

Books, Films, Drama

Of Changing Seasons

By EDA LOU WALTON

Darkness was symbol. Now the low full moon
Lifts a white grail above the stony hill,
And where the lips denied, they must affirm,
And where the heart was stoic, it must turn
Tearful from out its fortress. All too soon
The frail leaves feather the far trees and burn
On the near maples; this, the sweet hour, will
Shelter within the valley while the air
Gathers again to snow. And heart compelled
Now by the downy forest soon is knelled.
And heart and moon and stony hill must quell
Always their earliest singing, black their glow
Even when the smothered choir shall swell, and slow
Flowering become a madness to unfurl
The bright cocoon of summer, to unwind
The silver-threaded orchards, and trees twirl
In radiance down the valleys. Alas, the mind
Delirious then with fragrance and delight,
Even in its ripest hour thinks on night,
Recalls a stark December, and remembers
Darkness was symbol.

Last Testament

Assorted Articles. By D. H. Lawrence. Alfred A. Knopf. \$2.50.

THE fugitive pieces gathered here add little to Lawrence's message to the world. Had he lived longer it seems unlikely that his reputation would have greatly increased. His future writings would probably have been mere repetitions of his earlier work, would have come as anti-climax. He had shot his bolt.

Among the articles in the present volume the two that I find most attractive are a portrait, at once delightful and scathing, called *Laura Philippine*; and the autobiographical sketch. The latter tells of the "pneumonia illness" which attacked Lawrence at seventeen and at twenty-five, damaging his health for life; and it gives also the reasons why he felt that he could not "rise in the world and become even a little popular and rich." The other articles are, in the main, preachments, passionate declamations. No matter what his ostensible topic may be, Lawrence keeps returning to his central doctrines—that life must be a direct sensuous contact with people and with nature, that life must be a flow, that sex must be a flow, a real flow of sympathy, generous and warm, that we must stick up for our own instinctive feelings against the things we are taught, that we have shut Life out from our living, and that we must struggle down to the heart of things, where the everlasting flame is, and kindle ourselves another beam of light.

Lawrence sometimes talks in the terms of the social reformer, but we cannot deal with him as we can with the usual social reformer. We are not to pin him down to particulars, to expose his contradictions, to ask him what, concretely and specifically, his passionate phrases may imply. For Lawrence's strength surely did not lie in any ability to reason closely and carefully. I do not believe he ever once hesitated before making a sweeping generalization to think whether or not it was quite true. Indeed, I suspect that for what is called reasoning he had at bottom very little respect; temperamentally he must have de-

spised logic, or the exact mathematics, the patient verifications, that are necessary for the conclusions of science. Much of his influence came from his "mysticism," but this mysticism often reduced itself, on examination, to mere vagueness and unintelligibility, a persistent inability or refusal to reduce his sweeping indictments to specific terms. What does he mean, for example, when he says: "So intense and final is the modern white man's conviction, his internal conviction, that he is *not* a man, that he dares anything on earth except be a man"? Or what does he mean when he tells us that "people flaunt their bodies to show how unphysical they are," or that "the young are, in a subtle way, physically repulsive to one another, the girl to the man and the man to the girl"? How did Lawrence know all that? What reason have we for supposing any of these statements, as generalizations, to be true? Are we being asked to apply the principle of "credo quia absurdum"? Must we assume the mystical truth to be the exact opposite of the literal truth? We are obliged to come back to the conclusion that we cannot judge Lawrence's message by any literal standards. Or rather, we must adopt the standard that Walter Lippmann once applied to Mencken—we must judge him as we would a barrage of artillery, for the general destruction rather than for the accuracy of the individual shots.

Lawrence thought of himself as a rebel against tradition, but he wrote in a tradition with deep historic roots. Irving Babbitt would have little trouble in showing, for example, that a part of Lawrence's attitude and many of his ideas stemmed ultimately from Rousseau. But we need not go so far back. He was essentially in accord with Pater's doctrine that the artist should burn with a hard gemlike flame; and in form of utterance if not in doctrine he belonged in the tradition of Carlyle and Nietzsche. In brief, he was a prophet of our day. He impressed his personality and his doctrines on his generation by returning with passionate insistence to the same everlasting preachments. He was against routine, against mechanization, against stock emotions, against everything that was sheeplike and safe and "nice" and dull. He was a prod and a gadfly, and he set an example of splendid courage. He felt that we were all somehow trapped by civilization, and he shook the bars of the cage and shouted for release.

HENRY HAZLITT

The Sensibility of Proust

The Sweet Cheat Gone. By Marcel Proust. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. Albert and Charles Boni. \$3.

"**M**ADEMOISELLE ALBERTINE is gone!" With this exclamation the penultimate volume of Proust's great romance begins, and though the author is not accustomed to commence in any fashion so simply dramatic the sentences which follow instantaneously recapture for the reader that particular mood of elegiac contemplation which has been, throughout, so consistently and so charmingly maintained.

A moment ago, as I lay analyzing my feelings, I had supposed that this separation without a final meeting was precisely what I had wished, and, as I compared the mediocrity of the pleasures that Albertine afforded me with the richness of the desires which she prevented me from realizing, had felt that I was being subtle, had concluded that I did not wish to see her again, that I no longer loved her. But now these words: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!" had expressed themselves in my heart with an anguish so keen that I would not be able to endure it for any length of time.

Tender toward myself as my mother had been toward my dying grandmother, I said to myself with that anxiety which we feel to prevent a person whom we love

from suffering: "Be patient for just a moment, we shall find something to take the pain away; don't fret, we are not going to allow you to suffer like this."

Proust has many remarkable excellences, but there is no passage which better illustrates one of the most striking—which is his power to communicate an egotistical absorption in the poignancy of a cherished pain. Nor does he, in the whole of the present volume—devoted exclusively to the history of the gradual fading of the narrator's love for Albertine—once fail to maintain in the reader an interest, almost equal to his own, in the intricate involutions of a spirit which is nursing its sorrows in order that it may note and describe the effect of each fluctuation of pain.

In the tenth volume of a continuous novel one would hardly expect to find anything which is strictly new, and indeed one does not, but one seems almost to do so, for so rich is the originality of Proust that, as one reads the successive sections of his work, it is almost impossible to refrain from concentrating one's attention upon different aspects of his originality and from taking each individual volume as an illustration of the particular quality which one has in mind. Certainly, for example, nothing about his work is more striking than the particular form assumed by the sensibility which informs it, and certainly "The Sweet Cheat Gone" is at least an example as striking as any other of the nature of that sensibility peculiar to him. It is obvious that Proust finds in contemplation the meaning of life, and that of all things Love is, for him, the one which can be made the most fruitful object of contemplation. But he has achieved his own selection from among those many simples from which love is said to be compounded, and no little part of the unique experience of reading his work is the result of sharing with him the emotions of that very particular kind of love which he celebrates.

The value which he puts upon it is as high as the value assigned by the most extravagant of romantics, and yet Proustian love shows not a trace of many of the elements which usually accompany and which are, perhaps, usually thought necessary to a love so romantic. It has no reticences, for Proust analyzes even the most intimate of its sensual aspects; it has no selflessness, for it makes little pretence to unselfish desire for the happiness or welfare of the beloved object; and it is, moreover, completely dissociated from the idea of permanence, for Proust, even in the midst of his transports, never fails to remember that the time will come when the desire which masters him will seem distant and incomprehensible. Proustian love has then no rational element and no rationalized value, yet it has a power to absorb and a power to torture which cannot belong to sense, simple and unadorned. To the making of it has gone (besides sense) only sentiment, but it has become, without the aid of moral ideas, something marvelously elaborate and something well-nigh unique in literature.

Perhaps this love of his, this emotion which is so obviously neither the sacrament of the romanticists nor the devaluated amusement of the cynic, might indeed be made the type of his sensibility, for in many other respects also he manages to achieve an attitude poised somewhere between the extremes which have so often seemed inevitable alternatives. Disillusioned enough he was with many things, with morals for example, and he had neither any code nor any standards besides those which his tastes supplied. Yet there were capacities and faiths which he still retained. He still believed, for example, in the sufficiency of the senses and in the value of art. He never, like so many moderns, found himself in a world limited and debased by the impossibility of escape from psychology, anthropology, and Freudianism. The world was still absorbingly, still amazingly, interesting. Women, most women, were to him magical and mysterious. Conversations were witty, salons were thrilling, and artists—even contemporary artists—incalculably

great. In a word, he respected his desires, his tastes, and his amusements, and hence, though experience might be predominantly painful, it was neither meaningless nor mean. And that perhaps is the secret of the individual charm of his world. It is one viewed with the critical freedom of modern thought and one in which skepticism rules. Yet it is somehow glamorous as well.

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

The Rediscovery of America

The Bridge. By Hart Crane. Horace Liveright. \$2.50.

THOUGH a number of critics have "discovered" Hart Crane, his has been one of the esoteric names. "The Bridge" should change all that. There is no good reason why he should be the private property and more-or-less-patronized poet of a few of the intelligentsia. His work is difficult, but it is not obscure in any cheap or wanton fashion. Much contemporary poetry is more difficult, and there is very little that is so rewarding.

Perhaps a reviewer can perform no better service than to outline the poem. The opening stanzas of the poem, *To Brooklyn Bridge*, suggest the nature of Mr. Crane's vision and its elusiveness:

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty—

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
—Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

The seagull, it is to be noted, remains a seagull and yet fulfils another purpose. This is the way Mr. Crane uses symbols. The picture of the bridge at night, sharp in its compact imagery, reveals the same quality:

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

The final stanza indicates that the bridge is a kind of cosmic symbol as well as a symbol of the American spirit:

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curvship lend a myth to God.

With *Ave Maria*, the soliloquy of Columbus as he returns from his first voyage, the lines swell in somber dignity. Columbus, bringing back Cathay, remembers that the secret may yet be buried at the bottom of the sea. He recalls his thoughts when land was sighted and warns Ferdinand against reckless exploitation of the new continent. Finally his voice lifts in prayer, which becomes a petition on behalf of the questing mind:

O Thou who sleepest on Thyself, apart
Like ocean athwart lanes of death and birth,
And all the eddying breath between dost search
Cruelly with love thy parable of man,—
Inquisitor! incognizable Word
Of Eden and the enchained Sepulcher,
Into thy steep savannahs, burning blue,
Utter to loneliness the sail is true.

The next section, *Powhatan's Daughter*, is divided into five poems. The basic symbolism here, as suggested by the first poem and the marginal annotations, is sexual. The theme is the American continent, the very soil itself, its traditions and potentialities. One of the poems, *The River*, begins with

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