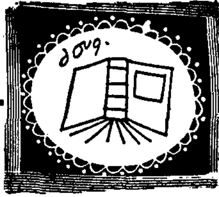

LITERARY HORIZONS

Art and Reality

By Granville Hicks

THE late Joyce Cary possessed in an unusual degree the gift of losing himself in his characters, of simply vanishing in and behind them, so that Mister Johnson and Gully Jimson and Chester Nimmo and many others seem to exist in complete independence of their creator. When one tries to define the dominant Cary qualities, this self-effacement is what comes first to mind. But there is also his vitality, which finds expression in the relish with which his major characters welcome whatever experiences come to them. And then there is the craftsmanship that keeps the stories spinning, that holds the storytelling process under control without destroying the illusion of spontaneity.

What disappoints me in **"Art and Reality"** (Harper, $3), which is based on lectures Cary prepared for delivery at Cambridge in 1956, is that he says so little about his own practice. Indeed, he does not seem to be altogether happy with his subject. He works his way into large generalizations and battles his way out again. His comments on particular novels are always illuminating, but in the more theoretical passages he is ill at ease.

Cary begins with a discussion of the nature and importance of intuition and of the conflict between intuitions and concepts, and this leads him into the problem of the education of the artist. After talking about symbols and the fragility of symbolic systems, he comes to his main problem. The serious artist, he holds, is concerned solely with what he believes to be reality, and the serious novelist is concerned with human reality, which he defines as "the moral real" and "the moral constant." "All novels," he writes, "are concerned from first to last with morality." Reading he sees as a creative act, in the course of which the reader is helped by what he reads to order his own world.

So much for the main argument, which, as Cary develops it, has its loose ends. But a lot of interesting ideas are thrown off. For instance, Cary observes that symbolic systems are "highly fragile." "Fashions in art, in literature," he says, "are little more enduring than those of dress." He goes on: "The change of fashion, of style in literature is rarely so frequent and complete as that of the plastic arts. But this, I suspect, is due simply to art schools which teach a new method to thousands as soon as it becomes accepted." He then makes this ominous suggestion: "It will be interesting to see if the writing schools in the United States produce there a more rapid decay in symbolic system, a more rapid turnover in literary fashion."

Certainly fashions in literature do change, but at the same time supposedly outworn styles have a way of lingering on. Naturalism, for example, has been regarded for some decades as old hat, and yet we still have our James Joneses and our Willard Motleys. Motley's latest novel **"Let No Man Write My Epitaph"** (Random House, $4.95) is naturalistic not only in its massing of factual material; it is based on a deterministic concept of human behavior and thus conforms in a general way to the theories of naturalism set forth by Zola.

"Let No Man Write My Epitaph" is a sequel to Mr. Motley's first novel, "Knock on Any Door," which told the story of Nick Romano, an altar boy at twelve and a condemned murderer at twenty-one. The principal characters of the new novel are one of Nick's girls, Nellie Watkins, and the child she bore after his father's electrocution and named Nick. Also prominent in one long episode is the first Nick's younger brother, Louie. On all their lives the influence of Nick's life and death is strong, and Motley quotes long passages from the earlier novel.

The principal theme of "Let No Man Write My Epitaph" is drug addiction. Nellie is led into the habit by one of her lovers, a dealer in dope known as The Wolf, and we follow her through all the stages of enslavement. At one point she goes away for a cure, but she lapses again, and we are spared no detail of her degradation. And then young Nick, at a low point in his young manhood, is introduced to marijuana and goes on to heroin, and we follow with him the process we have followed with his mother, though in the end he is saved.

"Knock on Any Door," in spite of a good deal of heavy-handed documentation, moved ahead with a powerful directness that held the reader. "Let No Man Write My Epitaph," on the other hand, is full of distractions. One of the themes, strongly emphasized in the first part of the book, is the struggle of a group of amiable derelicts to save young Nick from his father's fate and to protect him from the consequences of his mother's vice. The theme lends itself to sentimental treatment, and Motley doesn't always resist the temptation. One of the derelicts, an alcoholic ex-judge, calls Nick "the symbol of the innocence of youth in a horrible, horrible environment," and that note is repeatedly sounded.

Then there is the largely irrelevant story of Louie Romano. It is true that Louie, who has begun to follow in his brother's footsteps, is saved by discovering who his brother was and how he died, but mostly we are told about Louie's romantic love for a Negro girl, a romance doomed by race prejudice.

But after his various excursions Motley always comes back to the problem of drug addiction. Not only does he describe in detail the cases of Nellie and young Nick; he introduces Grant Holloway, the philosophical journalist who figured as the older Nick's friend in "Knock on Any Door," to provide plenty of documentation. Grant, who is conveniently writing a series of articles on drugs, furnishes statistics, conducts interviews, and serves to tell the reader whatever Motley wants him to know.

Grant also serves as Motley's spokesman in a more general way. "Every human being is dignified," he reflects. "Or should be. Has something of quality. . . . If you knew what brought them here. And they're not completely bad. Sick, yes. Warped, yes. . . . It's easy to judge. It's harder to dig down into the solid rock of cause."

That, I suppose, represents Motley's original intuition, to use Joyce Cary's word, the feeling about life with which he begins. His philosophy, of course, is not original, but it is not contemptible, and something of the sort has served as a foundation for fiction of distinction. The difficulty is that he has only occasionally been able to embody his intuition in dramatic form and has therefore had to rely on documentation. Instead of disappearing out of sight behind his characters, as Cary does, Willard Motley is conspicuously present, and he gets in the reader's way.

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PERSONAL HISTORY

Prospector of the Polar Skies

***"Come North With Me," by Bernt Balchen** (Dutton. 311 pp. $5), is a polar flier's autobiographical account of his thirty years in aviation, during which time he pioneered in perilous flights to the North and South Poles. It is reviewed by Captain Finn Ronne, USNR, a member of Byrd's second Antarctic expedition, who recently was commander of Ellsworth Station for the International Geophysical Year.*

By Finn Ronne

BERNT BALCHEN'S lively autobiography "Come North With Me" relates his adventurous life as a star-blessed, crackerjack polar flier. Countless brushes with death become mere routine as he searches compellingly for an answer to the eternal question: "What driving force causes a man to leave comfort and security and risk hunger and privation and even death in search of something he cannot keep even when he finds it?"

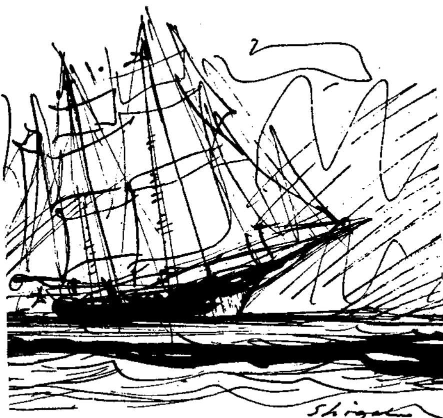
His personal account, written in the present tense, vividly portrays three decades of active participation in the making of aviation history. The Norwegian-trained pilot, who in 1926 cast his lot to join the American way of life, was closely connected with many of the hazardous, record-breaking events in flying following World War I. When the first flights were made over the North and South Poles and across the Atlantic Ocean, Balchen played an active role. He was one of the "greats" in a pioneer era. For those old enough to remember the headlines of the fabulous golden Twenties, "Come North With Me" will arouse memories. While for those younger, it will be equally thrilling to live these historic accomplishments through this moving first-hand account.

With modesty and frankness, he explains why and how Amundsen helped his rival, Byrd, take off first from Spitsbergen. "We are not competitors, we are collaborators in a joint assault on the polar regions . . . ," Amundsen pointed out. As a result of Bernt Balchen's valuable assistance, Byrd brought him to the U.S. after the North Pole flight. Before long Balchen was bush piloting in the Canadian Arctic, and Byrd's trans-Atlantic flight followed. After cruising over Paris in heavy overcast, Balchen made the dramatic belly landing at Ver-Sur-Mer Inlet, saving not only the lives of the three Americans but also the plane, which now graces the Ford Museum at Dearborn, Michigan.

Then came the equally challenging South Pole achievement. Balchen describes how he regained his position as Chief Pilot. During a depot laying flight, the large plane ran out of fuel and made an emergency landing about 100 miles south of Little America. After ferrying the fuel, Balchen returned to the base expecting the other plane to follow. When it did not, he flew back to the downed plane and found they were unable to get the motors started. In less than an hour, Balchen had the three engines humming and they returned to the base. A few hours later Byrd informed Balchen he would pilot the South Polar flight.

Balchen's writing style is light; words flow easily, and he is often amusing. The reader will sympathize with the early heartbreaks and lack of recognition with which this Norwegian immigrant is confronted. When all the other pilots and radio operators are awarded the Navy's Distinguished Flying Cross, Bernt Balchen instead receives a subpoena of deportation for breaking his residence by going to the South Pole. Fiorello La Guardia saves the day by arranging for a special bill which is passed by Congress granting Balchen rights to full citizenship.

Balchen's characterizations reveal the personalities of the flyers and explorers he has known throughout his long and turbulent career: Amundsen, the heavily lined, stone-faced, deep thinking "last Viking" to whom he remains intensely loyal; Ellsworth, the unobtrusive; Floyd Bennett, competent and genial; the wildly impetuous "Uncle" Tony Fokker; and Byrd who is "very well known, but nobody knows him very well." Balchen's association with Byrd lasted for thirty years, but philosophically they were poles apart. With a controlled restraint Balchen hints why he and Byrd were never very *simpático*.



Captain Bernt Balchen, USAF, is in no one's shadow when he sets up Bluie West 8 in the Arctic at the outset of World War II. His exploits rescuing stranded war-time pilots on the Greenland icecap and strafing a secret German radio station there are animated chapters in the saga of the north country.

Throughout the volume, the reader is transported rapidly from one stirring experience to another. There are no boring details. During the "Ve Do It" operations, bringing stranded allied soldiers from Sweden to England and dropping supplies to the underground fighters in occupied Norway, there are many hairbreadth escapes. His secret visit to the center of Oslo and his ride in an elevator with a Luftwaffe General has enough suspense to make the most unimaginative individual shiver. On this visit he set up a new code of communication with the Norwegian underground.

After more than thirty years of flying a cobweb around the earth, from the North Pole to the South Pole and from Singapore to Moscow, Colonel Balchen states: "Today the only true map is the globe, and the airplane has turned it on its side. In Roman times the Mediterranean Sea was considered the center of the world; but our new Mediterranean is the Arctic Ocean, and the North Pole is the crossroads of tomorrow."

Bernt Balchen has contributed a great deal to both his native Norway and his adopted United States. His most recent contribution to the free world is contained in his plea to eliminate the present holes in our far north radar fence warning system. "I believe our only security is another DEW line at least a thousand miles farther north. Faced with the reality of supersonic manned aircraft and guided missiles, the Congress must provide funds to establish an advance Arctic warning system on the extreme perimeter of the continent, equipped with even more sensitive radar, searching the skies as far forward as the Pole itself."

In "Come North With Me" he finds his answer to the question of "What makes an explorer?" and certainly Bernt Balchen is one.

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