

Brian O'Leary—"unfortunate timing."

presence there will represent only one needed step toward due respect for science. The rate at which *Apollo* landings are made is now too fast to allow scientists on the ground to make adequate studies of lunar rocks that are brought to earth. Acquisition of knowledge would be better served by voyages separated in time by at least a calendar year.

I feel closest intellectual kinship with O'Leary when he departs from his argument in favor of landing scientists on the moon and opens the question of how important manned voyages really are at this stage of extraterrestrial exploration. He speaks for many scientists of my acquaintance when he says we should ask not what we can do with a man but how we can best perform a mission, manned or unmanned. The robot *Mariners 6* and *7* provided remarkable photographs and valuable scientific information about Mars, yet each cost less than 15 per cent of the price of an *Apollo* trip to the moon.

I applaud O'Leary's courage in speaking up for collaboration with the Soviet Union in space exploration. At the time he wrote his book, mainland China was not a serious contender in space. But now that a Chinese satellite is circling the earth, it is not too early to begin thinking about allowing the land of Mao its share of risks and expenses.

John Lear is science editor of Saturday Review.

Coming May 23

WELFARE

Time for Reform

A Special Issue

**IN MY OWN GOOD TIME:
An Autobiography That Defies Gravity**

by Anthony Gibbs

Gambit, 321 pp., \$6.95

EXILES

by Michael J. Arlen

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 226 pp., \$6.95

Reviewed by Glendy Culligan

■ The snows of yesteryear fall gently over the landscape of these memoirs by sons of once-famous British novelists. Both living authors grew up in the shadow of celebrity. Like fraternal twins who bear a strong resemblance only at first glance, however, Anthony Gibbs and Michael J. Arlen reveal striking individual differences in the very act of exploring a similar past.

The era in which their fathers flourished and won fame was the Golden Twenties. Although durable Sir Philip Gibbs began writing in 1912 and was still at it in 1956, his greatest success was probably *The Middle of the Road*, an international best-seller in 1924. A year later Michael Arlen, father of Michael J., produced the most famous of his fourteen titles, and possibly the decade's most notorious heroine. That debauched debutante Iris March startled what was left of the Edwardians with her reckless behavior in *The Green Hat*, anticipating Hemingway's new breed of disappointed hedonists.

Iris crashed her Hispano-Suiza into a tree four years before her privileged world smashed with the stock market, ending an era and initiating a legend. While later novelists and literary historians have embroidered that myth, it is ironic that these two authentic voices of the period—Michael Arlen and Philip Gibbs—are out of print and unknown to the present generation.

In their respective primes, as the sons now testify, both fathers might well have expected more lasting niches. During the London season, when "vast" Daimlers whirled past Hyde Park bearing the well-born, the well-educated, and the talented to each other's houses for tea, both men frequented the same drawing rooms in Chelsea and Mayfair. Both knew H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and other reigning intellectuals. When the season changed, both followed the fashionable route to the Riviera. Nostalgic images of Cannes and Antibes flicker through these two volumes, reviving the old Carlton bar, terraces where peacocks and authors strutted, parties in the Baroness Orczy's villa, at which "Willie" Maugham and Noël Coward were fixtures.

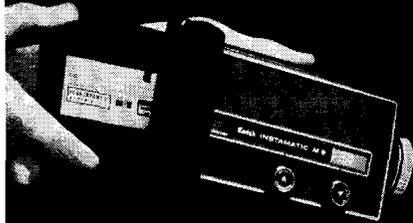
But when that world of almost interchangeable artifacts disappeared and the homogenizing effect of celebrity wore off, the paths of these fathers diverged sharply, carrying the sons forward into entirely different later histories. Descended from British yeomen on one side and solid upper-middle-class English on the other, Gibbs Senior was versatile, steady, unflappable, able to turn a phrase in any weather. Indeed he might be called a prototypical Briton, exemplifying that sturdy blend of regular work habits and venturesome living habits that built the Empire. In 1920, even before his long career as popular novelist, he had earned a knighthood for distinguished journalism, having covered World War I in the field from start to finish. On a first-name basis with statesmen as well as authors, he remained an influential commentator through the second world collision, although prevented by failing eyesight from combat duty in Europe. Topping these public virtues, Sir Philip possessed in private "the gift of youth," and eschewed the heavy father role for that of companion. And yet, curiously, he emerges from these bland pages an indistinct figure, portrayed not only minus warts, but with scarcely any face at all.

By contrast, Arlen Senior was himself the stuff of which modern novels are made. The trouble was, he couldn't write them. Insecure, alienated (all the catchwords apply), he seemed to lack what academic critics call "a usable past."

In view of the facts, that limitation seems strange. Born Dikran Kouyoumdjian in Bulgaria, Arlen, who was of Armenian ancestry, had early emigrated with his merchant family to the Liverpool area and soon outstripped them all in assimilation. He mastered English, started and abandoned medical school, finally gravitated to journalism in London, where Dikran-Michael enjoyed instant success in "the best places." At its peak he married a minor Greek-American heiress, whose inheritance later supported the look of success when the reality faded.

Long before his voluntary exile to the United States during World War II, Arlen had ceased to create, his fantasy evidently checked by the sober new scenery of Depression. He had prided himself on telling stories, his son remembers. Now, epiphanies were in demand. Unlike Fitzgerald, Michael Arlen lacked the intellectual power to convert his failure into a symbol for his generation. "The people who had liked him for being so charming and amusing and elegant disliked him for trying to be serious," his son explains. "The people who had disliked him for not having been serious enough now

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disliked him even more for trying to be serious and for not being better at it." Thus, the reputation that had soared like a kite in a spring wind drifted inexorably down.

Living on memories, and on his skill at recounting them orally, the debonair outer man continued to play celebrity to an ever-diminishing audience of café socialites in New York. He lunched ritually at the St. Regis. The Arlen apartment, although too small, boasted a correct address. Young Arlen was admitted to St. Paul's and Harvard. Yet, when home on holidays, the wise child heard and understood his father's endless pacing in the unproductive study.

Each of the present authors is unmistakably the son of his father, but in reaction rather than in imitation. Chirpy, anecdotal, a little too readily amusing, Anthony Gibbs has abandoned the middle of the road where Sir Philip marched to success, preferring to play comedian along the edge. Less blandly professional, Michael J. Arlen is more sensitive, more successful in exploring family tensions. Having been puzzled in childhood by his parents' pretensions, he imposes truth upon himself with an almost religious fervor. Thus, despite his limited scope, occasional secondhand evidence, and kaleidoscopic structure, Michael J. Arlen adds a moving chapter to the general history of fathers.

Glendy Culligan was for a number of years book review editor of the Washington Post.

FRASER YOUNG LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1397

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1397 will be found in the next issue.

YTSRRU FLKY LNV ASV SLH-
HMVYA FLKY RX KRQN
UMXV—HNRIMFMCE, RX TRQ-
NYV, KRQN KRCQYAVNY
LNV RUF VCRQES AR ER.

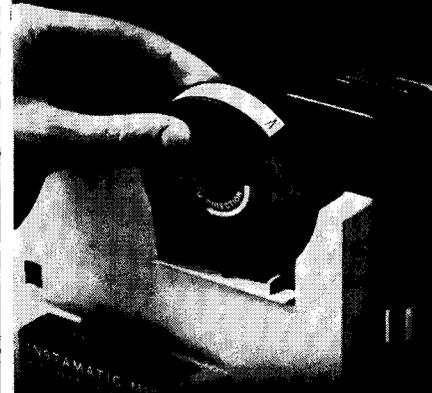
—HLQU YVUFVC

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1396

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—THOMAS MACAULEY.

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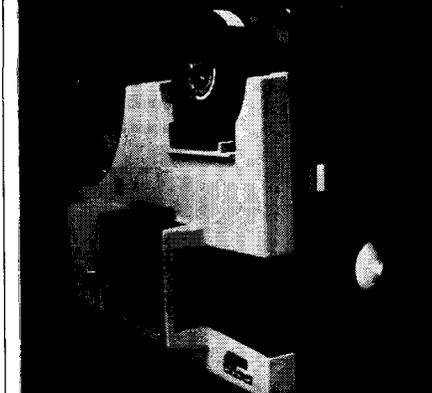
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