congratulatory side, however, Rumens's own originality is present, too. "A Future" is extremely effective. Elsewhere in the poem, we get

Though no-one's starving, and the poorest will
receive his little spring

by courtesy of the state and Montessori
—paints and clay, milk and imagination—

the landlord holds the clock's trump card....

"A Future" is from a part of her book called "New Addington", a housing-estate district.

In the ramshackle wood
the stars of anemones go on. How can they
manage such fission, such spillage

of spotless amps on such a ruin?

she writes in "Spring." The "granite tundra" of New Addington is loved and hated in an ambivalent perspective, and her compassion and criticism seldom roar into the sentimentality which such a subject opens easy doors to. "The price-tagged dreams fall to the darkening street", from the end of "A Future", is an indication of what's behind the door.

Other sections of the book are called "Birth", "Concern", "Love", "A Catholic Girlhood", "Politics", "Women's Liberation", a purposeful categorisation which I think betrays the innocence I mentioned earlier. It's as if she sees her poems as too urgent and too subject-covering to be poems, to be "literary." As some of the poems are so obviously poems, I don't think her ill-advised approach matters much. And, if I'm still able to recognise talent when I see it, Carol Rumens will survive her over-long, badly organised first book.

The Virtues of Laughter

Humour & Humorists—By GEOFFREY STRICKLAND

"NO MAN", wrote Carlyle, "who has once heartily and wholly laughed can be altogether irretrievably bad." Mr Boston has his doubts, and describes Stalin at a banquet for the heads of the NKVD laughing till he choked at a re-enactment of the execution of Zinoviev. Yet nearly all his other examples of laughter, even the manic-depressive laughter of a Samuel Johnson or a Byron, are admirable and reassuring and the point of view from which he writes is not very different from Carlyle's.[1]

This is an enjoyable book written in a manner close to that of animated conversation between friends. Mr Boston draws easily on a generous store of hilarious situations and remarks and only occasionally kills a joke by trying to explain it or in the excess of his admiration for its perpetrator. His favourite humorists are Rabelais, Sterne, Boswell, Johnson, Sydney Smith, W. C. Fields, Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Peter de Vries and Jacques Tati (he has himself impersonated Tati in one of Tati's own films), and much of his book consists of excellent quotations given at affectionate length, intriguing pieces of biography and interesting ideas thrown out in passing: for instance, that it was Johnson's fear of the night which made it difficult for him to "check his risibility" at the "blanket of the dark" in *Macbeth.* The main varieties of humour he discusses are the Rabelaisian, the manic-depressive and the anarchic quasi-divine humour typified by the Trickster figure of American-Indian mythology which he finds also in Rabelais's Panurge, the Marx Brothers, Monty Python and Christ.

There is hardly ever a dull moment in the book; yet it is disappointing, all the same, as a contribution to either the history or psychology of humour. Not that it is very clear how seriously Mr Boston sets out in the first place to be a historian. In his preface he refers to the view that humour today is not what it was and that one of its Golden Ages was the early 'sixties; though he then draws the rather lame conclusion that this Golden Age may well resemble others in that it belongs to a period anterior to any point one may choose to consider in time. Jokes and people's attitudes to jokes *have* changed, surely, whether for better or worse, since the 'sixties. This is obvious enough when one talks to students and to give one's own impression of the changes would be useful, if nothing else, for the historical record. When writing of a more distant past, he uses bolder, more categorical terms and concedes that laughter, both as a physiological and a cultural phenomenon, has known its ups and downs. After the appearance of Burton's *Anatomy*

[1] *An Anatomy of Laughter*. By RICHARD BOSTON. Collins, £3.25.

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of Melancholy, for example, the advocates and opponents of laughter "moved into separate camps and it became harder for one person to see the case both for and against." It is difficult to believe that things could ever have been quite as simple as that, even in the 17th century; and the further claim that Handel's setting of Milton's *Allegro* ("holding his si-hi-hi-hi-hides") marks the "return of laughter to polite society" sounds more like an exclamation of delight than a statement of fact.

As a psychologist too Mr Boston writes as an enthusiastic amateur, though given the nature of the subject, this is preferable to the would-be precision of many would-be professional students of laughter. He writes with respect and at the same time refreshing scepticism of the various well-known attempts to account for laughter in *all* its forms: those of Hobbes, Bergson and Freud: also Konrad Lorenz's view that laughter corresponds to a strong bond of fellow-feeling among those who laugh and a common aggressiveness towards outsiders. However, his scepticism deserts him in his chapter on the Trickster, whom he sees as the archetypal clown, essentially anarchic and priapic. "Trickster's independent penis may have its counterpart in the objects carried by other tricksters, clowns and fools. . . . Charlie Chaplin's tramp always carries a walking stick, as did W. C. Fields, and as does the Russian clown Popov. Jacques Tati's Monsieur Hulot always has a loosely rolled umbrella, Groucho Marx has an enormous cigar, and Harpo an elongated hooter. . . ." Harpo, no doubt, is pure "unrestrained libido." No woman is safe from him. But Chaplin, even at his most romantic, or W. C. Fields even at his most gallant? It is not even true that M. Hulot always carries a rolled umbrella. In *Les vacances de M. Hulot*, it would have got in the way. He is like Trickster to the extent that he is an anarchic figure, though the fact that this is the last thing he wishes to be is, surely, part of the joy of the film. To claim that he is in any way sexually aggressive as well is to perform the melancholy feat of forgetting his courteous stance and sublime cavortings across the screen.

IT IS AS A MORALIST, however, that Mr Boston is most unsatisfactory and not least of all because of his earnestness. "Whatever form he takes [Trickster] as long as he survives in some shape . . . there is hope for humanity . . ." he writes. "We need laughter just as we need love." And quoting with approval W. H. Auden on Falstaff: "'. . . this untiring devotion to making others laugh becomes a comic image for a love which is absolutely self-giving'." Earnest too describes

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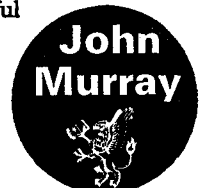

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his thoughts on humour at which one can laugh "unashamedly", jokes which depend for their effect on going just a bit too far, and "comic" effects such as the enumeration of the parts of the cranium severed by the monk in *Gargantua* when he smites one of his guards: "the long medical description . . . by going into quite unnecessary detail dehumanises the dead man (thus freeing our sympathies so we can laugh at him). . . ." The Pantagruelism of Rabelais, "our contemporary", is "noble, decent, brave, humane and human. . . ."

If we laugh at Rabelais, it is surely not because of these latter qualities. Nor would it be if we could be certain that Rabelais possessed them. The Gargantua who declares that all men who marry without parental consent should lose their heads, a wish that was to be fulfilled by actual edicts to that effect (see M. A. Screech's *Rabelaisian Marriage*, which Mr Boston dismisses as humourless) is not "our contemporary." The mediaeval ecclesiastical law he despised and the "molecatchers" (or Friar Laurences) are much closer in this respect to the modern view. So too, I find, as far as the love of men and women is concerned, are Chaucer and Boccaccio. Yet it remains true, presumably, that we can only laugh at a situation which we condone, even if guiltily and in spite of ourselves or because of its seeming unreality. And we usually judge, approvingly or disapprovingly, the laughter of others according to what they seem to enjoy: whether, for instance, they are laughing at the victim of an accident in reality or in a funny film. This is why the perennial discussion in which Mr Boston engages, however judiciously, for and against laughter, as distinct from its occasions, seems to me unreal and his attempts to elevate laughter itself into a moral virtue (Falstaff into a saint and Christ into a clown) unlikely by the nature of things to succeed. Our laughter, if it is genuine, is an expression of what we are genuinely capable of feeling, irrespective of whether we laugh. It is often also (and Lorenz may be right in thinking that it is always) convivial: there is a degree of understanding and sympathy even between enemies who find they can share a joke. It would be difficult to maintain seriously that either the genuineness or the conviviality were always admirable or preferable to their opposites. They often are, it is true, but by Mr Boston's standards and those of most of his readers, there might have been a redeeming streak of humanity in Stalin had he been only pretending to laugh at the re-enactment of Zinoviev's execution.

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EAST & WEST

A Bolshevik Reconsidered

The Case of Comrade Bukharin

By Sidney Hook

THE TIDES OF interest in the past often depend on events in the present. The conjunction of the diplomacy of *détente* and the recent fruits of scholarship has brought to the fore issues that were the obsessive concern of Communist political factions a half-century ago. The publication of three massive biographies of Stalin within the space of a year and the first comprehensive political biography of Bukharin together with the world clamour over the revelations of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* has made the nature, development, and justification of the Russian October Revolution a topical question once more. Almost all considered reviews of these works raise the problem of the relation between the thought of Lenin and Stalin, and of both to the thought of Karl Marx.

Were the Bolsheviks the true heirs of Marx? Was the success of their seizure of power an historical fluke or a rational move under the circumstances? Was the fateful development of the Soviet Union implicit in a situation resulting from the failure of revolutionary movements in Western Europe to materialise, whose expected outbreak was among the premises of the October action? Or was the transformation of a technologically backward, agricultural country into one of the most highly industrialised the consequence not of the historic or economic logic of the situation but chiefly of the genius—evil or not—of a great leader? Must we acknowledge the presence not merely of one event-making personality in history, Lenin, whose heroic and indispensable role in forging and preserving the October Revolution even a doctrinaire Marxist like Trotsky was ultimately compelled to admit, but of two—Stalin as well? However we assess Stalin's personal capacities—whether as a "grey blur" (Sukhanov) that insidiously spread until it absorbed the whole political landscape or as a "marvellous Georgian" but intolerably "rude" party secretary (Lenin), or as "a mediocrity" (Trotsky) fashioned by the bureaucratic machine to serve its interests in the ebb-tide of the revolutionary spirit, or "... a genius, no less so, perhaps, than a Mozart or Einstein ... in his own highly specialised and destructive field ..." (Hingley)—was Stalin Lenin's genuine political disciple, as he always professed, or his nemesis who destroyed his legacy and transformed Lenin's vision into a nightmare?

And regardless of the personal differences between them, the cultural and intellectual disparities, was the terror that Stalin unleashed his own creative improvement on Lenin, or was he applying to a new situation the lessons he learned from his master?

Any one of the three biographies of Stalin referred to (by Robert Tucker, Adam Ulam, and Ronald Hingley) can serve as a point of departure in considering these questions. But the biography of Stalin's most formidable victim (after Trotsky), Nicolai Ivanovitch Bukharin by Professor Stephen F. Cohen[1] seems to me to provide the freshest challenge to those who wish to reconsider the tangled issues. And this for several reasons. First, for those who are not professional students of Soviet and Communist affairs it contains more new information about Bukharin, his rise and fall, than is available in the other studies in the context of a fascinating eminently readable account of the Russian Revolution. Second, it is written with a sympathy and compassion for Bukharin as a human being that transcends the author's political differences with him. The human and personal costs of revolutionary statecraft are never glossed over. Third, and most important, it takes a clear stand on all the basic questions posed above.

According to Cohen it is Bukharin, and not Stalin, who is the true interpreter of Lenin's legacy. Of special significance is the nature of that legacy. It is not to be found in the corpus of Lenin's prolific writings nor in the great deeds of his life work but in the last few articles he penned or dictated as he lay ill and dying. In them and in conversations with Bukharin (who was very close to him after he was stricken) Lenin disclosed his final views of the way to the ultimate socialist goal. Appalled by the growing careerism and bureaucratisation of Soviet society, he reversed the grand strategy that had brought the Communist Party, despite its triumphs, to a despairing

[1] *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution, 1888–1938.* By STEPHEN F. COHEN. Alfred A. Knopf (New York), $15; Wildwood House (London), £4·40.

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