

From a Small, Well-Lighted Place

“Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist,” by Frederick Stopp (Little, Brown, 254 pp. \$4), is a study of the English writer in his roles as novelist, critic, and satirist. William Van O’Connor is the Berg professor of English and American literature at New York University. He is the author of “Age of Criticism,” “Tangled Fire of William Faulkner,” and other books.

By William Van O’Connor

FREDERICK STOPP is a friend and admirer of Evelyn Waugh, and the friendship and admiration apparently made it hard for him to see his subject in a detached way and to raise and answer questions one expects in a book about Waugh. Waugh is a man about whom one is likely to have strong feelings. Having chosen to write a book about him, Mr. Stopp should have been willing to create an image, either pleasing or enraging, that a reader could respond to. For example, he mentions Mr. Waugh’s rather famous piece in *Life* in 1946, written on the heels of his success in the U.S. with “Brideshead Revisited.” He calls the article part of Waugh’s “American honeymoon,” yet he gives no hint

Manger Scene

By Robert Cooke

LET me creep through the filthy aperture
and look into the throne room.
Is it Henry the Eighth?

No, no, move the pile of dirt and see.

Is it Anne Boleyn?

No, no, look closely at the camels.

Is it a wise man?

No, no, in ermine and burlap?

Is that ermine?

No, no, burlap; can’t you see?

I see the pile of dirt and Henry the Eighth.

Then it must be; cover the aperture.

What is that light?

No, no, cover the aperture.

of the sentiments expressed in it, or its tone, which, to take a term out of literary criticism, can best be described as snotty.

Mr. Stopp mentions several instances of Waugh’s conservative or reactionary actions, but he neither criticizes nor justifies them. This is not true, however, of his account of Waugh’s view of the present literary scene. Mr. Waugh believes that the religious man and the dedicated literary man live in a small, well-lit place, and that outside is “darkness and savagery.” Today the writer is likely to work for the State or for a public relations agency. For the dedicated writer “the choice lies in the two extremes of anarchic bohemianism and ascetic seclusion.” Waugh says that the age of the common man is a bad age for the writer, and a bad one for English prose. On this part of Waugh’s cultural position Mr. Stopp is informative and interesting.

The middle part of the book, “The Novels,” is an improvement over the first section, “The Writer.” There are a number of perceptive things said about specific stories, and Mr. Stopp gives one a sense of Waugh’s comedy. But something must be missing because the discussions are not the sort that cause one to want to go back for another look at Waugh’s books.

In section three, “The Artist,” there are also discerning comments, especially about the techniques behind Waugh’s peculiar sort of grotesqueries. But again something seems to be missing. In a critical biography, say a study of Charles Dickens or Henry James, one usually finds what a nineteenth-century French critic called the writer’s “controlling faculty,” that complex of interests and attitudes that simultaneously explain and help to account for his peculiar vision. One finishes and puts down Mr. Stopp’s “Evelyn Waugh” wondering what the “controlling faculty” in Waugh is. Mr. Stopp might reply to this criticism by saying he does not know what the “controlling faculty” is and furthermore it would be presumptuous of him even to search for it. Maybe so. But lacking this, or some equally unifying force, his “Evelyn Waugh” lacks the inner life or radiance that one expects in a critical study that is also an account of the writer’s life.



Geoffrey Household—“banking to bananas.”

Suspense Spinner

“Against the Wind,” by Geoffrey Household (Little, Brown, 238 pp. \$4), chronicles the multifaceted career of a popular suspense writer. Sergeant Cuff of SR, whose beat is the CRIMINAL RECORD, summarizes it for us.

By Sergeant Cuff

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD’S literary life has so far encompassed some twenty-two years and a dozen books. All of the books have been aimed at providing a superior species of entertainment, and all of them have been squarely on target. Best known is “Rogue Male,” the story of an Englishman who drew a bead on a central European dictator and was caught in the same instant (“My nails are growing back but my left eye is still pretty useless”). “Rogue Male” was converted into a good movie, but it remains a better book.

“Against the Wind” is autobiography. It is divided into three sections: “Traveller,” “Soldier,” “Craftsman.” “Traveller” does not mean explorer or even tourist—it means commercial traveller, the old-fashioned drummer (an Americanism now not so much colloquial as it is archaic).

Newly out of Oxford in 1922, Geoffrey Household went to Rumania to serve on the staff of the Ottoman Bank in Bucharest, whose managing director was the father of a fellow Magdalenian. Household shifted from banking to bananas, which he sold in Spain, and Spain became, and still is, his second country. Then he began dispensing printing inks in much of Europe and most of South America.

With the Munich crisis, Household became one of 500 standers-in-line outside the War Office in London. It
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Manners Left by Their Mistress

"The Watsons," by Jane Austen; continued and completed by John Coates (Crowell, 318 pp. \$4), is a fragment of a novel about matrimony and manners, developed at full length by a devoted Janeite. Joseph Wood Krutch, who writes frequently about English letters, is the author of many books, including literary studies.

By Joseph Wood Krutch

NOT long after finishing her first two novels, "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility," Jane Austen began a third, "The Watsons." Presumably because she had found no publisher for any of her work she abandoned it, and when, after an interval of several years, she resumed writing she made a new start with a different story. John Coates's book is actually more his own than the jacket description—"Jane Austen's fragment continued and completed"—might suggest. Only about one-fifth of it is Jane's and even with this first portion he has taken some liberties. On the whole, however, this makes the work even more to his credit since the story is made interesting in itself and strikes me as a remarkably convincing imitation of the Austen manner.

Why should one undertake a task so difficult and, some might say, so unrewarding? Mr. Coates is described as "a strong Janeite since the age of fifteen" and the answer is in part, I suspect, that he intends an interpretation, even a defense, of his idol. Was she a snob or a satirist of snobs? Was her attitude towards money low-minded or merely sensible? To some extent Mr. Coates answers these questions by unobtrusively making what he believes to have been her attitudes more explicit than she usually made them herself.

Of Miss Austen it has been said that she had no predecessors and also that she was above all a describer of the comedy of manners. Neither of these statements is quite the whole truth. Her predecessor was that prig of a genius Samuel Richardson, who first demonstrated that the minute analysis of the emotional problems of quiet people could be made absorbing. Her comedy of manners is actually a great deal more. That is the

form but the subject is always Manners, Morals, and Prudence: how they are related, to what extent they conflict, and just how the conflicts should be adjusted. If there have been disputes and misunderstandings, that is largely because, unlike most idealists on the one hand and most "realists" on the other, she attached great importance to all three members of her trinity. She held that only a fool undervalued either a good income or a good social position but she despised heartily anyone who overvalued either. In the present tale (and the conclusion she intended is known) the heroine accepts the proposal of a respectable gentleman with a decent income rather than a rich lord because she likes the respectable gentleman better. But certainly Jane would not have approved a thoroughly imprudent marriage merely "for love."

Mr. Coates, as was suggested above, takes the liberty of making even Jane's own text rather more explicit than she made it herself. When, for instance, the heroine is accused by her sister (and also, I think, in Jane's own hinted opinion) of putting a trifle too much emphasis upon "strict rules," she is made to reply, "It is not I who lay them down, dearest Elizabeth, it is society. I think . . . everybody would be well advised to follow them." But I cannot find that bit in my text of the original. Or, to take



—Culver Service.

J. Austen—"a snob or a satirist?"

a more striking case, Mr. Coates seems himself to have added at another point the remark apropos the rude behavior of one of the "best people": "Elizabeth had too much good sense not to recognize hard-hearted prosperity, low-minded conceit, and wrong-headed folly when she saw them." But why not? Jane may have forbore to make the remark and she might have thought it unnecessary, but she would not have thought it inappropriate.

Does she actually consider money more important than the majority of decent people think it today? I doubt it. If she sometimes seems to do so, it is partly because she is frank and partly because in a society where "social nobility" is conspicuously absent, the question "how much is his estate worth a year?" takes the place, not only of a similar question today, but also of the far more inclusive question "what are the chances that he will ever be able to make a decent living?" In her society few had any "prospects" they were not born to.

Test-Tube Trickery

"The Scientists," by Eleazar Lipsky (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 375 pp. \$4.95), is a novel about the intra-laboratory intrigues and jealousies that surround a scientific discovery. Critic Maxwell Geismar is the author of "American Moderns."

By Maxwell Geismar

THE GIFTED son of a distinguished father, Eleazar Lipsky is the lawyer-writer and former assistant district attorney, who started his literary career with a series of excellent mystery tales. In "Lincoln McKeever" he extended his fiction in the direction of the problem novel, and "The Scientists" continues this mixture of literary forms. It is very readable, entertaining, and the writing, often sharp, is also rather pleasantly artificial.

The title of the novel is somewhat misleading. To the contemporary mind—if there is one—this almost implies something in the vein of atomic research, or at least in the realm of C. P. Snow. Mr. Lipsky's scientist is a worker in genetics, who has come up with a stabilizing element for the antibiotic drugs. He has made his discovery in the laboratory of a tyrannical and Germanic college professor, who claims half the credit and a goodly share of the profits. The novel is a study of academic types and uni-