

PHOTOGRAPHY

by Margaret R. Weiss

OUR preview of the autumn calendar singles out a quartet of shows. Individually, each reveals the photographer in a different role: recorder of relics of the past; eyewitness reporter of history in the making (and the remaking); roving chronicler of the transient scene; collector and purveyor of images that have become emi-

nently collectible art. Diversity of artistic purpose is matched by variety of subject and locale. Viewed as a group, these exhibitions recapitulate some of the major directions taken by the photographic medium in this century.

- Almost all that glitters is gold in "Treasures of Tutankhamun," which will usher in the fall equinox at the New Orleans Museum of Art. This dazzling spectacle showcases 55 funerary objects from the

fabled hoard found in the boy-king's tomb—among them, the superbly wrought gold mask inlaid with carnelian and lapis lazuli, a golden shrine, gilt-on-wood furniture, and gilded figurines. There is ample reason to applaud not only the archaeologists' feat but the skill of the photographer who documented it. For years Harry Burton's 1,800 priceless glass-plate negatives have been resting—as tomblike as the objects they recorded—in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Egyptian Art. Now enlargements of some of those images made more than 50 years ago provide the visual "you are there" narrative for the art and artifacts on display. Small wonder that Howard Carter's journal of the Valley of the Kings excavation so often noted, "Mr. Burton at once made his photographic record." Step by step, Burton's lens followed the action in progress—before, during, and after the uncovering of each precious find—and his photographs remain a truly extraordinary document.

- A follow-up on our "face-finding" report in *SR* [April 3, 1976] takes tangible form as "A Will to Survive," which is to be mounted in New York's America-Israel Cultural Center from the first week of October through late December. This will be the American premiere of a show that chalked up an unprecedented viewership of 500,000 during its inaugural at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. John Phillips's dramatic then-and-now documentary presents a collective portrait of survival—the rebuilding of lives, homes, and the Old City after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. More than 200 vignettes trace the fate of 50 survivors, and the story they tell fulfills the promise of the show's title graphically and photographically. During 1978–79 the exhibition will be circulated to Washington, Chicago, Houston, Miami, Los Angeles, Montreal, and Toronto.

- Whatever Franco-American relations may be concerning the Concorde, both nations are in perfect accord about one subject: André Kertész, photography's stalwart old master. In the wake of the Paul Strand retrospective at the new Georges Pompidou Center, the even newer National Foundation of Photography Museum (formerly the Musée de Luxembourg) will open late in October with a tricolor tribute to Kertész. The final se-



André Kertész's "Chez Mondrian, Paris 1926"—"The examples ultimately mounted will reflect Hungarian wit, Gallic sophistication, and Yankee simplicity."



lection of about 225 prints is still in progress. But no matter what examples are ultimately mounted, they will reflect his special blend of Hungarian wit, Gallic sophistication, and Yankee simplicity. Throughout his 65-year career—in his early days in Budapest, in Montparnasse during the golden Twenties, and in New York for the past four decades—Kertész has kept a worldly-wise eye on the city scene, framing his insights with flawless precision and unflinching grace. It is fitting that both sides of the Atlantic should join in paying homage to one whose influence has indelibly marked the course of photo-reportage here and abroad.

- At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, associate curator Weston Naef is at work preparing an early December show and monograph on the prints in the museum's Alfred Stieglitz collection. Well timed for the current interest in collecting and collectors, the exhibit will feature 125 of the 600 photographs that gift and bequest have brought to the Metropolitan. These were prints acquired by Stieglitz during his long years as prime mover in the avant-garde art scene, gallery owner, photogra-

One of Harry Burton's glass-plate negatives of Tutankhamun's tomb—"Almost all that glitters is gold in the show at the New Orleans Museum of Art."

"Our Dragoman in Cairo," circa 1898, by Frank Eugene, from the collection of Alfred Stieglitz—"Spans a 60-year period of aesthetic tastes."

pher, and friend of photographers. Ranging from J. Craig Annan to Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter, "The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz" spans a 60-year period of craft techniques and aesthetic tastes. Although friendship doubtless colored some of Stieglitz's choices, the eye of the connoisseur usually prevailed. He was objective enough to include the painterly and even the pictorial along with the direct naturalism that he espoused; worthy unknowns were given a place among the lauded elite. This is a rare personal collection on several counts: it was made by one who exemplified the artist-collector rather than the investor-collector, and it was saved from the haphazard dispersal that generally follows the owner's demise. ©



BOOKS

1. Pick of the List

by Benjamin DeMott

EVENING, early summer. Outside birches brush the deck, moths flutter the screens. Inside the reviewer reads—page proofs from the book season to come, new novels, biographies, autobiographies, collected essays, collected letters, light and heavy versions of *The Age*. . . . The terms of the publishing trade dictate that, with some exceptions, the strongest works of the year are released during a single 90-day cycle, September–November, and it's in early summer that the pre-publication copies of these items begin to swell the mail.

Before and after the beginning of summer, the beat is gentler, and there's less need to scramble. The reviewer, a person who (as somebody said) conducts his education in public, enjoys lazy stretches, plateaus between peaks, intervals of digestion. Now, though, the wisest, wittiest, most stylish, and most powerful teachers seem all to be in their places at once, commanding attention. School is intense.

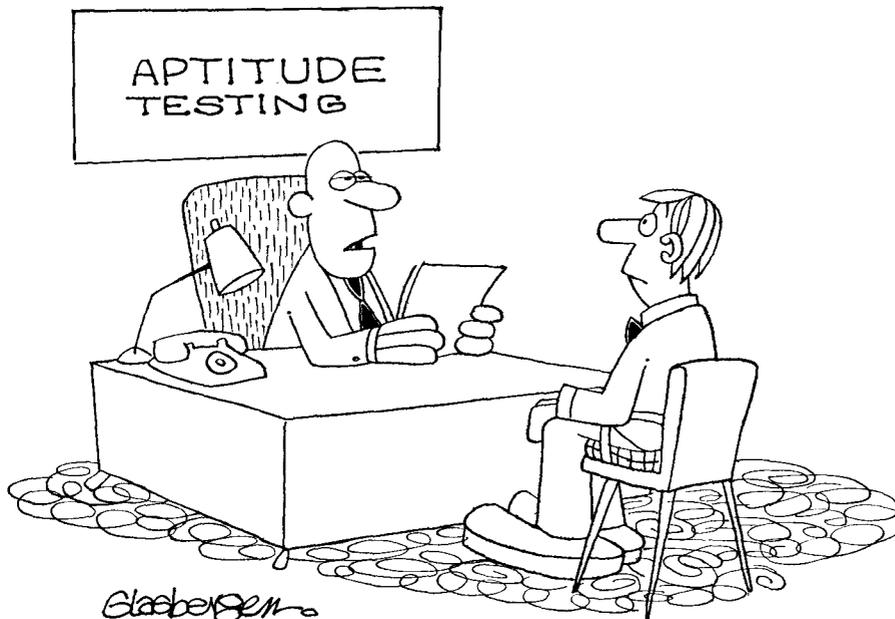
For three weeks running, the reviewer reads hard—and then (late June, a taking-account kind of evening, birches brushing) he attempts a sorting out. Among a passel of strong books, which seem strongest? What does one really like best?

Edmund Wilson's *Letters on Literature and Politics* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$20) is extremely impressive. Its publication is, indeed, the American literary event of the upcoming season—the occurrence, that is, most important to the history of American writing, as distinguished from American business, politics, ecology, or whatever. But unlike many such events, this one is miles from boring. Wilson wasn't just broadly learned and penetrating about bookish matters. He was direct and appetitive in his general address to life, and it's these qualities that keep his literary and political correspondence fresh. I like the acerbity and downrightness (“Huxley is the most overrated writer alive”), also a dozen or more enjoyably wicked turns—a report on *The New Yorker's* twenty-fifth-anniversary party, com-

ments on the intellectual tone of the Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., circle on Cape Cod, gossip about what Charles Scribner said to Maxwell Perkins about Ernest Hemingway's naughty words. There are lively settings-straight, of other writers, about usage. (H. L. Mencken is told to look up *jejune*; Alison Lurie is chided, in a letter praising her novel *Nowhere City*, for confusion about *disinterest*.) And there are lengthy exchanges, from over the years, with Dos Passos, Allen Tate, and others that are remarkable for the sustained energy of Wilson's good sense.

Toward the end of his life this critic, despising the pedantry of the “new scholarship” in American literature, entered into serious combat with the “professoriat,” as represented by the Modern Language Association. *Letters*, as edited by his widow, Elena, could be seen simply as a continuation of that warfare by other means. What shines in Wilson's correspondence is a writer's contempt for hyperprofessionalization, his struggle to ensure the survival of a literary atmosphere clean of academicism yet entirely supportive of linguistic precision and imaginative integrity. Real risks were taken in this struggle, and mistakes were made. (About John Crowe Ransom, R. P. Blackmur, and Wallace Stevens, among others, Wilson was consistently unintelligent.) But the overall performance—the quick, sure clarity about major achievements such as T. S. Eliot's and James Joyce's, and the shrewdness of the critic's strategies for maintaining personal independence—is both admirable and enlivening. So, too, is the fundamental unselfishness. *Somebody in our time did this much for letters*, you think, turning these pages. *Somebody cared this much about books*. *Amazing*.

The major European literary event of the upcoming season—of those that American readers can inform themselves about in their own language—is the publication of André Malraux's *Lazarus* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$7.95), a meditation on death composed shortly after the author was stricken by a nearly fatal nervous disease in 1973. (Malraux, whom Edmund Wilson ranked as the greatest French novelist since Proust, died in 1976.) The book, feverish and occasionally overwrought, descends like a storm on the imagination, obliterating trivia and evasion, driving the reader into confrontation with last things, ultimate meanings, imponderables. The materials are various—dreams, memories of hairbreadth escapes (from execution, from capture in war).



“Let's put it this way—if you can find a village without an idiot, you've got yourself a job.”