

four shorter poems. The long poems deal with the dilemma of man in the modern world. The new and title poem, "Nags Head," considers the hazards of flight, celebrating the Wright brothers' achievement, but depicting an aviator's plight aloft when his wheels wouldn't go down. Anderson's imagination soars through skies of contemplation on the meaning of life, love, and human values in the long flight of this poem. For all his philosophical questionings and doubts about man in the modern world, in verse that is sensuously alive and buoyant, Lee Anderson ends with his pilot affirming "We are ready/We are returning to earth/We hope to live."

—RICHARD EBERHART.



**A VOICE APART:** Because Vassar Miller believes that writing poetry is an act of faith, demanding the dedication and discipline of the strictest devotion, she deliberately confines her orthodox religious lyrics in traditional forms. Yet nothing else is truly derivative in "Wage War on Silence" (Wesleyan University Press, \$3), for even within the narrow conventions of those sonnets where alliteration and syntax might suggest Hopkins's influence, she has a voice that is hers alone.

Her poems are so intricately constructed that their flashes of verbal brilliance are difficult to isolate. Only full quotation could illustrate the rich texture of her prayers and the wit in both her parody of "How do I love thee?" and her attack on the pantheistic discovery of immortality in nature's rejuvenation. But even without its context, there is no mistaking the original insight and precise expression in her description of a dying woman, insensible to the chatter around her, as "She catches the first syllable of silence."

—ROBERT D. SPECTOR.

**POISED ON A PRECIPICE:** It is ten years since John F. Nims's "A Fountain in Kentucky," his second book of verse, appeared. That the decade has been well spent—prolonged residence abroad, chiefly in Italy and Spain; translation from the Greek; the analytical exposition of a number of contemporary

Italian and Spanish poets—and that it has left its mark upon Mr. Nims's writing is abundantly obvious in "Knowledge of the Evening" (Rutgers University Press, \$3). The earlier style, characteristically American and brilliantly urban, has taken on new colors, investigated a wider range of modes. The delicious wit remains, the wry twist of mind that has always set this poet off from his fellows; but one perceives now, in poem after poem, how humanely and lovingly deep the playfulness can strike. Even in the overtly devotional verse—and there is a great deal of Catholic devotion here—the tone is delicately poised, moving along a precipice so narrow and so abrupt that the slightest false step would mean disaster. There are few false steps, though one of them—a speech by Agamemnon in a parody of horse-opera talk—constitutes a collapse of taste as well as of art; and the deviations, such as they are, hardly matter in the face of so much that is moving and wise.

In some respects Mr. Nims is a throwback, a reincarnation of a tradition almost lost in our time. He is a humanist, in the old and now most unpopular sense: he has Greek and Latin, and his verse shows it. He is a cosmopolitan, and his verse shows this too—excessively sometimes, what with the plethora of untranslated tags in Dutch, Polish, Spanish, Italian, Provençal, besides the ancient languages and the neo-Bret-Harte. In these matters he is a scholarly virtuoso, and the children will do well to hold onto their hats. But one feels that however beguiling these accidental toys may be, proceeding as they do from a discriminating but uninhibited love of language itself, there are only accessories to the shaking true force of those of Mr. Nims's poems that seem certain to endure: "Ishtar," for example, and "The Young Ionia"; "The Lover," with its nightmare-sick crescendo; "Etruscan Tomb"; "On the Banks of the Duero," and the utterly lovely "Christmas Ballad" imitated from St. John of the Cross. There should be more such throwbacks, such fortunate reincarnations.

—DUDLEY FITTS.

## I Was in Brooklyn

By Reeve Spencer Kelley

**I** COULDN'T free my mind that hour,  
I saw an elbow in the street;  
A hand lay still and held a bird,  
I saw the bird begin to eat.

A newsboy raised that wreck aloft,  
I was two thousand miles away;  
I walked in blood, in blood and snow,  
I was in Brooklyn all that day.



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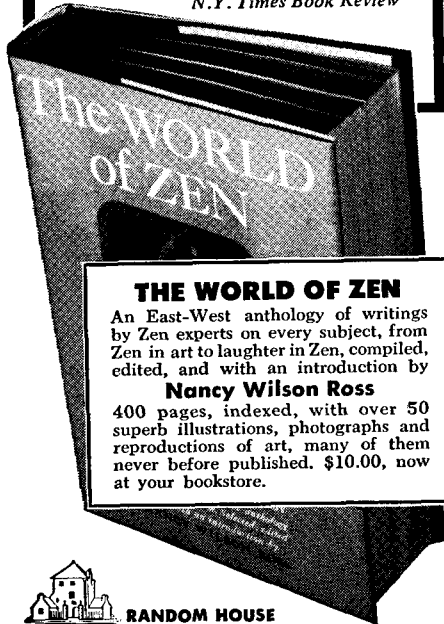
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## Book of the Week

Continued from page 57

thought and imagination, his *saeva indignatio*, against man's perversion of values he alone had conceived. It became essential for him to discover "whether man alone, without the help either of God or of rationalistic thought, can unaided create his own values."

Since according to Camus the first value of man is freedom, on which all others must be based, he attacks all forms of totalitarianism wherever it may be found. Totalitarianism is defined as that system which imposes one way of life to the exclusion of all others. That which gives life and all its systems value is the constant tension between opposing points of view by which man's evolution is formed. Though in sympathy with certain Socialistic aims of the Communists, Camus opposed their historical "economic fatalities" as even more terrible than the "divine whims" of the Church. Though he affirmed the Christian emphasis on love and brotherhood, he could not accept such dogmas as the immortality of the soul, or the universal resurrection of bodies, or the eternal damnation of unbaptized children. It is the supernatural bias of the Church, he thought, which has permitted it to justify capital punishment. "If Christianity is pessimistic as to man," he writes, "it is optimistic as to human destiny. Well, I can say that, pessimistic as to human destiny, I am optimistic as to man."

Not the individual who often murders without premeditation, but society, whose oppressive laws are premeditated felonies, must bear the burden of guilt. "What is capital punishment," he exclaims in "Reflections on the Guillotine," "but the most premeditated of murders?" And again, "Every society has the criminals it deserves." Against all such murders Camus turns his surgical knife, refusing to be constrained by consideration of country or God, the

Left or the Right, the artist or his community. His attack on capital punishment is an attack on war itself, on all murders which have been given the sanctity of legality. He condemns equally the murders in Hungary, Spain, and the Soviet with those perpetrated by his own country against the Algerians. Camus is one of the few artists of stature who, unlike W. H. Auden or Stephen Spender, have in their maturity fulfilled their youthful denunciations during the Thirties of Franco's insurrection against the Loyalist government of Spain. Himself an Algerian by birth and a Frenchman by culture and descent, his essays on Algeria are not chauvinistic toward either of his two allegiances, but lucidly clarify a program of honor and justice for both parties, and remind us, by a curious reversal, of the United States' own dilemma in the South, where the Negroes are the colonists (though by force) and the Southern whites the natives (though not the aboriginals) who are now clamoring for their initial rights.

To all these problems Camus brings the insight of the artist dedicated to no extreme but involved in all, seeking to find between opposites not so much a harmonious balance as an explosive creativity always dangerous, a state of flux and ambiguity where one extreme is not so much blunted as sharpened against the other. "The loftiest work will always be . . . the work that maintains an equilibrium between reality and man's rejection of that reality," he writes in "The Artist and His Time." "After all, perhaps the greatness of art lies in the perpetual tension between beauty and pain, the love of man and the madness of creation, unbearable solitude and the exhausting crowd, rejection and consent." It is this tension that is the very soul of Camus's life either as artist or man of action, and it is this and this alone which gives cohesion to his work. But, alas, it cannot give meaning to the accidental absurdity of his death.

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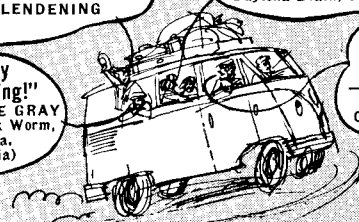
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### "Martha, Martha"—Price, Waechter, Wallenstein

GIVE Victoria de los Angeles, Richard Tucker, Rosalind Elias, and Giorgio Tozzi scales to sing, and they would make an evening at the Metropolitan an agreeable experience. In the current revival of Flotow's "Martha"—the first in the theatre since 1928—they have decidedly more than scales to sing, and the total of fine sound they produce is considerable. But they also have a cheap, illiterate, and vulgar English "libretto" to contend with, a resounding discredit for whoever decided this was the proper way in which to re-introduce Flotow to Metropolitan operagoers.

Basically a French opera by a German composer which is best known in Italian, "Martha" is currently being presented (and misrepresented) in a snickery "looker-cooker," "hurry-scurry" "yack-yacking" kind of doggerel which makes one grateful that the standard of English enunciation from this stage is, on the whole, still indifferent. The authorship of this unvivacious parody decided, shortly before the performance, that not all of her innovations were being respected and decreed the omission of her name from the program. But the printed libretto identifies her as one whose ASCAP credits also include "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" and "Willow Weep for Me," no recommendation whether known as Ann Ronell or Ann Onymous.

Fortunately, however, there is still Flotow's music, and it is being performed cleanly, clearly, often affectionately under the sympathetic and suitably Latin shaping of Nino Verchi. The long absence of this charmingly melodic, honestly sentimental score is the kind of restorative slumber required to give it sap and vitality again, freed from the esthetic guilt-by-association that inclined our fathers to patronize it as "naïve" or "old-fashioned." Today it can be accepted as a period piece and a soundly imagined one, in the fashion of quality (like "Giselle" of the same era) that can never grow old.

Like its balletic counterpart, its French styling puts the test to a performer's production, support, continuity of phrasing, etc., which, together, spell artistry. Together Miss de los Angeles as Harriet-Martha and Miss Elias as Nancy-Julia, the Messrs. Tucker (Lionel) and Tozzi (Plunkett) showed themselves not merely adept but expert in the kind of vocal blending appropriate to the "Spinning" ensemble

and the "Good Night" quartet. Individually, Miss de los Angeles put herself on record with some great names of the past with her delightfully simple yet warmly tasteful "Last Rose of Summer" (in which Miss Onymous performed her crassest chore in substituting her own words for those of Tom Moore) as Tucker did in his powerful but controlled delivery of "M'Appari" (which, despite everything, still includes the words "Martha, Martha"). With the qualified collaboration of Elias and Tozzi, they made this "Martha" memorable in the way those of the past have been celebrated.

Too many of the other elements, however, were discordant and jarring to make the sum an integrated whole. Designer Oliver Smith and Director Carl Ebert are both professionals of high standing ("My Fair Lady" is testimonial to the former's art, as Glyndebourne is to the latter's). But the Smith designs ranged from a colorfully gay treatment of the opening scene at Lady Harriet's country house to a rather gloomy Richmond Fair (with green sky!), as Ebert's direction did from a valid realization of the sentimental moments to heavy, stilted action in the comic ones. Tozzi had the most of the latter to contend with as the bumpkin Plunkett, and he scored high for his try. Unfortunately, much of it was more trying. Lorenzo Alvary made a droll little sketch of his Tristram.

What is basically distressing about this kind of penny-wise, pound-foolish "up-dating" is the penalty it imposes on the matter of real worth—Flotow's music and the way it is sung. Let's accept the reasonable view that W. Friedrich's original libretto about the high-born ladies who find their masquerade as servants easier to put on than take off was a contrivance of its time; but it remains a better contrivance for Flotow than the one which either Ann provided for our time. Go to "Martha" by all means: but go to listen selectively.

Leontyne Price made an auspicious entry on the Metropolitan scene in a "Trovatore" that found her understandably tentative at the beginning, increasingly secure in the middle, and finally triumphant in a treatment that was all finesse, glistening sound, and warm artistry. There were qualities of musical distinction throughout, even when she was short of breath at the beginning, but the range and power of her voice, the poise and purpose of her

action were positive factors all the way. A large contingent of well-wishers might have made her task more than normally difficult with their tumult of greeting; but she gave them, finally, an opportunity rightfully to roar. In dress and bearing, Miss Price conducted herself as every inch the lady Leonora is supposed to be.

There was a good deal of roaring also for the new tenor, Franco Corelli. So good-looking a man need hardly be able to sing to make an appealing troubador; thus the voluminous sound (of rather bland color) he pumped out early in the evening made an imposing effect. However, Verdi's requirements took the wind from his self-esteem if not from his tones in an "Ah si, ben mio" that was crude and sobby, and a "Di quella pira" that touched every base Italian instinct. He did some real singing later on, but which inclination will prevail in the future can only be a speculation. Conductor Fausto Cleva did nothing to curb his excesses, also going whichever way Robert Merrill, as di Luna, decreed. Irene Dalis knows the values a good Azucena must provide, but her voice was not equal to producing them this time. As Ferrando, William Wildermann continued his solid, satisfying service to whatever composer he is assigned.

ANOTHER "Tannhäuser" brought another Elisabeth in Birgit Nilsson and still another Wolfram. Eberhard Waechter, in his local debut. Nilsson's is the womanly rather than girlish kind of Elisabeth, whose vocal problem is to reduce her output to the intimate requirements of the role rather than build it up to the dramatic ones. While awaiting the time when she brings all these elements into focus one can admire her meticulous musical workmanship, her sure sense of word and phrase, which are always a pleasure. Waechter's attributes include valuable components of poise and style, bearing and action. The vocal quality was less vibrant, rather slighter than could have been anticipated. Wildermann's Landgrave was decidedly good, Margaret Harshaw's Venus more dramatic than seductive. Ignace Strasfogel preserved the basic values of the performance established by conductor Georg Solti, about as much as can be done in such circumstances.

The week's artistic experience was substantially supplemented by Alfred Wallenstein's first appearance as conductor of the New York Philharmonic and his choice of Berlioz's "Romeo and Juliet" symphony, which has not been heard in Carnegie Hall for much too long. This was an act of honor to Berlioz, of charity to his listeners, and of prime benefit to the Philharmonic's