

Perhaps it requires no rational explanation; certainly it has never found one.

George Lichteim

## The Monotony of Love

**The Chains of Love.** By ZOÉ OLDENBOURG. *Gollancz*. 18s.

**The Captive and the Free.** By JOYCE CARY. *Michael Joseph*. 18s.

**The Ruined Boys.** By ROY FULLER. *Deutsch*. 15s.

**Love in 4 Flats.** By RALPH RICKETTS. *Chapman and Hall*. 15s.

**Let Us Find Heroes.** By GREGORY SOLON. *Constable*. 16s.

ZOÉ OLDENBOURG's splendid and sprawling new novel, excellently and feelingly translated by Michael Bullock, *The Chains of Love*, is about a group of artists in Paris: and for a harder set of people to bring alive you would have to comb the five continents. It ought to be as easy to write a love story about one place, or one set of people, as another. But Paris, and Parisian left-wing intellectuals (subsection painters and sculptors particularly), have been overworked till the very names of streets and districts, the very smell of paint and clay, seem more fictional, more "romantic" in the wrong sense, than actual. Then, too, though it may sound paradoxical, it is harder, I think, to write a passionately intended and passionate sounding love story about people to whom sex (if not love) is something almost as commonplace as paint or clay, and as uninhibitedly regarded, than it is to write about one in which there is an element of conflict, not so much between the lovers as between one way of life and another, one relationship and another, where the physical consummation of a love affair is less casual, less a foregone conclusion. This is not to advocate eight and a half volumes of snails' pace seduction, such as you find in *Clarissa*, with consummation in the ninth, but simply to state the (pretty obvious) fact that the "glass of water" attitude to sex does not noticeably diminish the excitement. (In fact, Madame Oldenbourg's main character Stéphanie is anything but promiscuous: but the atmosphere of pervasive promiscuity—a basically unexciting one—exists, of course.) Here the love affairs, though mainly triangular or even quadrangular, are made so terrifyingly passionate that one almost really

believes in a man's suicide for love; and, so closely is one involved with them that one follows with a personal sense of fullness or loss the fluctuations of Elie's feeling for Stéphanie, Stéphanie's for Aron, Aron's for Stéphanie, Stéphanie's for Francis, and so on, since they are never mechanical or arbitrary. The characters live at an intense, but credible, level of feeling; and this intensity extends far beyond the scope of a particular love affair, to their attitude to their work, to their surroundings, to their families: particularly one feels it in the relationship between Stéphanie and her illegitimate child Lisbeth—their complete interdependence, the fun and physical playfulness, the mother's half-exhausted, adoring sense of responsibility, the sort of sense that makes it impossible for the mother of a small child ever to sleep really soundly, for the consciousness of the child's needs is there, even in sleep. It is in making us feel the humanity of her characters, her meaning of the word love and the way it conditions their behaviour, that Madame Oldenbourg excels: "Oh, the everlasting backslidings and fresh beginnings," she writes, "the monotony of love!"

Joyce Cary's last novel, posthumously "put together" (for he wrote his novels in a curious horizontal way across the years, spending as

long as ten years on one, with several others going at the same time), *The Captive and the Free*, is, like other books of his, a kind of circuitous commentary on something; an effort to interpret some large philosophical question in terms of action and human beings. The result, if humanly artificial and philosophically inconclusive, makes fascinating reading in a dry unprepossessing way. I find Mr. Cary's mind (and consequently his style) arid and unrewarding to consider; and this effort of his to say something about religion seems to me as wide of the mark as *The Horse's Mouth*, say, was wide of any artistic mark that mattered. It has, though (and this was Mr. Cary's main talent), assembled a good grotesque lot of characters with a Breughel-sque vigour and animality about them, though limited by the rather obtrusive "contemporariness" of their surroundings, which makes one feel Mr. Cary was determined to work in too much social comment without a really working knowledge of the social scene. This was a serious writer without, I feel, the spiritual equipment to carry his weight of seriousness: a man without intuition, without those moments of joy and passion that make writing, at times, the transparent vessel of feeling and of thought. He wrote with tough courage, without them: the result is glum and at the same time intellectually invigorating.

*The Ruined Boys* is what you might call an oblique book: it never stares straight at its subject, or says exactly what it means to say; gradually and cumulatively it builds up its picture, its effects, its morality, and, looking back on it, you see distanced the pattern of what happened, the meaning of all that was left unstated or misunderstood. It is a school story, an evocation of mild moral squalor rather than a story in the sense of plot or incident. A boy, his home life shattered by his mother's bolting, and reduced to a furnished bed-sitter with his father, goes to school over-anxious to please, to make a niche for himself. He grows, his values confused by the extraordinary adult confusion of values around him: the good and valuable being embodied only in some rather remote relationships and almost unsympathetic glimpses of adult life and behaviour. Over it all hangs the dreadfulness of life in a cramped, bad boarding-school—the huddle, the snobberies, the rudeness, set down in a rather formal way, tidily, exactly, with little comment and no obvious moral drawn: one at least of life's horrors we need never revisit.

*Love in 4 Flats* is a neat book—too neat—in a highly conventional framework. The time is 1935 and the four flats are occupied by four sets of people with overlapping relationships. While he keeps inside the flats Mr. Ricketts's nice

social sense and general agreeableness keep him going well enough; but immediately he goes outside them (as on a trip to Nazi Germany) you realise the limitations of his method and above all of his outlook, of mere agreeableness, even of his view of love. The characters are pleasantly differentiated, their appearances and particularly their clothes very carefully described, the effect being (even where vivid) rather glossy. You can see it in the names, even: the two young heroines are called Auriol and Cynara, their respective *cavalieri serventi* Valerian Crowe and Julian Tarrant. Altogether, a novel to skim without effort or distaste: mild and polite and almost entirely flavourless. The jacket is unusually attractive; the Book Society recommends.

*Let Us Find Heroes* is the opposite, a heavy-weight book, the story of an escape from East to West Europe through a divided capital city: intense and credible, but (as is the danger with books of the kind) too consciously "powerful," hammering hard but somehow rather inadequately. It is restrained with its horrors, which makes them the more horrifying. Its theme and even its method have grandeur, but not the final—rather nebulous—impression.

Isabel Quigly

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## FROM THE OTHER SHORE

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### Sad Sack, Uncensored

IT SEEMS centuries since Russia was described as a "mystery wrapped in enigma" and even longer since travellers were publishing reports on "a new civilisation" and "a future that works."

Books and despatches have become soberer, more modestly informative, although reporters on the spot have still over the years been handicapped by the operation of Russian censorship.

Mr. Macmillan's visit to Russia provided the first opportunity to send uncensored dispatches "from the other shore" by Western journalists. For the huge press corps accompanying the Prime Minister to Moscow censorship procedures were suspended by the Soviet authorities. How was this historic opportunity used by those who went on the tour? *The Observer* (March 8) noted:

The visit was an unusual journalistic expedition—a caravan of over a hundred, all under the same roof, at the same reception, in the same train, or sitting round the same press conference. It was scarcely surprising that, however much they wished to study Russia, they spent most of the time studying each other.

An index to the huge sheaf of clippings from Russia during this period would run the gamut from A to B. There was the inevitable reference to the tutti-frutti varieties (variously listed as 57, 62, 67) of ice-cream sold in the sub-zero temperature of the Moscow winter, and the inescapable statistics of the Russian girls (52-45-50 was held to be not representative). The political analysis was less concerned with Marxism than with millinery (that Macmillan hat), and few correspondents bit off anything tougher than the real proportions of Mr. K.'s toothache. The *News Chronicle* sceptic reported a baritone singing a ballad called *If I Loved You*. *The Times* was apparently more enthusiastic, less conditional, and had Mr. Litsitserin intoning *I Love You*. The *Daily Express* hit rhapsodic notes: "Some say that it [the hat] has been such a success that Britain must have it enshrined as a national monument." The toothache caused general dismay, but the *Daily Worker* (February 27) put up with it very bravely: "No slight or discourtesy on Mr. Khrushchev's part can be read into the decision not to accompany Mr. Macmillan to Kiev." (The dental session with the Iraqi delegation which Mr. Khrushchev had instead was not reported in the *Worker*.)

As to the political significance of the visit, the correspondent of the *Daily Express* (February 23) found an authoritative source in Moscow, Burgess, who disclosed "I have no inside information, but I know the Russians are always very pleased at the

prospects of talks with the West." Malcolm Muggeridge was less pleased, and his *Daily Mirror* despatches must have given the temporarily unemployed censors itchy palms: "I myself find it difficult to see how a non-aggression pact, as such, could have any more validity than the piece of paper Chamberlain waved in the air when he came back from seeing Hitler."

Randolph Churchill refused to stay in the Hotel Ukraina ("which may be good enough for Ukrainians, poor things, but not for an English journalist") but was able to report in the *Evening Standard*: "Well, there we are in the National Hotel—and Burgess, wearing his old Etonian tie, says to me . . ."

And when it was all over, there were still the enthusiasts and the sceptics.

The *Daily Sketch* issued its verdict with the headline: WELL DONE, MAC! BRITAIN IS PROUD OF YOU! Malcolm Muggeridge, whose recondite daily references to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky had to be explained in footnotes by the *Mirror* sub-editors, switched allusions:

Mr. Macmillan has to deal with Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Mikoyan, two characteristic products of a revolutionary régime . . . two tough, calculating, astute men who are by no means old-Etonians. They buffet him around, as in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, Ariel did Trinculo and his ribald companion.

One minute they slap him on his back and drink his health, the next they pull his chair from under him when he sits down. They alternatively bully and cajole him until the poor man scarcely knows where he is. It is a tragi-comedy such as even our bizarre time has rarely produced. . . .

Then Mr. Macmillan went on television, "for 20 minutes," according to the *Daily Express*, for "a confident, 27-minute appearance," according to the *Manchester Guardian*, before an audience (reported the *Guardian*) "unofficially estimated at between four and five millions," "ten million Russians" (reported the *Mail*), and Muggeridge, properly suspicious of the whole infernal medium, wrote of the broadcast: "What impression has it made on the Soviet people? I should say, in our sense of the word, very little. . . . How many saw and heard him on TV last night it is impossible to say. The telecast was confined to Moscow. It was not announced in the press beforehand nor reported in it afterwards. A viewer would have had to pick it up by chance. Nor was it put out on sound radio which would have carried it all over the Soviet Union. . . ."

It was all apparently a very shaking experience, but what shook?

"*Ten Days that Didn't Shake the World*" was the summing-up in the *New Statesman*. But, according to *The Observer* they were "*Ten Days that Shook the Press*," and their correspondent went on to reveal what perhaps we should have known earlier:

Several of the more august correspondents were telephoned by Russian girls in the hotel, who appeared to be quite genuine prostitutes, attempt-