Books and Drama

Father and Son

By CARLETON DREWRY

Let him be proud awhile under
His armor, and unafraid:
Soon to go naked and blunder
Into the blade.

Let him be riotous and think,
Until the glass be lowered,
That life's most passionate drink
For him is poured.

He will learn in the lull
Of the years, my words be his:
Ah, life could be so beautiful,
Yet never is.

A Free Woman

By JAMES RORTY

The cows are in the barnyard,
The sheep are in the pen;
And she has filled her pilgrim's scrip
And takes the road again.

Something high and something blind,
Lean, and stripped of fear.
Stranger, not for you or me
Is the Devil's Dear.

Not for you and not for me—
Who then will she find
Adrift on moving water
Or borne on blowing wind?

In earth the small seed quickens
To flower in its place
And beckon air and water—
This is its state of grace.

Never the devil's doxie
Shall rest from journeying
Nor dooryard gardens blossom
Nor sober churchbells ring.

But lonely men will startle
Hearing the devil's laughter
And leave their sour curds and go
Mad and follow after;

And roadside stones will shiver
And whimper to be free,
And rotting ships will stretch their sails
To plough the devil's sea;

Forgotten graves will render up
Their unforgotten pain—
The dead men would be shriven
Before they die again.

Something high and something blind—
We praise it with our fear.
Stranger, we'll be sooner dead
Than the Devil's Dear.

The Triumph of Time

The Captive. By Marcel Proust. Translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. Albert and Charles Boni. $3.

Répertoire de Personages de "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu." Par Charles Daudet. Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française.

THOSE impatient persons who insisted upon taking "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu" at a single gulp were perhaps less wise than those who have been content to wait for the English volumes as they have appeared one by one. The vast work certainly gains something if the experience which reading it affords is spread out over years; and some sense of duration, of changes taking place in time, is necessary for the appreciation of its full effect. Nor need one, now that an index is provided in the "Répertoire," fear that he will forget any necessary details, since he may by its aid easily refer to the most significant passages concerning any character.

"The Captive" yields to none of the previous volumes in interest or beauty. The first half, concerned chiefly with the inward life of the hero during the period when he was attempting to satisfy the demands of his morbid jealousy by exercising the most minute surveillance over every detail of Albertine's life, is one of the most curious of the many analyses of abnormal emotional states which the work contains; but the second half, dealing more largely with other personages and including a magnificent account of the musical soirée which M. de Charlus arranged for the Verdurins, is even more interesting, since Proust's power of creating character and atmosphere is, despite the greater attention which has been paid to his subjective analyses, perhaps the most remarkable of his gifts. It is obvious that even his own personality interested him hardly more than that of the cruel, perverse, and yet charming Charlus (certainly the most fascinating character in the long list of his *dramatis personae*) who is here exhibited in all the magnificent insolence of his social genius.

The form of "Cities on the Plain" seemed to me to be determined by its author's conception of society as an artificial institution whose arbitrary standards supplied him, as novelist, with those necessary lines of reference which he could not discover in any rationally defensible scheme of ethics; the form of "The Captive" seems to be, on the contrary, determined by something more closely related to the conception referred to in the key-words "Temps Perdu" of the general title; by, that is to say, the sense of a certain instability as so much the most striking of human characteristics that the discontinuity of experience becomes the most significant feature of one's personal history.

Proust was doubtless led to his all but obsessive interest in the contrast between the absolute value of our desires while they last and the rapidity with which they can, nevertheless, utterly disappear, by his own experience with the complexities of the sexual passion. Though assigning a wholly romantic value to this last he nevertheless completely dissociated the idea of love from the idea of permanence, and his realization of the

fact that a change in his dominant desire made, in effect, a new person of him led him to notice how many similar if less striking examples of the same phenomenon are to be observed when we consider the interests, opinions, and even manners of a man. And at last it came to seem to him that it was folly to speak of himself, of Albertine, or of Charlus as though any one of them were an entity maintaining its identity while time flowed past, and that a novel could be significant only if it were everywhere dominated by the sense that even the personalities for which the constantly recurring names stand are as fluid as the medium through which they float.

I have no way of knowing to what extent Proust was aware of the fact that this dominant concern of his was related to the concern with space and time or the absolute and the relative, with the different aspects of which so many of his contemporaries have been busy. I do not know whether or not he realized that in accepting time as a universal solvent he was rendering it impossible to set up, even within the realm of a single work of art, any of those monumental personalities or passions or principles which give to classic works the air of existing in some eternity exempt from the destructive influence of the flux which makes all merely human things insubstantial and trivial. But whether he realized it or not, he should be the arch enemy of all who hold any classical conceptions of either personality, art, or morals. Others have struggled to rescue something from the flood; they have cherished at least the delusion that there are certain rocks around which the waves break. But his is a universe in which every molecule is fluid.

For Proust, memory is the only enemy of time. It alone links what we are with what we were, and hence it gives a false sense of continuity to our lives. Through its aid, the time that is past may be recovered after a fashion, and to recover it is a necessity if we are to seem to ourselves to have any enduring identity. But even memory rather collects than joins together, and what it gives us is a bag of dissimilar fragments. The aggregate of them is what any one of us calls himself, but it remains only an aggregate, not a meaningful whole. Hence to remember is the last expedient of the man who feels himself dissolving in the eternal flux, even though it leaves him aware that memory alone serves to separate even the detritus of himself from the common ruin into which the passions and purposes of each moment are thrown by the next.

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

An Imperfect Philosophy

Gestalt Psychology. By Wolfgang Köhler. Horace Liveright. $4.

AMERICAN psychologists have long suspected *Gestalttheorie* of concealing a philosophical doctrine at the heart of its argument, and for that reason most of them have made little effort to understand it. Their suspicion must now certainly be substantiated by Wolfgang Kohler's treatise, at the same time that Köhler's explicit formulation of the philosophy underlying gestalt psychology must challenge their characteristic disinclination to consider any theory too obviously tainted by "philosophy."

The challenge is threefold: first, in that the early chapters contain a critical examination of the naive objectivism of the behaviorists, and of the over-simplified mechanism common to both the traditional mentalistic structural psychology and the most radical materialistic behaviorism; second, in the development of the principles of gestalt psychology as a special case of a general ontological theory of *Gestalten;* and, third, because the experiments which Köhler reports cannot be understood without reference to the theory in terms of which they were conceived and executed. This last point is, perhaps, most penetrating, for it is the dominant tendency in American laboratories to make the experiment the thing, as if it were an agency of revelation to be invoked, but never to be understood as the mere creature of a methodology which, in turn, is the formulation of theoretical postulates in terms of instruments and arbitrarily controlled situations. Kohler's book should stop the familiar controversy as to whether the experiments of the gestalt psychologists prove anything new. They prove nothing, and least of all the theory, unless to prove means to illustrate, to demonstrate, or show by a spectacle what has already been said by analysis.

The philosophical theses from which the details of gestalt psychology, including the experimental results, can be deduced assert, first, that nature is a hierarchical organization of whole-part structures; second, that nature is experience and that the distinction between matter and mind derives from the analysis of experience, the differentiating concepts of physics and psychology being intellectual constructs rather than descriptions of existent entities, such as "physical objects" and "mental states"; third, that all relations are internal and hence parts and wholes are reciprocally determinative and determined; and, lastly, that natural events are always a development of such whole-part structures, and therefore all processes of change can be understood as the occurrence of wholes (patterns or *Gestalten*) internally determined.

The critical argument of Köhler's book is implied by these postulates. Behaviorism distinguishes, in terms of a naive epistemology, between objective and subjective as equivalent ontologically to physical and mental; and, viewing the organism and its behavior as members of the physical world, it applies thereto the simple concepts of classical mechanism: atomism, external relations, and efficient causality. Hence the analysis of all behavior into the mechanisms of reflexes and conditionings, the latter being only accidental combinations of reflexes. Introspective or structural psychology is founded similarly on this seventeenth-century "natural philosophy," dealing with sensations instead of reflexes, and the complexes produced by the accidental association of sensations instead of conditional reflexes. In short, Köhler here applies to the traditional psychology of both kinds the same type of criticism which Whitehead has made of Newtonian physics. The "constancy hypothesis" which Kohler points out as underlying the doctrine of pure sensations is a special case of the fallacy of simple location in classical mechanics. Kohler's dynamism is equivalent to Whitehead's organic mechanism.

The positive construction of gestalt psychology also follows as an application of these fundamental assumptions to traditional psychological subject-matter. Perception, association, and reproduction are dynamical part-whole processes, analyzable in terms of the properties of organized wholes. Perceptions and memories are not products of the fortuitous contiguities of past experience but are intrinsically determined by the circumstances of their occurrence. On its descriptive and experimental sides, gestalt psychology seeks to classify these conditions phenomenologically and to create them in the laboratory under control.

This construction is crucially defective, however, in both philosophical and psychological respects. Köhler abandons the phenomenalism of his critical chapters by using the old realistic dichotomy of the structures in the perceptual field versus the physical objects perceived in order to discuss the correspondence of physical and psychological *gestalten;* and adopts a form of atomism by treating the physical media of light and sound as constituted by "indifferently" related elements, thus contradicting the fundamental thesis of the ubiquity of organization. On the psychological side, the inadequacy arises not only from