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## BOOKS & WRITERS

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# Coriolanus of the Intellectuals

By C. P. Snow

THIS book of Barzun's\* has made a real impact over here. Which is excellent news: partly because he has as much to teach us as his own countrymen, and partly because he is a most interesting figure in his own right. The Americans have realised this latter fact, with a mixture of irritation, respect, and envy, for a considerable time past. The effect of Barzun's thinking in the United States is not to be disentangled from the effect of his personality. It is time we, too, learned something about him. He is Provost and Dean of Faculties of Columbia University; he is a historian by profession, and also an accomplished musicologist; his book on Brahms, so I am told by musicians, is very highly thought of; he is a close associate of Lionel Trilling's and they, together with Auden, preside over a highbrow book-club. All that sounds praiseworthy and respectable. It sounds the representative career of a man who, in this country, would be the master of a college, chairman of royal commissions, and a star performer on the TV Brains Trust. All of which Barzun, transferred to this side, would inevitably be. But it doesn't quite explain why he is the Coriolanus of U.S. intellectual life. Yet, at least to a visitor as one goes round literary parties and campuses, the opinion-forming fringe of the United States, so he appears to be.

He is brave, arrogant, clever, politely rude, intransigent. It isn't so much that he doesn't suffer fools gladly: it depends on the kind of fools. He has a conviction that a large percentage of "intellectuals" (literary or scientific) are people of contemptible native intelligence and even more contemptible intellectual discipline, and he enunciates this conviction with eloquence and lucidity. It doesn't make him specially popular. Just to rub it in, he is a man of unusual handsomeness; and unusual handsomeness is about the last quality one should choose, if one felt impelled to talk about the class of "Stupid Intellectual" and at the same time not look like Coriolanus. Not that Barzun

seems to mind. It just reinforces his feeling that Stupid Intellectuals would be better dead: and, with a resurgence of his parents' Gallic clarity, he goes on to knock some sense into the rest.

Actually he is a very valuable figure—not only for the U.S., but for all of us. He has courage, will, and intellectual ruthlessness. With a hundred like him, we could transform American and English education; and, as one can see from *The House of Intellect*, the transformation he wants is one that, with some qualifications, nearly all of us think necessary, though not sufficient.

He puts his case in a biting negative. He believes in Intellect, by which he means the educated and disciplined general intelligence. He believes that society loses one of its plinths if there is not a powerful section of the community who in this sense possess intellect, and who are in intellectual communication with each other. He sees the kind of intellectual society he most admires in upper-middle class Victorian England. He also sees its disappearance all over the world, most sharply and dramatically in the United States, mainly through the effect of three enemies of the general intellect, which he calls Art, Science, and Philanthropy. By *Art* he means the whole corpus of "creative" activity from which the reflective mind has been excluded. By *Science*, on which he is not so well informed, he means what I think I should call "scientism." By *Philanthropy*, he means something very much his own, the favourite target for his mischief, irony, and disrespect. He defines it as the doctrine of "free and equal opportunity, applied to things of the mind"; but he includes under it some of his pet Panglossisms, such as that learning is living, that schools exist primarily for social happiness, that the gift of intelligence is not distributed with extreme inequality. Finally, he uses it to satirise the great philanthropic foundations themselves, Ford and Rockefeller and so on, with their bureaucracy of benevolence.

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\* *The House of Intellect*. By JACQUES BARZUN. Secker & Warburg. 32s. 6d.

A GREAT deal of this is very near the bone. It is true, Barzun's natural attitudes are

not egalitarian. In this country, he would be close in feeling to the more enlightened members of the Conservative front bench. He gains a certain pleasure (while I, for example, feel the precise opposite) from the brutal fact that a largish proportion of mankind are not educable beyond a modest intellectual limit. But this touch of superbity doesn't disturb his judgment much. Unlike most men who hanker after a patrician society, he understands modern industrial society very well: he doesn't try to avoid the facts of life, his mind is too strong for that. So that, although his tone sometimes puts one's back up, his conclusions come out broadly true.

Just as an aside, shall we in this country pat ourselves on the back a bit? The situation of the intellect over the entire West is much as Barzun depicts it: but here there is perhaps a shade of difference, very small but perceptible, in our favour. Believers in the general intellect have not yet lost their nerve completely here. We still, for instance, have an administrative Civil Service selected for nothing else: I suspect that the top levels of our Civil Service meet Barzun's specification more exactly than do any other group on earth. And, though our education is so bizarrely narrow, it is, again at its highest levels, competitive enough for anyone, even for Barzun. Where else in the world can children of the well-to-do find themselves taking written examinations before the age of seven? Where else is there any equivalent to our university scholarship examination? These are not, in my view, good things: but at least they are not soppy. Since sopiness is the intellectual vice that Barzun despises most, he is inclined to give us distinctly high marks. I think he exaggerates our merits, but I should myself be sorry to see us lose our national passion for competitive examinations.

Still, we are all, intellectuals of the West, in what is in essence the same fix. That is why we have to listen to Barzun. Occasionally his detachment leaves him; even in savaging contemporary U.S. intellectual mumbo-jumbo, he accepts more of it than he realises. For example, though no one has said more contemptuous things about the gobbledygook of art, he doesn't take any positive advantage of the possibilities of art. He has been enough exposed to U.S. critical theory to have a surreptitious respect for the view that a work of literary art is a structure in words, detachable from the writer, a structure in which the reflective (U.S. discursive) intelligence has no place. That view leads to the absurdity that there are, I suppose, a hundred Ph.D. theses in the U.S. on *Finnegans Wake* for every one on *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (the classical example of the reflective intelligence in full operation). In fact,

just as Barzun's general intellect ought to be a social plinth, so should Intelligence-in-Art be.

Similarly, Barzun accepts, as most Americans would (but as we shouldn't), that on the whole men of intellect have no place in politics. One thinks of the first six of each of the British Parliamentary parties. Most of them are both clever and highly-educated: several (e.g., Gaiskell, Butler, Wilson) have been dons, others could have been if they had wanted. Is this a weakness? I should have thought it helps us keep Barzun's house of intellect propped up. It is very important that boss politicians and top Civil Servants and industrialists can talk to one another in the same intellectual language, and on the plane of reason. We do that more than most countries. Despite Barzun's assumption, I think we are better off because of it, not worse.

**B**UT those are minor quibbles. The nearer he comes to the point of action, which for him is teaching, the sharper and more authoritative he becomes. No one has ever taken a hatchet to U.S. scholastic nonsense with more wit and more intellectual effect. Remember, that nonsense is coming our way. Let us make Barzun required reading for all our secondary schools, while we've still got time. For what he says is simple: but there are many simple things, and this is one, which, because of the Gresham's Law of silliness, it takes a brave and gifted man to say. He writes:

Nobody wants to return to the school run like a bad prison, by terror and flogging. The question is not about kindness but about instruction: Is the school a place of teaching or of psychologising? Is it to prolong vicariously the parents' love of innocence and act out their dream of a good society, or is it to impart literacy? And are we to wait till *after* the Ph.D. to get it? When, finally, is the school to sort out types of mind and, assuming that all can read, write, and count, enable each kind to acquire the facts and principles relevant to their calling and their tastes?

To encompass such ends the school must know what it wants, not in the form of vague private or public virtues, but in the form of intellectual powers. It must stop blathering about sensitivity to the needs of others, and increasing responsibility for bringing about one world, and say instead: "I want a pupil who can read Burke's 'Speech on Conciliation' and solve problems in trigonometry. I want young men and women who can read French prose and write English. I want academic high school graduates who can remember what the Missouri Compromise had to do with the Civil War, and who will carry over into college their familiarity with logarithms and the techniques of the chemistry laboratory."

And having said these or similar things after due consideration, the school must enforce what it has said.

It is because Barzun can say that, and say it as starkly, that he is important to us. Take away the wit, take away the trick of overplaying the Coriolanus part: one is left with a man in dead earnest, who happens to know what the foundations of the intellectual life must be. There aren't many of them. We had better be quick and set about adopting him for ourselves.

## Two Faces of War

**The Face of War.** By MARTHA GELLHORN.  
*Hart-Davis.* 18s.

**Journey with a Pistol.** By NEIL McCALLUM.  
*Gollancz.* 16s.

MISS GELLHORN was for eight years a war correspondent for *Collier's*, and *The Face of War* is composed of a selection from her dispatches written during that period. She tells us that "The point of these articles is that they are true; they tell what I saw," and certainly she has a professionally sharp and observant eye for the scenes of horror, destruction, and suffering of which she was, in Spain, Finland, China, Italy, France, and Germany, a privileged ringside spectator. But the problem of truth is not quite so easily settled as Miss Gellhorn implies, and indeed her claim is not altogether an honest one. Like most war correspondents, she is not content only to tell us what she saw, perhaps because what one really sees in war is so unutterably confused and chaotic that it refuses to compose any kind of a picture; it would not, after all, encourage the old folks at home to be told that the only result of all their efforts and sacrifices and sufferings is the meaningless shambles which is all the naked eye sees of a battlefield.

So war correspondents nearly always tell us, not only what they see, but what they feel; it gives dignity to the proceedings. Even more, they tell us what *we* ought to feel; and Miss Gellhorn is no exception. What she *does* feel are the appropriate emotions of grief and pity for the sufferings which war inflicts; only somehow she writes as if even these feelings could be conscripted into the cause of democracy. Germans whose homes, families, possessions are destroyed by air attack suffer no less than Spaniards, but while suffering in Spain rightly provokes Miss Gellhorn to pity and indignation, in Germany it only provokes her to a sneer. It is no doubt true that the destruction by shell-fire of a little Dutch town like Nijmegen is a

tragedy and justifies Miss Gellhorn's moral that "it would be a good thing if the Germans were never allowed to make war again." It is equally true that the destruction of Hiroshima by atom bombing was no less of a tragedy, and justifies the moral that it would be well if Americans were similarly inhibited from war. It may be true that all democratic soldiers, sailors, and airmen are as gallant, modest, uncomplaining, and good-looking as those Miss Gellhorn had the good fortune to meet on her progress round the theatres of war, though I seem to have met some who did not strike me that way; but it is certainly not true, as anyone who fought them could assure Miss Gellhorn, that all German soldiers were the undersized, unhealthy, and contemptible little runts which is all Miss Gellhorn seems to have seen of them. It may be true that all American pilots and GI's were filled with that burning hatred of the German race which rose so spontaneously to their lips in conversation with Miss Gellhorn; but apart from the fact that few soldiers I ever knew talked that way, it is difficult to reconcile such feelings with the instinctive desire to make friends with the Germans which made American and British soldiers alike, and to their credit, the despair of anyone who tried to enforce the preposterous SHAEF order against fraternisation.

The trouble is that while one trusts Miss Gellhorn's eyes one does not trust her heart, and her heart interferes with her vision; and this distrust is increased by the deliberately flat, affectedly simple, mock-Hemingway prose, more a trick than a style, in which Miss Gellhorn describes what she saw and felt at the wars. The result is that none of these articles, re-published, as Miss Gellhorn tells us, with a praiseworthy intention of reminding us that war is horrible, is either memorable or moving.

Perhaps it may be true that, as Yeats said of Wilfred Owen, pity is not enough; or it may even be true that in war the only really honest form of pity is self-pity. It never seems to occur to Miss Gellhorn that in war *everybody* is degraded by what he (or she) does; soldiers would say that war correspondents are more degraded than most. It takes two sides, sometimes three, to make a war; but once they are joined they form a single pattern to which conflicting political and spiritual aims are curiously irrelevant. It is Mr. Neil McCallum's deep understanding of this aspect of war, which is its true face, which makes *Journey with a Pistol* such a remarkable book. For war is an intellectual problem more than an emotional one; it is also a moral problem; and it is with the intellectual and moral problems of war that *Journey with a Pistol* is concerned.

Mr. McCallum was an infantry officer in the