

## Books Encountered

**Here Lies: An Autobiography.** By ERIC AMBLER. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £10.95.

A testing title from the 76-year-old master of intrigue, and a rather oblique book. It begins with a thriller-like accident and amnesic aphasia, and ends in mid-career: but is discreetly revealing, thoughtfully learned, and characteristically quizzical.

**The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955.** By JOHN COLVILLE. Hodder & Stoughton, £14.95.

Fascinating, witty, and (in wartime) illegal diary by Churchill's Private Secretary and confidant: sharper than any memoirs, it includes outspoken biographical notes. Of Lord Moran's *Winston Churchill*, Sir John confesses: "In reviewing this book, I wrote unkindly but truthfully: 'Lord Moran was never present when history was made, though he was quite often invited to luncheon afterwards.'" No such reservations here.

**Rise and Fall.** By MILOVAN DJILAS. Macmillan, £14.95.

The last of Djilas's four volumes of memoirs, this runs from 1946 to 1966—not, as the blurb claims, to "the present day." It ends with his abrupt release from the imprisonment occasioned by *Conversations with Stalin*, on which it interestingly enlarges.

**An Egyptian Journal.** By WILLIAM GOLDING. Faber, £12.95.

Testy, warps-and-all account of travelling the Nile in a hired motor-cruiser with a crew of five, illustrated chiefly by the author's photographs. These and the text bring to life an Egypt as beguiling (and vexing) as Europeans have so often found it.

**Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World.** By BARBARA GUEST. COLLINS, £15.

A sympathetic, painstaking, not excessively critical biography of Ezra Pound's disciple and one-time fiancée, later married to Richard Aldington and lover to others, including "Bryher" (Winifred Ellerman). Long ago now, and rather far away.

**Brett: From Bloomsbury to New Mexico: A Biography.** By SEAN HIGNETT. Hodder & Stoughton, £14.95.

Briskly written, and a change from Bloomsburyolatry, this spices biography with amused, affectionate memories of Dorothy Brett in old age, and sheds duly harsh light on Katherine Mansfield and Middleton Murry, as well as on Lawrence and Frieda.

**Monty at Close Quarters: Recollections of the Man.** Compiled by T. E. B. HOWARTH. Leo Cooper in association with Secker & Warburg, £10.95.

Uncontroversial sidelights on Field-Marshal Montgomery from twelve friends and acquaintances, including (and marshalled by) the former High Master of Monty's old school. They add, but not vitally, to Nigel Hamilton's *magnum opus* in the making.

**The Courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett.** By DANIEL KARLIN. Oxford University Press, £12.95.

Wildly revisionist Browning version, based on closer scrutiny of the letters. "It is not too much to say [of Browning] that he composes his love for her in the same terms as he composes the action of his poems." Far from devaluing the lover, this integrates lover and poet.

**A Path from Rome: An Autobiography.** By ANTHONY KENNY. Sidgwick & Jackson, £15.

The Master of Balliol, CND supporter, philosopher, and former priest, on his lonely childhood, his early vocation, his austere training, his painful doubts, and the dialectic which led him into the world and marriage.

**August Strindberg.** By OLOF LAGERCRANTZ. Translated by ANSELM HOLLO. Faber, £20.

Another tortured soul, master of domestic hells, revealed in this remorseless biography as having rearranged his own life-story, and heightened family tensions, to serve his dramatic art.

**The Other Side of the Moon: The Life of David Niven.** By SHERIDAN MORLEY. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £10.95.

Not *quite* so racy as its subject's own memoirs, but more accurate. It reveals love-affairs, corrects legends, and harrowingly describes Niven's terminal motor neurone disease. Enough now said?

**Everything to Lose: Diaries 1945-60.** By FRANCES PARTRIDGE. Victor Gollancz, £12.95.

More post-Bloomsburiana, from Ralph Partridge's widow, concluding the journal began in *A Pacifist's War* and continued in *Memories*. Homely glimpses of literary lions and kittens, from E. M. Forster, Arthur Koestler, and V. S. Pritchett to Cyril Connolly, Raymond Mortimer, and beyond.

**Ezra Pound and Dorothy Shakespeare: Their Letters 1909-1914.** Edited by OMAR POUND and A. WALTON LITZ. Faber, £25.

Some 200 texts, a handful from diaries, mostly hitherto unpublished, and many illuminating Pound's poems with the editors' scholarly help. A few remain trivial or enigmatic, and Dorothy Pound (as she became) probably destroyed a score or so.

**Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Zionist Leader.** By JEHUDA REINHARZ. Oxford University Press, £29.50.

First of two projected volumes, in which Professor Reinharz combines exhaustive biography with comprehensive history. Immensely learned, painstaking, and reasonably impartial, it amply describes but seldom shares its subject's firecracker quality.

**The Kitchener Enigma.** By TREVOR ROYLE. Michael Joseph, £15.

A worthy effort, backed by family papers, to bring Kitchener to life as more than the moustachioed recruiting poster, and less than the covert homosexual sometimes alleged. Verdict? Rather a dull dog; but lonely, loyal and brave.

**The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams.** By DONALD SPOTO. The Bodley Head, £12.95.

Candid, harrowing, but redeeming account of a turbulent career, alternating self-doubt with exuberance, and haunted by family tragedy which no doubt spurred Williams to self-destructive addictions: drink, drugs, and homosexual promiscuity. The redemption is in what he nevertheless wrote.

**Edward Thomas: A Portrait.** By R. GEORGE THOMAS. Oxford University Press, £12.95.

A fittingly respectful study, improving on both Coombes (1956) and Cooke (1970), of the poet (and prolific prose writer) whom Leavis considered "exquisitely sincere and sensitive", and who here comes alive as far more troubled.

**The Quest for Merlin.** By NIKOLAI TOLSTOY. Hamish Hamilton, £12.95.

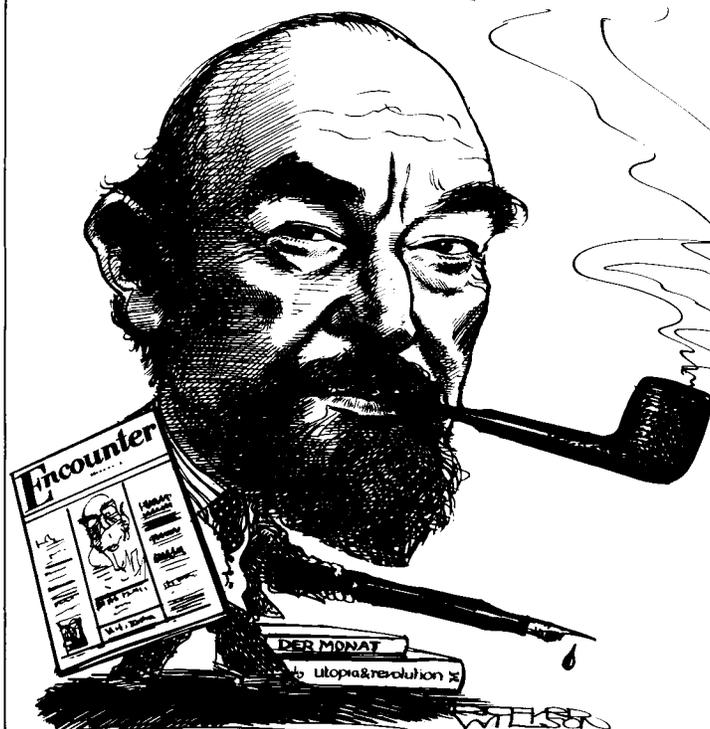
A treasure-hunt of a book, at length unearthing its quarry in the 6th-century Scottish Lowlands, but exploring also the ramifications of the myth which Tolstoy believes was based on a real last heir to the Druids.

**Memoirs of King George II.** By HORACE WALPOLE. Edited by JOHN BROOKE. Yale University Press, £65, \$100.

New, sumptuous, definitive three-volume edition of the first part of what Walpole left in a sealed chest to enlighten his family and heirs. Less fun than his letters, but indispensable to historians. The George III volumes are on their way.

R.M.

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**Melvin J. Lasky**

# Utopia & Revolution

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Dostoyevsky novel as his model for constructing a history ... It is indubitably an original — in its location of important, heretofore obscure minds, in its skilful handling of a very large body of texts, and in its fresh interpretations ... There is also in his book the quality the French call *passion*."

Robert Nisbet, *New York Times Book Review*

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J.W. Lambert, *Sunday Times*

"Mr. Lasky's magnum opus may turn out to be, both as symbol and source book, one of the most influential for years past. It won't be widely read ... but it will be one of those which people think they have read when they haven't (compare *Das Kapital*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Golden Bough*). Its message, probably garbled, will percolate through to commentators and political scientists on the campus. It will be misrepresented, and will have effects Mr Lasky didn't even imagine. But then he is a reflective and experienced man, and part of his message is that nearly all human utterances and plans have effects that those making them never did imagine ... Lasky's work is perhaps the wisest and most balanced plank in ... the middle ground of Western political thinking."

C.P. Snow, *Financial Times*

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# FILM

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## A Russian Master

# Andrei Tarkovsky

By Mark Le Fanu



IS CINEMA, in the West, any longer very important? It is; but one is forced to defend that conviction in the face of a culture which increasingly sees this art-form as a standard dinosaur. Cinemas, as we know, are closing; we live in "the television age." But the exigencies of the cathode tube

are less than friendly to the pictorial richness which was always part of the cinema's greatness: the enormous screen, the darkened auditorium, the invitation to dream which is our past and our fortune. We were lucky as children to be open to the cinema's romance and we may hope, in turn, that enough of it survives for future generations to learn its pleasures.

In the Soviet Union and the countries of the East, and in the Third World, the issue has not yet reached crisis point. There, city-dwellers still adore "the movies", giving them a place in their lives, as the West did in the 1920s and '30s. Yet such a contrast is already contentious as far as the Soviet Union is concerned. Soviet cinema is, of course, as old as cinema itself. Its heroic age in the 1920s was responsible for many of the medium's most enduring masterpieces, and Andrei Tarkovsky—perhaps Russia's greatest contemporary film-maker—is first and foremost a descendant of Eisenstein. Like Eisenstein he has a passion for history, which he explores with intense painterly boldness. His talents are visionary and theatrical, and as far above tendentious ideological moralising as it is possible for an artist's to be.

In a career which began in 1960 Tarkovsky has made six feature-length films, all generally considered to be masterpieces: *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Roublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *The Mirror* (1974), *The Stalker* (1979), and *Nostalgia* (1983). His "sociological position" is complex and subtly interesting. Cinema is a popular art-form, but Tarkovsky's films are—more, perhaps, than those of any other contemporary film-maker—hermetic, experimental, intellectual to the point of obscurity. One wonders how he managed to survive in the Soviet Union for as long as he did. After the filming of *Nostalgia*—a co-production between Mosfilm and the major Italian television channel RAI—he applied to the Soviet authorities for permission to extend his stay abroad for another two years in order to carry out a

couple of projects (in Sweden and Britain) arising out of assignments for the staging of operas. He received no reply. He is now in Sweden, working on his latest film, *The Sacrifice*; it is not yet clear whether he regards himself as being in permanent exile.

TARKOVSKY'S FIRST FILM, *Ivan's Childhood*—shot in a black-and-white of striking tonal contrasts—is one of his most lovely and complex works. Set in the Second World War, it opens with a sequence of a child remembering his mother; he yearns for her with passionate longing—he seems to fly through the air to greet her. (The Tarkovskian camera possesses, always, extraordinary powers of mobility.) Later in the film, a Russian officer's care for the child is like the tender regard of a father.

In themselves, stories of the War are of little importance to Tarkovsky. Their value lies in the residue of human attachment—the bonds of loyalty, courage, memory—which at any given moment such stories can muster. They define, I believe, his thoughtful and melancholy patriotism, which is as far as it is possible to be from a strident imperial chauvinism. Tarkovsky's patriotism stems, like the boy's protectiveness towards his mother, from sentiments of pity and love.

In the ebb and flow of the Russian advance through the Ukraine during the Second World War, the boy finds himself pitched into a position of command. His knowledge of the river crossings proves indispensable to the advancing battalions, conferring on him in the confusing delays of battle the status of minor guerrilla chieftain. An officer takes an interest in him, recognising his extraordinary qualities. A long time later, when the Russians finally enter Berlin, the same officer, sorting through the rifled files of the Chancery, comes upon a death certificate: the boy, captured by the Germans, has been executed along with hundreds of others. . . .

These Chancery scenes provide a useful route into what is distinctive about Tarkovsky's cinema. The capture of the ruined city of Berlin is dramatised on screen like no other military conquest I have seen. As the soldiers and tanks advance through the streets, the air becomes filled with a wash of the Chancery's documents, whirling and falling in multitudes. This "snowstorm" image has the power of an epiphany, not less so for the realisation, when it comes, that what we are witnessing is cleverly-cut documentary footage. For Tarkovsky's talent is as much as anything a talent for *finding* things. It is as if his gaze possessed some power, some integrity, that had only to alight on the photographed image to call into it a special beauty and meaning. All his films are imbued with this intensity of dreaming, yet his dreams (as such "documentary" incidents indicate) have their origin in the tragic determinants of history.

The film which followed in 1966, *Andrei Roublev*, is perhaps his best known in the West, and also the most explicitly indebted to Eisenstein. In *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1945-46) Eisenstein was engaged in intricate ideological manoeuvres. On the one hand, these films expose the darkness of the Middle Ages: their cruelty, superstition, unenlightenment. In the process, however, the logic of the intention collapses. The film-maker's astonishing reconstruction makes us see the very institutions of oppression as