



Nuclear Alert

'But campaigners don't have time to read books' I thought, even as I agreed to carry out a Christmas review of nuclear books for *Marxism Today*. Trying vainly to remember the last book I had actually read from cover to cover, I noted down the key criteria a busy campaigner uses to assess good books: must have a good index and be well referenced; must be easy to flick through in order to pick out key passages and quotes; must have big print in order to be read easily on trains; must be short; must have thick enough paper to allow the use of highlighting pens without blurring the other

Woman Can Fly

Unread theoretical books bought in 1986 accuse me from my shelves. And in my Scottish, feminist socialist guilt (a heavy combination!), I buy more, and add to the guilt.

It's been a year with more than its share of work, so reading has been an escape and a relaxation. It has also been a year with more than its share of 'existential' moments, involving grief and facing the necessity of choice.

For sheer nerve-tingling pleasure, I re-read *Angela Carter's* inventively irreverent, **Nights at the Circus**, (*Picador*, £3.50). Fevvers, her heroine, takes us on a journey between the 19th and 20th centuries, away from the world of male certainties, into fantastic other (im)possible worlds, full of danger and joy. Its style, like the story, twists and turns

side of the paper. Having laid down this exhaustive literary obstacle course, which the Booker Prize committee would do well to take note of, my final list of books would happily fit inside an *MT* carrier bag.

No review would be complete without a book on Chernobyl. Despite rumours of a whole series of books from the major publishing houses, only one so far has appeared. **The Worst Accident in the World** (*Observer/Pan Books* £2.99), was brought out so quickly after the accident that publishers' normal six to 12-month schedules appear faintly ridiculous. The book is rather disjointed, and factually inaccurate in several places, but it captures the tension and confusion of those first two weeks. Before history is rewritten and Chernobyl becomes, like Three Mile Island, an 'incident' rather than an 'accident' according to the industry, buy it.

My favourite book is also one of the shortest. **Going Critical - An Unofficial History of British Nuclear Power** by *Walt Patterson*, (*Paladin* £2.95), is

and leaps until we are breathless and cheering out loud. A woman can fly.

Camped under an unlikely spreading fig tree in Corsica, I mused on *Sylvia Plath's* likening of figs to choices in **The Bell Jar**. 'I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet'.

But mostly, under the fig tree, I talked to my friends Mario and Orietta. Orietta is the sole representative of Democrazia Proletaria on the Florence district council; pressure enough, without also being a woman in Italian politics. While she lived on a diet of 'gialli' - translations of conventional English crime thrillers - I escaped into **She Came Too Late**, (*Women's Press* £3.95 pbk), *Mary Wing's* 'lavender' pastiche of the 'gialli'. Its central theme - the women's move-

a superb black comedy of the last 35 years of nuclear power in Britain. From the weapons' programme in the 1950s, to the Sizewell Inquiry, and with full accounts of our obsession with plutonium and reprocessing, *Walt Patterson* uses official documents and records to make his point.

Red Alert by *Judith Cook*. (*New English Library* £8.95), is a comprehensive if rather heavy-going account of the many dangers of nuclear power. It covers a huge area but is marred a little by reliance upon secondary rather than primary sources of information. **Atomic Crossroads - before and after Sizewell** by *John Valentine* (*Merlin Books* £5.95), is a book concerned with many things apart from just Sizewell. Its description of the sorry debacle of Dungeness B, (some 16 years late for commissioning - yet with official pronouncements every year still optimistically suggesting next year as a start-up date), is reason enough to buy it.

Everyone dealing with the media and MP's needs good reference books. **World Re-**

sources 1986 (*World Resources Institute*, £12.00), and the **Gaia Atlas of Planet Management** (*Pan Books*, £9.95), are my favourites.

The Worldwatch Institute continue to produce three to four excellent reports on the state of the world every year. **Decommissioning: Nuclear Power's Missing Link** by *Cynthia Pollock* (*Worldwatch Paper* 69, £2.50), covers a less well-known aspect of nuclear power. The costs (up to £300m per reactor) and problems of taking old nuclear reactors apart are well documented and referenced.

Nuclear power is, of course, not just about technology, but about politics too. **How Nuclear Decisions Are Made** edited by *Sheila McLean*. (*Macmillan* £6.95), is a summary of the Oxford Research Group's work on the people who make such decisions, in this case decisions concerning nuclear weapons. It is a vital book if you want to understand why Trident and the PWR were chosen as technological options. Somewhat depressing, but an essential read. ●

Stuart Boyle

ment under threat from the new Right - is skilfully and subversively portrayed. The plot is neither here nor there - my copy had 40 pages missing and I didn't miss a thing.

Coming to terms with one's own past is the theme of **Other Women** (*Penguin* £2.95 pbk) by *Lisa Alther*. I loved **Kinflicks** (*Penguin* £3.95 pbk) in 1976 and I half expected to be disappointed in her latest novel. I wasn't.

But the most helpful book I read in 1986 was **A Reckoning** (*Women's Press* £3.95 pbk), *May Sarton's* story of a woman's approaching death, at 60, from cancer. It offers some startling insights. *Laura* says, 'Dying is the most interesting thing I've ever done... when there are limits, it's easier to handle some things... I live in the present... it's quite a relief.' The last few pages describing her death in the presence of *Ella*, the friend of her youth and one of the most real connections of her life,

had me sobbing at 80mph on a sleepless sleeper somewhere between London and Glasgow. When someone close, and close in years, dies, it's a reminder that this life is not a rehearsal for the real thing.

I have had to unlearn the results of a Scottish education this past year. I've discovered the pleasure of poetry. *Sylvia Plath's Selected Poems* (*Faber* £2.95 pbk) have helped, as have *Douglas Dunn's Elegies* (*Faber* £3.95 pbk) which I read in one sitting. And there's the promise of much future pleasure in the poetry of *Emily Dickinson*. *Orietta*, whose English is worse than my Italian, recommended her. In any language, her absolute accuracy, precise connections and cool irony, fair take the breath away; they can surely change the way you see the world: 'Because I could not stop for death he kindly stopped for me'. ●

Jean Barr

NEW BOOKS FROM THE USSR

AESTHETICS / Yuri Borev 7147 22790 £8.95 Hardback 330pp.
A well-illustrated textbook on aesthetics

MAYAKOVSKY – SHORTER POEMS / Vladimir Mayakovsky 7147 21859 Hardback
£5.95 280pp.

MAYAKOVSKY – LONGER POEMS / Vladimir Mayakovsky 7147 22855 Hardback £5.95
300pp.

SECRETS FROM WHITEHALL AND DOWNING STREET / Fyodor Volkov 7147 2260X
Hardback £5.95 335pp.

This book deals with crucial aspects of Anglo-Soviet relationships between 1917 and 1939, drawing on the latest documents

PRINCIPLES OF THE THEORY OF THE HISTORICAL PROCESS IN PHILOSOPHY / Oizerman
& Bogomolov 7147 22774 Hardback £5.95 348pp.

Two prominent Soviet philosophers set out their main theses of a theory of the development of philosophy

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION / 7147 21506 Paperback £2.50 160pp.

A cartoon history of the Russian Revolution, 1917 in pictures.

A MUSICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE SOVIET UNION / Sonya Richmond 7147 22928
Hardback £4.95 184pp.

A survey of the musical scene in the Soviet Union.

DIFFICULT MISSION / Admiral N. Kharlamov 7147 23096 Hardback £4.95 229pp.

The author was the head of the Soviet Military Mission in London during World War II. The book recounts the Mission's work.

ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS / Alexander Yakovlev 7147 21611 Hardback £4.95
399pp.

From Truman to Reagan, the doctrines and realities of the Nuclear Age. An in-depth analysis of US military strategy as seen by a leading Soviet commentator.

SELECTED POETRY / Sergei Esenin 7147 2338X Hardback £4.95 384pp.

A major selection from an outstanding poet of the Russian Revolution

DO THE RUSSIANS WANT WAR? / A collection of essays 7147 21441 Paperback £2.95
323pp.

A wide-ranging collection. Pieces by Aitmatov, Sholokov, Akhmatova, Nosov, Tvardovsky et al.

HISTORY OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY / A. S. Bogomolov 7147 21441 Hardback £5.95
350pp.

An extensive history of Greek and Roman philosophy, guided by Marxist principles

If you have difficulty in obtaining these books from your local bookshop, please order direct to Central Books. Add

50p postage per book, orders for two or more books will be sent post-free. Access or Visa welcome.

illustration, from cover of V. I. Lenin, by Mayakovsky

CENTRAL
BOOKS

14 THE LEATHERMARKET · LONDON SE1 3ER · TEL 01-407 5447