berenson's world, we may draw one more contrast with Frost. For Berenson there *was* a society of writers and worldly persons, however effete and inadequate it may now seem. We have only to think of the impossible picture of Frost in Edith Wharton's Newport, or at Amy Lowell's "cut-glass dinners," which he detested, to measure the distance between the two lives. Frost found a society at home, beginning with 1917, at about the time Nicky Mariano was being introduced to I Tatti, in Amherst, Michigan and other colleges and universities. He was one of the founders of the society of writers-in-residence, teachers and students, a thoroughly American institution, belonging to the new world in more than one sense of the word.

BOOKS

A LA CARTE

FOR A NEW NOVEL. By Alain Robbe-Grillet. (Translated by Richard Howard.) Grove Press. $3.95.

LA MAISON DE RENDEZ-VOUS. By Alain Robbe-Grillet. (Translated by Richard Howard.) Grove Press. $4.50.

From the publication of his first novel, Robbe-Grillet became the center of an unusually engaging critical dialogue; his works have been preferred objects of analysis for several of the most interesting contemporary French critics: Roland Barthes, Bernard Pingaud, Philippe Sollers, Jean Ricardou, Gerard Genette. In retrospect, it seems clear that his novels immediately coincided with some of the central preoccupations of an important segment of "new criticism" in France: a renewed attention to the structures of literature, to rhetoric, to *écriture*—writing itself. When Robbe-Grillet himself turned to criticism, it was evident that his formulations owed as much to his critics (especially Barthes) as to extrapolation from his own novelistic practice; his criticism is really the scene of a dialectic between his fictional manner and a critical language in the process of formation, and this confers considerable interest on the essays (written between 1953 and 1963) of *For A New Novel.* Incomplete, occasionally polemical and sometimes illogical, they are important gropings toward a new rhetoric of the novel.

At the start of Robbe-Grillet's rhetoric are a number of well-publicized esthetic and philosophical rejections: of the traditional novel's solid character, with weight, volume and contour; of psychology and "interiority"; of political or moral commitment; of narrative "innocence" and verisimilitude; of tragedy, defined by Barthes as a means of "recovering" human misery, subsuming and representing it as a form of necessity. The rejection of the tragic mode entails a refusal of any metaphorical link between man and nature, an attempt to reify the objective world as a nonsymbolic presence, a "being there" which will not bear the weight of any metaphysical or allegorical commentary. The result is what Barthes

has called a novel of "blinding literality": a seeming realism which does not refer us so much to a represented reality as to its own surface. As Robbe-Grillet maintains, a work of literature must give the impression of possessing an architecture which has necessity, but not necessity *for* anything.

This last image of the literary structure is close to that elaborated by English and American formalism. Yet our new criticism has always been centrally concerned with the metaphorical relations between literary object and reality; and certainly, despite the example of Joyce (and the renegade Beckett), England and America have produced no novelist who has followed formalist logic to such extreme conclusions, on the plane of *écriture,* as those we find in Robbe-Grillet. What Robbe-Grillet's literality has meant, what his nonutilitarian architecture has been built of, is of course description, assigned a new and total role in the rhetoric of the novel. His description apprehends the surface contours of things, and its detailings of surface constantly go beyond the point of visual and conceptual usefulness, to a kind of discourse where *Gestalt* becomes impossible, the utensibility of objects is destroyed, the "romantic heart of things"(Barthes' phrase) annulled. It is a description which confounds the human imprint on things; it refuses the traditional "recovery" of the objective world to psychological, characterological ends. Instead, it is inventive: it asks for judgment not on its correspondence to the world, but its creation of a structure. It starts, Robbe-Grillet explains, from a point, out of which it develops lines, planes, an entire edifice which is then corrected, modified or contradicted. The seeming precision of the prose—its indications of place, "to the right," "above," "behind"; its measurings in centimeters and degrees—gives the impression of an architecture rising *ex nihilo,* defining its space, like an abstract painting, only in relation to its own parts, and its frame. The constant replays on the same description, with variations or alternatives proposed without any principle of choice between them, give the structure a kinetic dimension, a constant instability, the necessity of transforming itself. The time in which this elaboration takes place corresponds only to itself, and makes no reference to an outside, represented time.

It is undoubtedly possible to criticize such a notion of time, and to do so one need not refer to any of the critical positions rejected by Robbe-Grillet: the purest formalist can point out that our language of time, our verb tenses and temporal adverbs, have a conventional value which refers us to larger and more significant or symbolic temporal wholes. And of course description, however nonmetaphorical and "objective," refers us to an observer and implies an epistemology. In fact, after the appearance of *In the Labyrinth* (1959) and *Last Year at Marienbad*

(1961), critics started accusing Robbe-Grillet of the heresies of subjectivity, psychology and symbolism. They pointed out that his protagonists were victims of psychological obsessions (sadism, jealousy), and that the supposedly neutral glance upon the surface of things was in fact at the service of an emotional state. His novels were reread, reinterpreted, and a new Robbe-Grillet was posited. But this much-debated problem of subjectivity/objectivity, symbolic/nonreferential, etc., seems to me a false one, and Robbe-Grillet's assent to seemingly exclusive interpretations of his method probably indicates that he thinks so too.

The problem with the debate is that it leaves the plane of rhetoric where it should be located. It is undeniable that Robbe-Grillet's registering glance is the instrument of someone, and that this someone is defined by his subjectivity. An epistemological choice has been made, and the world of objects cannot be "neutral." But the consciousness which directs the glance provides only the focus of the eyepiece through which we see the world; the world becomes the scene of the drama, and it does not refer us back to consciousness. As Jean Ricardou has formulated it, "Things, marked by the refusal of consciousness, become charged with that which consciousness refuses": that is, the objective world becomes the place of a subjective, emotional narrative in a new kind of *style indirect*. Robbe-Grillet's use of time, his creation of an eternal present of the indicative which gives equal status to what is "happening" and what is only imagined or desired, is designed, as Gerard Genette has demonstrated, to counter our natural reaction to rewrite certain pages in the conditional, others in the subjunctive, and so on. Robbe-Grillet's rhetoric both prevents us from allegorizing and reading content into reality, and charges reality with a creative emotional potentiality. He succeeds in giving us a sense of *presence* (a word he uses to describe the effect of Beckett's plays) which is nonsymbolic and nonutilitarian, but not at all nonaffective.

If Robbe-Grillet has sought to destroy the "romantic heart of things," there is a sense in which he is constantly fascinated by the romanticism of surfaces, a preoccupation especially noticeable in the films *Marienbad* and *L'Immortelle*, and quite explicit in his new novel, *La Maison de Rendez-vous*. The romantic surface is here one of exotic banality: a cliché Orient, a pasteboard Hong Kong of opium smugglers, expensive prostitutes, rich perverts and double agents: it all has about the same reality as glossy pages from *Harper's Bazaar*. It is the most Rousselian of his novels: as Robbe-Grillet points out, Roussel preferred to describe a reproduction rather than an original, to represent an imitation or reflection of reality and to fill his books with empty enigmas —underground passages, concealed exits—which give them a gratuitous

gothic mystery. *La Maison de Rendez-vous* is first of all a structural elaboration of the *factice,* the artificial.

This artificiality is linked to a mentality of eroticism which dominates the book. "Women's flesh has always played, no doubt, a great part in my dreams," the narrator begins, and the starting point of the novel's architecture is a revery over the banal accoutrements of eroticism, celebrated for their stimulating artificiality. The world elaborated is one of silks and silky skin, and its central image is the repeated photographic shot of a tall, supple Eurasian girl in a silk sheath slit to the thigh, accompanied by a large, sleek black dog straining at his leash. The narrative (and this is the most narrative, most kinetic of Robbe-Grillet's novels) progresses as a series of reels, each of which unwinds for an indeterminate length of time, until it is interrupted, corrected or contradicted by another. The principle of disappointment built into most of Robbe-Grillet's novels through a structure of false mystery, *faux policier,* is here (as in *L'Immortelle*) an element of striptease, the natural (and frustrating) counterpart to narrative voyeurism. Toward the end of the novel, the narrative "I" becomes more insistent—though remaining unidentified—as it attempts a "logical" reconstruction of a "plot" involving prostitution, opium and murder. There is an attempt to arrange sequences and stills in patterns of cause and effect with a beginning and an end. But where this finally leads is to the empty eyes of an expensive call girl whose unfixed gaze may have initiated this whole elaboration, as well as providing its terminus.

Robbe-Grillet's collage of images has a certain shiny beauty, and his narrative is rapid and supple—qualities, one should mention, perfectly preserved in Richard Howard's admirable translation. And in its play of excitements and disappointments, *La Maison de Rendez-vous* is *entertaining* (as most of Robbe-Grillet's novels indeed are). But it never really gets beyond collage: it remains too captive to the artificiality and banality of its materials. It does not possess the strong necessity felt in *The Voyeur* and *Jealousy,* where the rigorous exclusions and insistences of the chosen glance forced a radical renewal of vision.

Peter Brooks

THE ILLUSIONIST

DISRAELI. By Robert Blake. Eyre & Spottiswode. £4 10s.

Having in the past miraculously breathed some life into the dry bones of Bonar Law, Britain's dullest and least significant Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Blake, the Oxford historian, has now turned to the very different figure of Benjamin Disraeli. From his patient labors in the archives there has emerged a splendid portrait of the enigmatic character who presided for almost four decades over the Tory half of Victorian politics and letters. In the process he has destroyed a few legends and unearthed a good deal of circumstantial detail not recorded by Disraeli's official biographers, the worthy if long-winded pair of Monypenny and Buckle. Yet the reviewers who predictably pounced on the scandalous side of the record—Disraeli's bizarre journalistic exploits in the eighteen thirties, his debts, his quarrels, his weird entanglement with Henrietta Sykes, his invention of an aristocratic background for his own highly respectable bourgeois family—have cantered off in the wrong direction. Mr. Blake is no Lytton Strachey and not interested in scandal. Not only is he a professional historian and a careful scholar: his assessment of Disraeli's baffling character is based on a profound understanding of the environment which made him possible. The central fact about Disraeli—missed by earlier biographers and firmly established by Mr. Blake—is that he was an adherent of the Romantic movement which climaxed in the eighteen thirties and collapsed two decades later. His early fame as a novelist, an amateur parliamentarian with a few brilliant speeches to his credit, and the central figure of the "Young England" group of aristocratic Toryism was won in the eighteen forties, when it was still possible for an aspiring politician to imitate Byron. To this period belong his amorous adventures, which gave offense to the respectable, and his financial speculations, which left him permanently debt-ridden. Then, by an extraordinary stroke of luck aided by some rapid maneuvering, he made the transition from Byronic adventurism to Victorian solemnity at the very last moment before the train pulled out of the station. The great economic gearshift of the eighteen fifties had enthroned the middle class and wrecked the kind of aristocratic Toryism in which Disraeli believed. He survived the transition, as he survived all subsequent ones, by exploiting to the full his intellectual ascendancy over the bewildered cohorts

who sat behind him after having been abandoned by Peel and Gladstone. More than that: he made himself their leader by taking up what had become a lost cause. Peel's "betrayal" in 1846 (his abandonment of the Corn Laws on which the predominance of the landowners rested) opened the way for Disraeli. His meteoric rise from the back-benches was effected by a single speech: a three-hour oration, improvised on the spur of the moment, which more than a century later still casts a spell upon the reader. In the hour of defeat Toryism had found a new leader.

It was an amazing achievement, and only an adventurer with a touch of genius could have brought it off. That genius Disraeli possessed, and for the sake of it generations of Conservatives have forgiven him everything, from his shady tactics to his novel-writing. At the time, though, what they chiefly felt was bewilderment. Their leaders had abandoned them. Their ancient cause lay in ruins. Instinctively they clung to the orator who put into words their dull resentment and their secret conviction that they alone could govern England. They were a defeated party and Disraeli restored their self-confidence. In exchange they gave him, not their trust (that he never received), but the backing he required to reach the top.

It was a bargain, and Disraeli soon made his supporters feel that they had not lost by it. In an age of accomplished parliamentary debaters he outshone all his rivals. Moreover, the record makes it clear that from a languid amateur he gradually turned himself into a hard-working professional. Skill in debate and maneuver was matched by organizing ability and a genuine gift for public administration. But at the heart of the phenomenon there lay something more elusive—something Disraeli allowed to emerge only in his novels and in the more outrageous of his letters. Mr. Blake has caught the Luciferian note which surrounds the performance. A latter-day Byronist, and for good measure a Jewish convert of the generation which on the Continent produced Heine and Lassalle, Disraeli from an early age had fixed a sardonic gaze, half amused, half contemptuous, upon the society he was determined to conquer. His fantastic novels light up an interior landscape remote from the familiar iconography of Victorian politics. The heir of the Regency wits, with his carefully cultivated Mephistophelian appearance, is seen to drag a metaphorical clubfoot across the stage. His family background (Spanish according to him, Italian in reality), his highly personal and altogether unorthodox Judaeo-Christianity, his saturnine looks and mordant turn of speech, repelled and fascinated. All in all, Disraeli appealed to the submerged romanticism of the English. The faint whiff of brimstone that clung to his figure alarmed the pious Gladstone. It did not bother Victoria, and it enchanted the audience of the great illusionist.

For it is as a master of political *trompe l'oeil* that Disraeli has gone down in the annals of statesmanship. All his triumphs were illusory, and so were the methods whereby he secured them. He split the Tories in the name of principle, and then kept them in the wilderness for a generation, but did not lead them to the promised land. For all his impassioned faith in the permanence of the "aristocratic settlement," he did not in the end save the cause of the landowning nobility. He did not even secure their economic interests: farm prices collapsed during his administration, thus in the end bringing about the ruin of agriculture he had predicted for thirty years. He did not reconcile the alienated working class to the Establishment—that was done independently by the rise of nationalism. The "two nations" of *Sybil* (the novel that won the hearts of Young England) remained apart. The social reforms enacted while he was in office were useful but marginal, and in the end their chief beneficiaries were the trade unions. He carried on a rearguard action against democracy, and then took credit for surrendering to it. The most dazzling of his tactical triumphs, the Reform Bill of 1867 which gave the franchise to the urban working class, was a personal *tour de force* at the expense of conservatism, and the new electors thanked him by voting for Gladstone. Nor did he accomplish anything permanent abroad. The elevation of the Queen to the dignity of Empress of India flattered the national pride, but did not stem the rise of Indian nationalism. The showdown with Russia in 1878 and its sequel, the Berlin Congress in the same year, was another empty stage triumph, and its only practical result, the temporary prolongation of Turkish rule in the Balkans, was thoroughly undesirable. Disraeli's imperialism, like all the rest of his career in office, was never more than a brilliantly conducted rearguard action.

Why then did the Tories follow him wherever he led? Certainly not because they trusted him. Salisbury, the ablest of them and eventually his stoutest supporter, as late as 1868 (when Disraeli was over sixty and had just become Prime Minister) thought him "an adventurer and . . . in an age of singularly reckless statesmen . . . beyond question the one who is least restrained by fear or scruple." The truth is that they had no choice. Disraeli possessed the genius they lacked, and his willingness to spend himself in the service of what he and they knew to be a lost cause made it inevitable that he should lead them. They needed a faith and Disraeli gave them one—imperialism, the vision of England as the center of a worldwide empire held together by loyalty to the Crown. Illusory or not, it refloated the aristocracy and revived its morale for a couple of generations. It even made Disraeli popular, so that in the end he became a national hero. His opponents, Gladstone above all, denounced him as an immoralist and the enemy of responsible statesmanship. These were Vic-

torian judgments passed upon a man who in his youth had taken Byron for his model and, like his hero, resolved to live dangerously and for glory alone: the only immortality in which he believed. It was his good fortune that circumstances permitted him to play a role which in a different age would have led to disaster. As it was, he infused that streak of romantic recklessness into the Tory personality which at a later day enabled Churchill to bring the curtain down upon the scene with a final gesture of defiance.

George Lichtheim

CRITICISM, EUROPEAN STYLE

POETS OF REALITY. By J. Hillis Miller. Harvard. $7.95.

Mr. Miller is schooled in the best European practice. It is a pleasure to watch him as he charts, in a series of learned and intricate essays on Conrad, Yeats, Eliot, Thomas, Stevens and Williams, the emergence of a new "poetry of reality" out of the nihilism of the late nineteenth century. For all but Williams the journey is long and arduous: the poets spend most of their careers in the wilderness, translating the nineteenth century's dichotomy between subject and object into Heideggerian ideas about the contradiction between the ground-of-being and its specific form. But finally, all dualisms transcended, they all arrive in the promised land:

> Yeats by his affirmation of the infinite richness of the finite moment; Eliot by his discovery that the Incarnation is here and now; Thomas by his acceptance of death which makes the poet an ark rescuing all things; Stevens by his identification of imagination and reality in the poetry of being; Williams by his plunge into the "filthy Passaic."

The story begins, as do many good melodramas, in the murky, late-Cartesian world of Victorian England. The once immanent God is fast disappearing, and with him the common authority for man and the world. In their efforts to reunite "the 'poor fragments of a broken world,'" the Victorians succeeded only in assimilating the world, turning it inside out into the mind. The resulting solipsism makes man, in Miller's heady adaptation of Nietzsche, "the murderer of God and the drinker of the sea of creation," a Nihilist who "wanders through the infinite nothingness of his own ego."

What modern poetry has achieved, according to Miller, is nothing less than a revolution in man's experience, whereby he "turns himself inside out" and leaps into the world. Modern poetry then is a success story, so successful in fact that Miller despairs of criticism "if criticism means viewing with the cold eye of analysis and judgement." He does not, however, resign from the profession; he "resigns himself" instead "to the poet's world and accepts what he finds there." Miller's important effort is with the prose of the poets, especially during their earlier years. The poor individual poems adjust as best they can, wagging their casual paraphrases and fragments of current comment behind. The only difficulty is that as Miller progresses the poet's prose too often becomes more telling of his world than does his poetry. So, for example, Miller offers a fine reading of Eliot's criticism as a record of his efforts to escape the prison of his subjective self, while he sticks to appropriate but routine readings of his poetry. Miller's point of view and one of his limitations is made clear when he says of Eliot that "the attempted accomplishment of his program for poetry is less impressive than the project itself."

But the real problem in the Eliot essay, as in the other essays in the book, is the "new reality." Miller tends to forget that reality in poetry is as much a genre as is, for example, Romance; and that as with all genres, we are persuaded not through idea and theme, but through structure and mode. So Miller is unconvincing when he cites themes of body and marriage, based, for example, on the presence of fertility dancers in "East Coker" as evidence for Eliot's leap—this despite the problem of Eliot's archaic diction (" 'Two and two,' in a 'necessarye coiunction,' 'sygnifying matrimonie' "). He sees Yeats's reality as depending on his acceptance of the momentary event as the only escape from the mind's diffracting power," and here we are offered themes represented by heroes whose experience takes them outside of themselves "into a place where everything is present at once." These are the beggars, the warriors, the lovers of the late poetry, and most spectacularly the poet himself who triumphs with the "climactic . . . exclamatory image, wholly concrete, wholly resisting logical analysis" where "all the world and the power of poetry are present at once." Actually, it is impossible to tell, given Miller's methods, whether such an image as " 'nymphs and satyrs/Copulate in the foam' " is beyond the limits of metaphor or not. Miller can only explain concreteness in poetry in terms of his idea that an image which seems to elude rational discussion is more concrete than one that does not.

In the Thomas essay, Miller uses the language of structure, but the evidence is again of theme and idea. Thomas' sojourn in the new reality begins with his acceptance of death as a part of life: "Only by seeing things from the perspective of their death . . . can they be recaptured

in their vitality, and, paradoxically, saved from death." Furthermore, to see man this way "is to see him with God's eyes." The evidence for this hymn rests not, as we might expect, on the characteristic organization of the late poetry, but on two of Thomas' metaphors: one from a late poem (the poem as "ark"), the other from a late letter (the poem as "water-tight compartment"), and on the prevalence of dead, though not necessarily more vivid people, in the late poetry and prose.

In Williams, we have, as his poetry and prose so often declare in direct statement, a model of existential behavior. Indeed, Williams is unique among his comrades: he spends his entire career "within the sphere of immanence." Whenever Miller gives him the "means" test —syntax, language and the rest—he finds in Williams the true "poetry of humility": scrupulously bare, completely objective ("objects exist within an anonymous space, the poem"). So effective a beggar of reality is Williams that "seeing and hearing and by implication smelling are transformed into extentions of the poet's tactile power." The drama in his poetry is the last drama possible in the new world: it derives from his sense of the incompatibility of the " 'unfathomable ground' " of being, "chaotic, senseless, holding within itself the possibility of all forms" and "the formed thing, defined and limited." From this conflict he develops a poetry of emergence. Perfected in his last years, this becomes a poetry of "continual flowering."

One's discomfort with these essays is not very difficult to locate. It begins with Miller's handling of individual poems, especially as they illustrate the style of the new reality. For example, in his discussion of "field theory" in Williams, he decides that the logical and grammatical uncertainties of "The Locust Tree in Flower" are an attempt at a "simultaneous pattern of linguistic forces" bent on making the poem a "substantial . . . echo" of the real world. So Miller chooses a version of the mimetic principle, the very thing field theory calls into question. Elsewhere, the "red wheelbarrow" becomes a "small object" through which "one feels the swirl of great events" because "the particular *is* the universal." But it is not "for this reason that so much depends on the wheelbarrow." Rather it is because the opening cliché responds to nothing less than the world before it shrinks in small spaces of deliberation to the red wheelbarrow. And the poem must continually include this opening phrase as it depends on what there is: the red wheelbarrow and beyond. Miller does not really misread poems. He simply adjusts his comments so as to disturb neither the poem nor the philosophical scheme, which mirrors the discussion too exactly. The effect is to draw him away from important problems of style which, as we see from his theory itself, are always hovering close by.

This level of comment tends to make his context itself thematic, so that a structural term like process seems, when explicated, to exhaust the problem of structure. Miller's elaborating poem, or poem as substantial echo, is not really so different from Yeats's beggars, Eliot's marriages or the dead in Thomas. We are back, I think, with philosophy as context, and poetry as mimesis. For all Miller's interest in "enactment" and the "dynamic visual," we have in the end the image of a project rather than the project itself. And the whole Aristotelian world we struggled so hard to escape is, despite God's sacrifice, smuggled in again. What we have here is not poetry but philosophy. Instead of concrete perceptions (as we have, for example, with his phenomenologist master, Jean-Pierre Richard) we have a frenetic floundering in evidence. And instead of a critique of a new space in modern poetry, we have a space in which that poetry might take place.

Aaron Rosen

ORIGINS OF FASCISM

THREE FACES OF FASCISM. By Ernst Nolte. Holt. $7.95.

In Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* and in a spate of other books, we have been asked to confront the terrible truth that, as a consequence of the fascist era, "the subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition." Professor Nolte's book, which represents a marked departure from the attitude found in the historiography of the past twenty years, is a sign that we are coming near to the time when an appraisal of the disaster will be possible.

Although Nolte acknowledges that the theory and practice of fascism in France, Italy and Germany was rooted in certain tendencies of Western history since the French Revolution, he does not believe that its existence necessarily brings into question the values and possibilities of our culture. He discusses fascism on three levels: in terms of its historical origins and internal political doctrine, as an anti-Marxist nationalist movement which employed the methods of mass appeal, first developed by Marxism, to destroy Marxism; in regard to its external policy, as the "life-and-death struggle of the sovereign, martial, inwardly antagonistic

group," by which he means a society which self-consciously endorses offensive war in the face of a real or imagined challenge to its internally antagonistic class structure and its independent sovereignty; and in a more philosophical vein, as an ideology which radically opposed "transcendence"—that is, the great tradition of Western thought which, from Plato through Hegel to Marx, conceives of man as "transcending" his finite and discretely particular condition by reaching out towards the freedom of the whole, toward the totality of eternal and infinite existence. These three levels are related because fascism was but one form—an historically late and more radical form—of reaction against the emancipatory process of "bourgeois society." Both liberalism and Marxism are philosophies which derive from "bourgeois society" and which call—the former, to a lesser extent; the latter, to a much greater degree—for practical as well as theoretical transcendence—for political liberty, economic and social justice, in addition to "spiritual freedom."

Fascism as a Weltanschauung was an outgrowth of conservatism, that tradition of thought which grew up in opposition first to liberalism and then to Marxism, and, at least at its outset, it seemed to share with conservatism its devotion to traditional institutions such as the army and the church and, generally, its resistance to practical transcendence. But here the connection between conservatism and fascism ends, for fascism was the offspring of historical conditions which necessarily made its resistance to transcendence far more extreme than that of conservatism. Fascism as an historical experience was the product of the First World War, the "earthquake" which erupted out of the nationalist tensions and social antagonisms of the prewar years. Rather than containing the destructive powers of nationalism and socialism, the war, especially in its later stages, and as a consequence of the impossible treaty which brought it to an end, made them stronger. Fascism was thus characteristic of an era which, poised between the double threat of nationalistic war and social revolution, called forth an extreme response. As a self-conscious reaction to the threat of a Marxist revolution which demanded total practical transcendence, fascism moved past conservatism to deny all forms of transcendence—theoretical as well as practical—and to affirm, instead, the ultimate war of destruction, the "life-and-death struggle of the sovereign, martial, inwardly antagonistic group." Fascism was, as Nolte says, "the most desperate assault ever made upon the human being and the transcendence within him." In espousing destruction for the sake of destruction itself, it revealed its true nihilistic character—its despair and emptiness, its lack of substantive purpose. Hence its defeat, rather than indicating that our tradition has been "usurped," signifies an affirmation of the very values and possibilities

—contained in *both* liberalism *and* Marxism—which it sought to destroy.

Nolte does not fail to distinguish between the three fascist movements under study. And here again his analysis provides us with a new perspective on the situation. Toward the end of his discussion of National Socialism, he comes to the not so startling conclusion that of the three faces of fascism the German variety was the most radical and the most complete. But it is not his conclusion so much as the whole structure of evidence and reasoning which leads up to it which is new and important. He makes it clear that the radical character of Nazism can be properly comprehended only if it is seen against the background of French and Italian fascism, so as to lay bare "the complete, layered structure of the phenomenon."

In those sections of his book devoted to Maurras and the *Action Française* and to Mussolini and Italian fascism. Nolte tries to show that neither Maurras nor Mussolini were originally fascists. Both moved only gradually toward fascism: in each case the move signified a betrayal of earlier convictions. Out of fear for the traditional culture—which for him was identical with the "ancien regime"—and in its *unconditional* defense, Maurras was willing, in 1940, to sacrifice France and the French people to the German conqueror. Yet Maurras's love of France, no matter how wrongheaded and perverse, remained; hence Nolte rightly speaks of the *Action Française* as an "early" and incomplete form of fascism. Mussolini drifted into the fascist camp after and as a result of his break with his fellow Marxists over the question of Italian participation in World War I. When his attempt at some kind of collaboration with the socialists and the Popolari had failed, he gave up his hope of creating a social democracy which would be the spontaneous expression of the masses. All traces of Mussolini's socialism disappeared when he permitted his Italy to become the satellite of Nazi Germany, the far greater and more nihilistic fascist power. But with his fall in 1943, Mussolini returned, pathetically, to his old beliefs. "It will be," he said of that bastard state, the Republic of Salo, "the republic of Italian workers, and it has already begun on the determined realization of all those postulates which for forty years were inscribed on the flags of the socialist movements." Nolte demonstrates that in the case of both Maurras and Mussolini their original convictions were obscured and betrayed but not altogether destroyed by their fascism.

Against this background the sheer nihilism of Hitler and of National Socialism becomes clear. Like Maurras, Hitler justified aggression and inhumanity by claiming that he was waging war for the sake of "culture," and, like Italian fascism, German National Socialism purported to have a social content. But Hitler placed no real value on the German

nation and its institutions; in the end he had no qualms about including Germany in his own *Götterdämerung*: Germany was only the instrument through which he hoped to realize his own mad plans for destruction. In contrast to Gottfried Feder, his early teacher, or to the Strasser brothers, who, in their own way, were socialists, Hitler never deviated from his petit-bourgeois convictions about "the individual" and "private property." His only connection with Marxism had to do with the consummate skill with which he appropriated its more militant methods to the needs of his own radical fascism. The Italian fascist struggle against Marxism was a real battle against a real enemy; Hitler's anti-Marxism —in a post-war Germany which was not, like Italy, seriously threatened by revolutionary socialist agitation—was artificial and "mythical." His true and, in fact, only enemy was the Jew, and sometimes he acted as though he had only one purpose—to root out and everywhere destroy the hated and fiendish Jew. Hitler's last words, dictated shortly before he killed himself, attest to the negative, totally nihilistic motive of his entire career. "Above all," he said, "I demand of the nation's leaders and followers scrupulous adherence to the race laws and to ruthless resistance against the world poisoners of all peoples, international Jewry."

The inhumanity expressed in these words is neither as distressing nor as inconceivable as the fact that for twelve years they were applauded by the majority of the German people. Nolte approaches this question through biography and political history. In a long biographical section he attributes Hitler's success to his monomania, his infantile single-mindedness. Again, Nolte takes note of the historical circumstances which contributed to Hitler's strange career—the Versailles treaty, the depression of 1929, the intrigues of the army and of von Papen and Schleicher, the senility of Hindenburg. But all of this does not explain why more than half of the German nation was so receptive to Hitler's doctrine and so blind both to the implications and the consequences of his actions. For what we need—and what we do not have here—is a thorough examination of the social forces at work in Germany before 1933.

One thing at least is clear: the unique success of Hitler and of National Socialism is inextricably bound up with the sad history of the German middle class. Nolte makes a point of describing both liberalism *and* Marxism as "bourgeois" social philosophies. But he fails to mention that these two principal ideologies of "bourgeois society" had very little effect on the great majority of the German bourgeoisie. Indeed, the distinctive feature of German social history in the period before Hitler is the absence of an independent and politically conscious middle class. Although Germany was the greatest industrial power in Europe, her

middle classes, in contrast to those of England, France and even Italy, played almost no part in the political affairs of the nation.

They had sold out to Bismarck in return for national unification —which only Prussian power could accomplish. After 1870 Bismarck maintained the power of the Prussian monarchy and the conservative social forces which supported it by reforming both the army and the bureaucracy so as to exclude all "undesirable" or "liberal" elements. These measures produced what Franz Neumann has called the "feudal-bourgeois" type—that is, a middle class corrupted by its aristocratic pretensions, devoid of any real class-consciousness of its own. And it was this "feudal" middle class—or at least a large part of it—which withheld its sympathy and support from the Weimar Republic, and which, in the disordered frenzy that accompanied Hitler's rise to power, hailed his "unique revolution" in the name of the restoration of order. Goebbels, a not untypical member of the German middle class, provides a final comment on the whole disastrous era. "A historic moment," he wrote in his diary on the day Hitler took power, "The shield of German honor has been washed clean again. The standards with our eagles rise on high. . . . On the streetcars and buses, men, women, and children stand cheering and singing. A fantastic sight, unique in history."

Wallace Katz

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POETRY IN REVIEW

MERRILL

NIGHTS AND DAYS. By James Merrill. Atheneum. **$4.50.**

James Merrill's last volume of poems, *Water Street,* appeared in 1962; *Nights and Days* is its remarkable successor. There are lines in the earlier book that might well prepare us for the tone of this new collection:

back into my imagination
The city glides, like cities seen from the air,
Mere smoke and sparkle to the passenger
Having in mind another destination

Which now is not that honey-slow descent
Of the Champs-Elysees, her hand in his,
But the dull need to make some kind of house
Out of the life lived, out of the love spent.

His recent poems often—as these lines do—both invite the imagination and dismiss it. Readers of *Water Street* will remember it as marking a change, new powers expressed in poems that release the force of the coiled past, a personal past, "earth held up, a text not wholly undermined/By fluent passages of metaphor." The sly bows to his own richness of style are part of Merrill's strength. There is no pretense that the poet is shedding his skin; he keeps all the playful and rewarding complication that marked his earlier poems, but gains a psychological intensity and authority that is new. American poetry in the past ten years —quite unpredictably, quite wonderfully—has come to include voices once heard primarily in our fiction, in novels of the inner life. The gain in force has been in some cases inseparable from a crude confessional style that finally lacks any interest as *poetry.* But the real craftsmen have assimilated these energies slowly, with great certainty, and with astonishing results. I am thinking not only of Robert Lowell, but of Merrill and

John Berryman and Adrienne Rich, all of whom have transformed their already distinctive and mastered styles.

Nights and Days contains poems as supple as those of *Water Street* and continues its surprising liberties. But it includes something further, two important long poems, "From the Cupola" and "The Thousand and Second Night," the latter of which seems to me Merrill's best work. It is amusing and rapid, slips quite easily into prose interludes and a mocking verse analysis of itself, all this without sacrificing formal intensity. It would be hard to represent accurately the tone of this poem: on one hand the poet's surfacing memories and angular self-questioning (he is sometimes "I," sometimes distantly "you"); on the other, the rich settings of Istanbul and Greece and the background allusions to the *Arabian Nights*. They are there, these tempting frameworks, to remind us of the expectations and demands of our fantasy lives—Yeats's Byzantium, Scheherazade's inexhaustible inventions. But they are also there as mocking possibilities; the poem's sinewy movement forces us to see the connection between our privileged, detached fantasies and harsh facts. It begins, almost comically, in Istanbul with "an absurd complaint. The whole right half / Of my face refuses to move." That sharp disorientation is one of many in a poem whose traveler's extravagances are there finally to remind him of time and change: "Three good friends in as many months have complained, / 'You were nice, James, before your trip. Or so / I thought. But you have changed.'" This sailing to Byzantium has led to an unexpected goal:

Among the dancers on the pier
Glides one figure in a suit of bones,
Whose savage grace alerts the chaperones.

He picks you out from thousands. He intends
Perhaps no mischief. Yet the dog-brown eyes
In the chalk face that stiffens as it dries
Pierce you with the eyes of those three friends.
The mask begins to melt upon your face.

Inviting landscapes become landscapes of the mind, self-confrontation in the thousand and one nights of one's remembered past. The titles of the poem's opening sections are in themselves revealing: *Rigor Vitae, The Cure* and, particularly, *Carnivals*, used here to mean more than celebrations—quite properly "sumptuous farewells to flesh," rich awakenings to mortality.

Merrill's poems are some of the most convincing expressions we have of the pressure of fantasy, and of the abiding, unavoidable connections

between fantasy and the commonplace. So, "Time," the best of the book's short poems, incorporates fragments of daily demands, for one thing, the way a son hears a feeble father:

> *He grasped your pulse in his big gray-haired hand,*
> *Crevasses opening, numb azure.* Wait
> *He breathed and glittered*: You'll regret
> You want to Read my will first Don't
> Your old father All he has Be yours

But these voices are part of an already complicated vision whose initial picture of Time is more seductive: "Ever that Everest / Among concepts." That promise of adventure transforms games of Patience into "fifty-two chromosomes permitting / Trillions of 'lives.'"

> *You could inquire beneath*
> *The snowfield, the vine-monogram, the pattern*
> *Of winged cyclists, to where the flaw lay*
> *Crocus-clean, a trail inching between*
> *Sheer heights and drops, and reach what might have been.*

Against these fantasies play the voices of the possible—the feeble father, the postponing son. The emerging vision—still cards, still mountain-climbing—is now tempered, informed by the long littleness of life. Rich imaginings about time have been tested against neglect and procrastination:

> *You take up your worn pack.*
>
> *Above their gay crusaders' dress*
> *The monarchs' mouths are pinched and bleak.*
> *Staggering forth in ranks of less and less*
> *Related cards, condemned to the mystique*
>
> *Of a redeeming One,*
> *An Ace to lead them home, sword, stave, and axe,*
> *Power, Riches, Love, a place to lay them down*
> *In dreamless heaps, the reds, the blacks,*
>
> *Old Adams and gray Eves*
> *Escort you still.*

The technique, here as elsewhere, is one of bold transformations; the "worn pack" of eternal games of cards merges with the mountain-climber's burden. And here one comes to the special strangeness of Merrill's style, its taut alertness to meanings that lurk in words and phrases one casually comes upon. One finds this in all good poets, but here raised

to a habit of vigilance, a quickened control and poise, sometimes bravado, that he clearly believes in as a source of power. The phrase "on the rocks" springs unexpectedly to life in this section from "The Broken Home":

When my parents were younger this was a popular act:
A veiled woman would leap from an electric wine-dark car
To the steps of no matter what—the Senate or the Ritz Bar—
And bodily, at newsreel speed, attack

No matter whom—Al Smith or José Maria Sert
Or Clemenceau—veins standing out on her throat
As she yelled War mongerer! Pig! Give us the vote!,
And would have to be hauled away in her hobble skirt.

What had the man done? Oh, made history.
Her business (he had implied) was giving birth,
Tending the house, mending the socks.

Always that same old story—
Father Time and Mother Earth,
A marriage on the rocks.

All conversational ease and finally outrageous humor, the wit allows us momentary relaxation and then plants its sting. The newsreel proves more than quaint, is charged with meaning in the context of a long poem whose speaker is exorcizing the ghosts of a broken home. Beneath amused glimpses of twenties bravado, the verse penetrates to parents' energies (both envied and resented) that shape and cripple a child's. "The Broken Home" is a splendid example of both the poise and the psychological intensity which distinguish these poems, and like "The Thousand and Second Night" it gives us a sense of dangerous mastery. The wit is exhilarating precisely because it is exercised in the shadow of brooding enemies honestly faced—one's past, out of one's control; and time.

It would be misleading to suggest that all the poems in this volume are cut from the same cloth; if anything the book has less unity than *Water Street*. There is an exuberant "Violent Pastoral" which brings Death back into Arcadia in a surprising way. There are also several fine love poems, particularly "Days of 1964," recalling Cavafy, which concludes the book. And the volume includes a second very long poem, "From the Cupola." It plays out the tale of Cupid and Psyche in modern instances, its heroine a New England spinster with a haunted attachment to an unknown stranger, mocked by sisters named, mischievously, Alice and Gertrude. Though as interesting an experiment in extended form as "The Thousand and Second Night," its protagonist is less dramatically recog-

nizable, perhaps less a "psyche" than the speaker of the other long poem.

Finally, what marks off *Nights and Days* as a distinct collection is its strong sense of how Time shadows a life. Time's presence is stronger and more troubling than it was in *Water Street*. An inverse measure of the control and poise mustered against it are those moments when figures do "let go," like the speaker at the end of the poem "Time," who catches sight of something "not unlike / Meaning relieved of sense," or the man whose resisted temptation in "A Carpet Not Bought" cannot save him from "that morning . . . When sons with shears / Should set the pattern free / To ripple air's long floors / And bear him safe / Over a small waved sea." Or the splendid moment at the end of "The Thousand and Second Night" when the captivity of fantasy and flesh is finally ended and Scheherezade takes her leave of the Sultan. These visions are the most gifted passages in the poems, often occurring powerfully in their last lines. But they are measured, guarded by "an old distrust of imaginary scenes." The passion for release haunts *Nights and Days*, though it remains, now, wisely, a passion unfulfilled, deferred, glimpsed in its relation to the nagging voices of everyday.

David Kalstone

BRECHT, GRASS, VOZNESENSKY

DIE HAUSPOSTILLE; MANUAL OF PIETY. By Bertolt Brecht. Bilingual; English text by Eric Bentley. Grove Press. $10.00.

SELECTED POEMS. By Günter Grass. Translations by Michael Hamburger and Christopher Middleton. Harcourt, Brace, and World. $3.95.

VOZNESENSKY: SELECTED POEMS. Translation by Herbert Marshall. Hill and Wang. $4.50.

Mr. Bentley, its translator, thinks *Die Hauspostille*, Brecht's first collected volume, both one of the most remarkable first volumes of poems in modern literature and also "the most impressive single group of poems," as a whole, that Brecht produced. He thinks the volume has never had its due because it came out before Brecht had become a Communist and contains the famous "Hymn of the Red Army Soldier," which

Brecht later was anxious to suppress, and because the blasphemous parody, in the title and arrangement of the book, of a manual of devotion for the pious layman, combined with the fierce attacks on conventional religious sentiment, estranged Christian conservative critics. This may, Mr. Bentley feels, have led to Faber's, advised by T. S. Eliot, turning down his own early translation of *The Threepenny Opera.*

Yet an early Catholic critic felt that the book made sense in a Christian context, Brecht was a great reader and admirer of the Bible, and Mr. Bentley feels that his atheism, in this volume, suggests a writer, in the Kierkegaardian sense, in "the pre-religious stage," the stage of "vehement unbelief and outcry." Brecht perhaps is like a Victorian atheist, like Lord Russell in "A Free Man's Worship," fiercely denouncing a God whom he asserts not to exist. Sometimes, more gently, he reproaches that God: "Very slowly God forgets her bit by bit"; or even appeals to Him, ending a poem about a prostitute, "The Ballad of Hannah Cash": "May God make it up to her!" One cannot dismiss such phrases in the volume, Mr. Bentley says, as a "mere manner of speaking," since

> for poets manners of speaking are not "mere." A poem *is* a manner of speaking. And the phrase "God does not exist" can easily be a way of saying "God behaves as if he did not exist." Or absence can be equated with non-existence, *as it often is with children.*

"As it often is with children"—the phrase, whether by Mr. Bentley's intention or not, seems to give one a clue to Brecht's early genius, and perhaps also to his development later. The passion for justice, and anger at its absence, marks children more than their disabused elders; perhaps the passion for God, and anger at His absence, is only another name for the same thing. Children also, like Brecht, are sly, self-protective, ruthlessly observant, ready to mock or denounce, yet they will clown and mock themselves too. They love horror stories and the opposition of goodies and baddies, as Brecht did, but the baddies, the pirates, the Mack the Knives, gain their imaginative sympathy. They note early that being just good does not always pay. Brecht's taste in poetry, for Kipling, for Villon, for ballad and folksong, was an intelligent child's taste. There is a poem here about a boy of thirteen who killed his parents, hid them in an oak chest, bought azaleas to hide the smell, told those who came to the door that it was the smell of decaying veal; there is another poem about a maidservant who bore a bastard baby in the privy, killed it panicstrickenly, and then took it to bed with her. Both poems are saved from morbidity and sentimentality by a child's unshockability and clear vision of facts. Slyness and humor save the "poor B.B."

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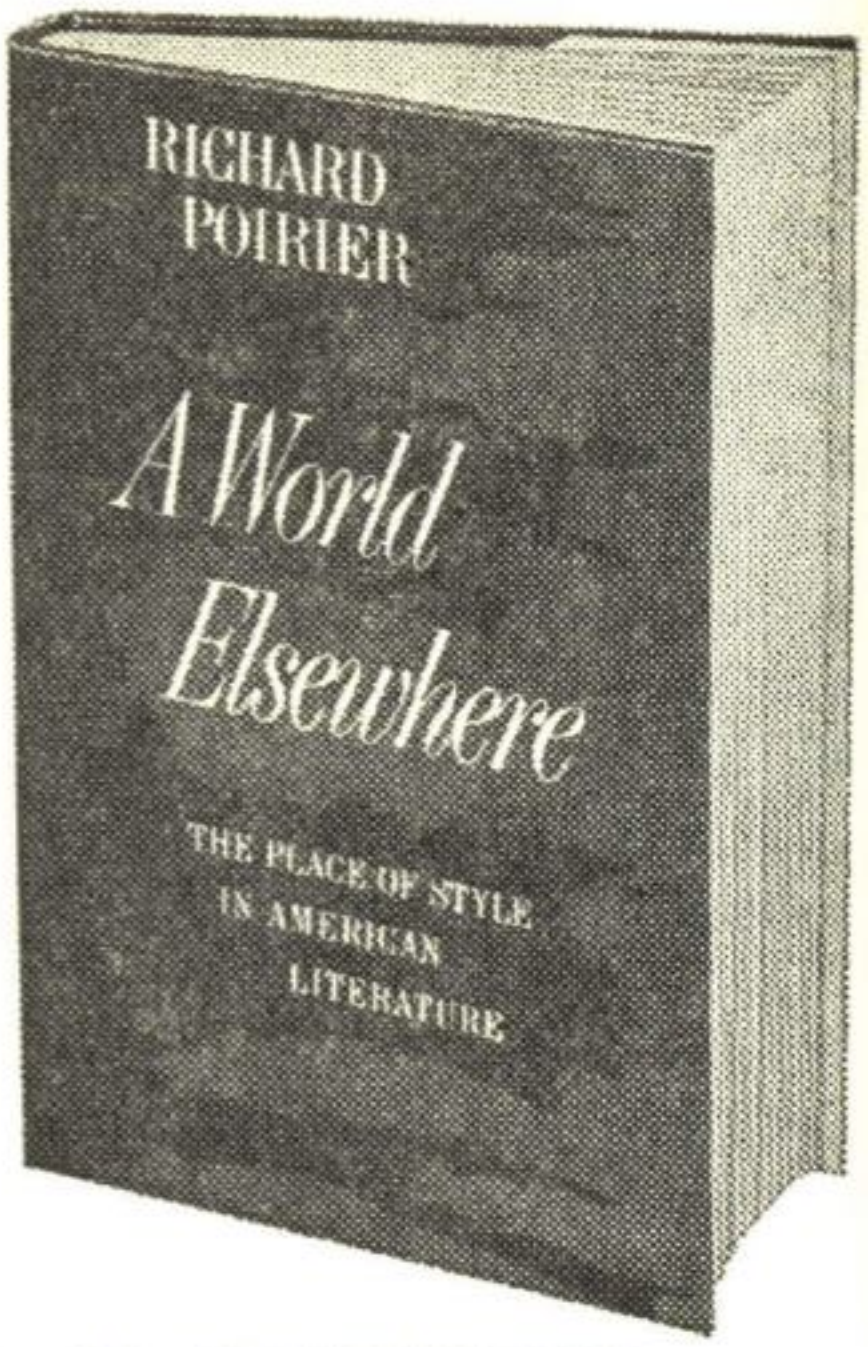

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poems from being exercises in either self-pity or a kind of inverted self-righteousness disguised as cynicism. The desire to shock, throughout, is so open and ingenuous that it does not offend. The mood is often attack and parody, but sympathy envelops the objects attacked and I did not realize, before reading Mr. Bentley's volume, how much there is in Brecht's early poetry that is, with only a slight distortion by the general critical purpose of the volume, lyrical and romantic in a simple and traditional way. Brecht's lost teeth, the cigar to which one can cling when one is mortally ill, the comfort of the privy as a place where one can be by oneself, these seem to blend, with the salutes to the fierceness of the elements, the grotesque or pathetic case histories, the fantastic American savannahs, the mock-hymns, the Groucho Marx clownings, the assertions and the denouncings of the world's meaninglessness and injustice, into a strangely harmonious unity. Strangely, Brecht's world is in the end homely, we are at home in it.

Mr. Bentley's translations are admirable, vigorous and vital in their rhythms, natural and yet surprising, alive and contemporary in their diction. One hardly feels that one is reading a translation at all. The following extract from his version of one of the "poor B. B." poems will suggest his quality:

I am friendly with people. I stick
A bowler on my head as they do.
"They are beasts," I say, "with a particular odor."
"So what?" I also say, "I am too."

In the morning, sometimes, I take some
girls and sit them
In my empty rocking chairs. Whereupon I
Look them nonchalantly over and declare:
"In me you have a man on whom you can't rely."

Towards evening I gather some fellows around me.
We address one another as: Gentlemen.
They put their feet on the table and remark:
"Things will improve." I don't ask when.

In a sense, throughout his career, Brecht will *always* be asking when things will improve, or when men will think clearly and act firmly enough to improve them; yet a sly relish for things even in their unimproved condition, an instinctive dry pity for what he condemns, a humorous appreciation of the complicity of all of us in what we condemn, these things lie, as this early volume shows, nearer the roots of his genius. Poor Bert Brecht is poor Everyman.

The other two volumes are not so important in themselves nor, I

think, are the translations so successful, though in some ways their problems must have been harder. Brecht's breadth, directness and immediacy, his taste for folk rhythms, must be a help to the translator. Günter Grass writes in short lines, without full rhymes, not expressing feelings directly but evoking them through naming objects; in a very broad sense, he is in a "free verse" and "imagistic" tradition. The following poem, "Folding Chairs," well-translated by Michael Hamburger, reminded me very much of some poems of Pablo Neruda's middle period in which he uses discarded dentures, "rotted utensils," meaningless, decayed and depressing objects as an equivalent for his sense of hopeless social waste:

How sad these changes are.
People unscrew the nameplates from the doors,
take the saucepan of cabbage
and heat it up again, in a different place.

What kind of furniture is this
that advertises departure?
People take up their folding chairs
and emigrate.

Ships laden with homesickness and the urge to vomit
carry patented seating contraptions
and their unpatented owners
to and fro.

Now on both sides of the great ocean
there are folding chairs;
how sad these changes are.

The blurb describes Grass as "a politically and morally committed" poet who is, however, "innocent of any obvious design on the reader." I suppose such a poem does uncomfortably suggest to us that we are often trapped by a world of things, come to depend for our identity on nameplates, saucepans and patented seating contraptions; and that we transport, not really personally rooted or personally traveling anywhere, not ourselves but our impedimenta. I am not sure if leaving us entirely, as Brecht would not, to make our own moral and political deductions from this makes for better poetry. The tone is certainly very withdrawn, compared to Brecht.

Let me illustrate what seems to me one of the translators' difficulties here. Grass has a grim and powerful poem, "Saturn," about Time as the

devourer of his sons. Here is the last stanza, first in the original, then in Christopher Middleton's version:

Nachts kommt Saturn
und hält seine Hand auf.
Mit meiner Asche
putzt seine Zähne Saturn.
In seinen Rachen
werden wir steigen.

At night Saturn comes
and holds out his hand.
With my ashes, he
cleans his teeth, Saturn.
We shall climb
into his jaws.

The horror is to be felt as everyday, habitual, emphasized obliquely by an accepting flatness. Mr. Middleton sees this, but does he convey it? Suppose instead, distorting English idiom just a little, one simply gave a point-for-point *map* of the original:

Nights comes Saturn
and holds his hand out.
With my ashes
cleans his teeth Saturn.
Into his jaws
we shall climb.

Voznesensky is utterly different from Brecht and Grass, so far as one can judge from Mr. Marshall's translations: fluent, light, gay, something of a virtuoso in fanciful surprises and daring juxtapositions, frivolous at times, almost rococo. His commitment is against solemnity and pomposity in Russia, against official anti-Americanism (he loves America even at, especially at, its most gimmicky and glittery) and for a tradition of dandyism, of insouciance, even of romantic individualism: Gaugin for instance is one of his cultural heroes. A most odd bird to come out of modern Russia, and how encouraging that he should come! But swift, light and difficult formal intricacy is, unfortunately, the one quality in verse that is almost untranslatable—the "play" element, depending so much on the genius of the poet's native tongue. Mr. Marshall has a jolly good try. But such a passage as this, lively as it is, makes Voznesensky sound *New Yorker*ish, a kind of male Phyllis McGinley, where one feels sure that his gaiety and elegance in his own tongue is in quality more comparable to that, say, of Richard Wilbur or Marianne Moore, or perhaps Auden in his comic-baroque vein:

I am Marilyn, Marilyn,
I am a heroine
of suicide and heroin.
For whom are my dahlias blossoming?
For whom are the telephones gossiping?
Whose suede in the wardrobe is squeaking,
unwearable?
It's unbearable.

A Russian friend of mine, Olga Lawrence, who checked this version over for me with the original, found it wonderfully close both to the form and the sense; and yet one wonders how often Mr. Marshall has had *a little* to distort sense to get this equivalent of rhyme and rhythm: rightly, no doubt, for one would guess that this is a poet for whom rhyme and rhythm, brilliant smooth surface, are, if not everything, at least very much. Mr. Marshall deserves much credit for having, at least, *suggested* this so clearly. And the brilliant visual imagery carries very directly over.

G. S. Fraser

PLATH, JARRELL, KINNELL, SMITH

ARIEL. By Sylvia Plath. Harper. $4.95.
THE LOST WORLD. By Randall Jarrell. Macmillan. $3.95.
FLOWER HERDING ON MOUNT MONADNOCK. By Galway Kinnell. Houghton Mifflin. $3.00.
THE TIN CAN and OTHER POEMS. By William Jay Smith. Delacorte. $4.00.

If Sylvia Plath's performance were not so securely knowledgeable, so cannily devised, so richly inventive and so meticulously reined, it would be intolerable. Many of these poems are magnificent; a whole book of them is top-heavy, teetering on that point where the self-created figure threatens to topple over into self-expression and the diversions of psychopathology. Reaching for a poet with whom to compare her, or in whose sphere of influence to "place" her—and only the illustrious will do—one hesitates before Blake (too "big," too masculine, too mythopoeic), before Baudelaire (too much the *poseur*, too *raffiné*, perhaps too comfortable in his rancor), and stops at Emily Dickinson. But anguish in Emily Dickinson is a consequence; it partakes of a classical notion of anguish: the great heart victimized by its own humanity. In Sylvia Plath, by contrast, anguish is not a consequence but the whole relentless subject itself. In her vision the primary colors of anguish,

the myopic eye of anguish, not only seriously distort the observed world but threaten to obliterate it. The exhibition of an obsession may, for a time, provide a reader with a voyeuristic *frisson*. But in the long run any fixation is apt to alienate its witness. The old cliché is inevitable: Miss Plath's strength is her weakness; impulses that individuate her thrilling talent are the same impulses that shrink the limits of a commanding achievement. Anything pursued far enough is likely to turn into its opposite: a shriek maintained for eighty-five pages becomes, to say the least, a bore. Nevertheless, what we have here is not, as some bewildered critics have claimed, the death rattle of a sick girl, but the defiantly fulfilling measures of a poet. Taken in small—one is almost forced to say, medicinal—doses, she is a marvel.

The Lost World of Randall Jarrell is really two worlds: first, the world of childhood, distilled by memory and made exotic by a register of minutiae close to total recall; then the world unclaimed, territories of imagination glimpsed in precious or frightening moments, perpetually imminent. Consciousness is itself a kind of anguish here, but anguish also has its specific sources—in a realization that the worst fears of the child all come true, in a conviction that the operations of the adult intelligence are inadequate and often perverse. If innocence cannot be recovered, its existence can at least be affirmed. The title poem provides an instance. The master image is the famous old movie based on a sort of *Amazing Stories* fantasy: there is a jungle plateau in South America, the result of a geological sport, on which prehistoric life in the form, mainly, of saurian monsters, continues its prehistory. Its extinct creatures are of course Hollywood artifacts, both in the movie and in the poem, but in their way they are also emblems of Eden. The man, remembering the child, sees them this way: "On Melrose a dinosaur / And pterodactyl, with their immense pale / Papier-mâché smiles, look over the fence / Of The Lost World." Yet they are no more overtly important than many other things selected by memory—no more important than "Lucky / Half wolf, half police-dog" who could "play the piano— / Play that he does, that is," or the dowager neighbor's electric car in whose glass confines he took "for granted / The tiller by which she steers, the yellow roses / In the bud vases, the whole enchanted / Drawing room of our progress." This world recalled exists whole and complete, a charming museum with everything in place. The child who once lived there has survived; all of his painful questions have been answered, painfully. He will never ask them again.

A trick of endowing ordinary situations with an aura of the mythical has always been part of Jarrell's poetic resourcefulness. A seam of fable runs through his books, a tendency to see life in terms of *Märchen,* in landscapes where every house is dwarfed and shadowed by the trees of an impermeably sinister Black Forest. In this book, continuing that strain,

there occur episodes of family drama in which real people play familiar roles, conversing like anybody's father, mother, children, and yet in which something subtly grotesque is happening right before our eyes, something that fixes the domestic dramatis personae just a few crucial millimetres away from "reality." These figures *en tableau* remind one of those German postcards on which large cats, dressed like characters out of *Buddenbrooks,* act out "Sunday at Grandma's" or "The Christening of the Firstborn." In Jarrell's versions they look as cuddly as their *kitsch* counterparts, they say things just as cute as those recorded in the balloons of speech that issue from their mouths, but they are involved in circumstances that have been of urgent concern to Sophocles and to Sigmund Freud.

This last, almost posthumous book, is full of utterly fresh observations, knifing wit and a pervasive tenderness. What the book perhaps lacks is verbal density, even verbal grace—an *ampleur* of language commesurate with its insights. Many of the poems are rich in surprise, and many of them give the illusion of a mind spontaneously working in shifts and turns. At the same time, many of them seem to conclude drily, logically, with an invisible Q.E.D. The poetic situations Jarrell records or devises are as distinctive as trademarks; what is often curiously missing is the sound of his voice.

In this grouping of poets Kinnell is the quiet one—deft, meditative, scrutinizing correspondences, hearkening to intimations. Like Jarrell, he is conscious of the penumbra of a "second" reality; but in his case the missing dimension is not a mythical projection but an impenetrable otherness. "I know I live half alive in the world," he says. "I know half my life belongs to the wild darkness." This is bold, and naïve, but Kinnell means what he says:

Sometimes I see them,
The south-going Canada geese,
At evening, coming down
In pink light, over the pond, in great,
Loose, always dissolving V's—
I go out into the field,
Amazed and moved, and listen
To the cold, lonely yelping
Of those tranced bodies in the sky,
Until I feel on the point
Of breaking into a sacred, bloodier speech.

The "wild darkness" sends out its emissaries, but most often nature is an unresponsive wall against revelation, a wall that won't give, a weeping wall. This immediate sense of the physical-cum-metaphysical extends to

personal identity. "I could make out a beggar," says Galway Kinnell, "Down the long street he was calling *Galway!* / I started towards him and began calling *Galway!*" The explicit figure of the *Doppelgänger* comes into the book just this once. But even without the dramatic intrusion his presence would be distinctly felt. The charm and force of many of Kinnell's poems lies in his ability to watch himself do what he does with a wise, untroubled stare. A mystical disposition suggests a vision blurred. But Kinnell's eye is exact and exacting: a Bleecker Street wino looks in upon the scene of a poetry reading from "the mowed cornfield of his gawk"; on a summer morning the poet sees "the old crane / Who holds out his drainpipe of a neck / And creaks along in the blue"; and watches "Milton Norway's sky-blue Ford / Dragging its ass down the dirt road / On the other side of the valley."

The quotient of "nature" poems in this volume is high, perhaps too high. While many poems in this vein are as economical as line drawings, a certain sameness of attitude dominates a run of them and threatens to fix the poet in the dead stance of man-against-the-sky. In the city, on the other hand, this man has things to say that are new. In "The River That is East," a kind of postlude to *The Bridge,* he suggests in just five packed stanzas what has happened, in less than thirty years, to the epical pretensions of a visionary and, by implication, to the illusions of a culture.

A Laocoön-like involvement in the toils of creative anxiety, a rage for freedom and identity, are the substance of the title poem of William Jay Smith's collection. The poem is superb—at once a dispersion of forces and a gathering of strength—and so far superior to anything else in the book that it has the impact of a window smashed open. A poem about itself, it begins with delicately quiet annotations, muted feelings, builds in a controlled extravagance of whirlings and whorlings and agonized self-recognitions, and arrives at a kind of epiphany. Wholly convincing, without a false syllable in its hundreds of lines, it is a recreation of experience that seems to make its statement not by its calculations but by its processes. To single out "The Tin Can" is not to slight Smith's demonstrated talents, but to recognize a poem that comes from the depths with the awesome wholeness of a thing urged into being.

Smith's range of subject and tone is notable—from pidgin English wit to Vergilian benisons—and while his book is continually engaging it is bewilderingly uneven. What is one to make, for instance, of the exquisite efficiency of a poem like "Morels" side by side with the thumping awfulness of "The Tempest"—in which a boatload of battered pilgrims comes to an island off Virginia "Where safely, under more compliant skies / They might chart out that voyage to a shore / On which with confidence a nation would arise?" In his recently adopted long lines and

loose stanzas, Smith takes chances that only now and then are lucky. Too often the center won't hold, description gets windy, self-generating, and we are left with expert maneuvers in a vacuum. In less ambitious pieces, where his old apprenticeship to watchwork accuracy obtains, he seldom goes wrong. But diversities and broad discrepancies merely spark the liveliness of an immensely readable book. These days, when a hopped-up syntax, hi-fi mechanics and the outlook of a *Playboy* intellectual are basic equipment, it is not difficult to spot and dismiss a poet on the make. A poet in the making, by contrast—especially a poet whose credentials, like Smith's, already give him title to distinction—has a power to rejuvenate his readers and to humble his critics.

John Malcolm Brinnin

NOTES

(Continued from page 10)

next fall. . . . **DIANA TRILLING** tells us she is expecting to spend part of the next year living in England. . . . **ALBERT J. GUERARD's The Journey** is a fragment of a novel he is now finishing, **Still Talking**, the third part of a trilogy which began with **Night Journey** (1950) and **The Exiles** (1963). . . . **ROLAND BARTHES** holds the Chair of Sociology at the College de France at the Sorbonne. M. Barthes's forthcoming book is the **Sociologie du Vêtements**; his **On Racine** is available in English. . . . **TONY TANNER**, whose article on Burroughs appeared in the Fall issue, is a Fellow of Kings College, Cambridge, and University Lecturer in English. . . . **Moderns on Tragedy,** an anthology edited by **LIONEL ABEL,** will be published this month by Fawcett. . . . **REUBEN A. BROWER** studied and later taught at Amherst when Robert Frost was a member of the Faculty. Mr. Brower is Master of Adams House at Harvard. . . . **PETER BROOKS** teaches at Yale. . . . **GEORGE LICHTHEIM** lives in London and has taught at Columbia and Stanford. Columbia brought out his **Marxism in Modern France** this year. . . . **AARON ROSEN** teaches English at Buffalo and **WALLACE KATZ** teaches history at City. . . . **DAVID KALSTONE** is spending a year in London. His latest book is **Sidney's Poetry**, which Harvard brought out. . . . A translator of poetry in his own right, **G. S. FRASER** is finishing a book about Lawrence Durrell. . . . **JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN** teaches English at B.U. His **Selected Poems** were published last year.

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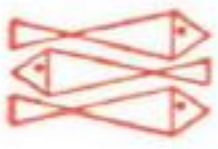

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