

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Straumann, "Zum Wandel des Menschenbildes in der zeitgenössischen amerikanischen Literatur," 125; Rudolf Haas, "Griechischer Mythos im modernen Roman: John Updike's The Centaur," Lebende Antike, Symposium für Rudolf Sühnel, ed. Horst Meller and Hans-Joachim Zimmermann (Berlin, 1967), 513-527.

<sup>10</sup> "America Is Hard to See," In the Clearing (New York, 1962), 22.

#### EXCHANGE -- LITERATURE AND CULTURE

#### BUT BEAR IN MIND:

#### A REACTION TO GALINSKY'S ESSAY

I am enormously impressed by Professor Galinsky's essay; the more I read it, the more I am struck by the over-all accuracy of his synthesis. Certainly the answer to his basic question, "What can imaginative reality contribute which empiric reality cannot also offer?" is fundamentally important in determining the place of the humanities in today's curriculum. If the arts have nothing to offer but what nineteenth-century exponents of the genteel tradition vaguely and condescendingly refer to as "refinement," they could scarcely hope to justify themselves in a curriculum centered on investigations essential to man's understanding and control of his environment.

I also agree, in large measure, with Professor Galinsky's conclusions; but they need, I feel, some modification. While he is more interested in establishing his general points than in making analyses of the specific works that illustrate these points, I feel that if the illustrations fail to serve adequately his purpose, the generalizations are fuzzier and less convincing than they might be. I would like, hence, to point out some examples that appear not to serve his purposes and to suggest some others that might better support his points.

I am troubled first by his acceptance--which may reflect a widespread European reaction--of Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead as social criticism. Most American critics, accepting the conclusions of Chester Eisinger in Fiction of the Forties, have come to regard the novel, despite the quaint flashbacks to scenes presumably typical of the diversity of American life, as an intellectual construct that pits against each other certain abstract forces that might be contending for control of our nation. To take the book at face value, however, is to conclude that generally Americans of the forties were more consciously aware of ideological divisions than they

were. Galinsky fails to realize, probably because of a failure of American criticism, that the best imaginative evocation of the impact of World War II on the American state of mind is John Horne Burns' The Gallery, which portrays the way in which exposure to the traumatically different culture of Italy awakens a naive but sensitive America to the shallowness and emotional sterility of his own culture. Mailer at least implies that Lt. Hearn might have something more sensitive to offer the nation than General Cummings; but both figures embody the nation as seen from the neutrality of Harvard Yard not from a close examination of reality, for which Mailer has shown a great distaste since his fine, very early short stories about the depression. Burns, on the other hand, knows that Minnesota and New Jersey are both physical states and states of mind.

Grouping Ship of Fools with Catcher in the Rye and Henderson, the Rain King is also misleading, especially when Professor Galinsky speaks of the "Atlantic Community" in connection with Miss Porter's masterpiece, for the implication is that she, like Salinger and Bellow, is dealing with the weltanschauung of American society during the Forties and Fifties. Unlike some critics, I think Ship of Fools great, but I regard it as the last great novel of the 1930's. The states of mind it dramatizes are those of the years between the wars, presented by an artist who has withheld her presentation until she could view the post-war society. What's depressing is that, despite this country's increasing commitments abroad, except for a very occasional story by John Updike or Arthur Miller, no American has done justice to the emotional perplexities occasioned by the attempt to create an Atlantic community. Our native artists apparently prefer to devote themselves to the endless limning of every fascinating ramification of suburban marital discord. Galinsky might, in fact, in his discussion, profitably comment on this country's increasing artistic provincialism at a time when its international political involvements are increasing.

Finally I must object that Ezra Pound is indeed monomaniacal and does not at all interpret, but unexceptionably condemns American culture. Pound can be usefully studied in any consideration of American literature as a vehicle of social criticism, but only if it is recognized that he is a deliberate expatriate who displays complete contempt for anything that goes against his prejudices. He is an example of what happens when the typical American bigot acquires such a vast superficial culture that he is no longer at home at the local country club. He is what every American might be if he had the intellectual energy to acquire voraciously miscellaneous erudition instead of slumping contentedly before the TV every evening.

These strictures on Ez bring me to my strongest reservation about Professor Galinsky's conclusions. He can find only T. S. Eliot exemplary among Americans of producers of the literature of spiritual guidance. Eliot, however, like Pound, is an expatriate, who, by the time he wrote The Cocktail Party was thoroughly immersed in the British way of life. His works

should be considered with those of Graham Greene, Charles Williams, the Buchmanites and so forth. Does this mean that the United States has produced no literature of spiritual guidance since Elbert Hubbard withdrew from the scene? Far from it! One of our major indigenous industries has been the production of saints. Before Professor Galinsky could hope to speak informatively on this subject he would have to read certain works that most serious critics of literature hold beneath their contempt. He would also have to abandon any concept of saints' lives emerging from within the traditional literary or ecclesiastical establishment.

The distinction of American religious life has always been the manufacture of cults for those alienated from the establishment. Our principal local spiritual productions--transcendentalism, Campbellism, Christian Science, Mormonism and such Calvinist offshoots as the Church of the Nazarene--have always appealed to those who could not embrace orthodoxy or who, for some reason, were too repellent for orthodoxy's embrace. American saints are, therefore, not likely to be introduced under an imprimatur.

One cannot say that twentieth-century America has produced no saint's lives until he copes with the works of Ayn Rand and their reception. I have no personal enthusiasm for The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged, and I do not recommend them on their aesthetic merits. I assert only that they have become, for Americans who otherwise read only stock market reports, the exemplars of inspirational literature. More recently, on the less materialistic side of the spectrum, we have had the enthusiasm for Joseph Heller's Catch-22. How could one hope to understand the recent Hippie movement without some contemplation of the saintly figure of Yossarian in his tree? I do not argue that Heller directly inspired the Hippies, but that his work presages (as significant literature does presage) the state of mind that they display in action.

To summarize, I have no quarrel with Professor Galinsky's method or the general acuity of his conclusions. I fear only that the picture drawn from his reading of American literature is too largely tainted by intellectualism, a quality which exercises little more influence in the life of this nation today than in the times of H. L. Mencken, one saint who left behind the materials for his own hagiography. You cannot draw comprehensive conclusions about a nation largely in the control of anti-intellectual forces from the writings of the kind of intellectuals who do still exercise great influence in other lands. I urge readers to weigh carefully Professor Galinsky's conclusion--which have the immeasurable virtue of coming to us from beyond the realm of our own prejudices--but to weigh them in the light of their own experience of the examples that he uses and of works whose native influence may not yet be recognized abroad.

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