BOOKS *and the* ARTS

In Memoriam

Look, till all of his years,
Foreshortened in your gaze,
Become, as under glass,
A few intensest days.

See? The courageous head—
The brown one—the white—
It flickers like a single
Star in densest night.

Listen. But no sound.
Not even glancing here.
The fever in him flashes:
The love against the fear.

Anxiety in this man
Yet could not kill the heart,
That now is burning coal,
And his immensest part.

The panic, the distress—
Oh, brothers, do not cry.
His love alone is climbing
The fences of the sky.

MARK VAN DOREN

Historical Sources of Totalitarianism

THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM. By Hannah Arendt. Harcourt, Brace and Company. $6.75.

IN "The Origins of Totalitarianism" Dr. Hannah Arendt—a trained philosopher, a discerning critic, and a recognized authority on anti-Semitism—has produced what is without question a remarkable book. It is certainly the most important work on totalitarianism that has appeared since Franz Neumann's "Behemoth." Like "Behemoth" it is the product of a rigorously trained and scrupulously honest mind, impatient with easy explanations and verbal fluency. It reflects the high intellectual level of the German emigration of the 1930's, which has done American thinking an inestimable service by setting a standard that the native-born have rarely been able to match. To a reader surfeited with the vacuous rhetoric that is currently doing service as the discussion of public affairs, Dr. Arendt's book comes as a salutary mental shock. It is good to find a writer who offers her readers no compromises, no escape from the hard necessity of thinking. This is no book to leaf through in an idle hour. It is one to read and ponder during many long evenings. Those who have the patience to do so will emerge much the wiser.

Dr. Arendt approaches her subject from three directions. In the late nineteenth century, she argues, three movements, seemingly unrelated, were converging to produce the type of mind and political activity that was to evolve into totalitarianism only after the First World War. What united these movements was that they all reflected—and accelerated—the collapse of the European class structure and nation-state concept. Class and nation-state had alone given reality to the "rights of man." Without them, these rights were reduced to mere abstractions. With the dissolution of the basic institutions of European society, there were no barriers left against what "became this century's curse only because it so terrifyingly took care of its problems."

The first of the preparatory movements was anti-Semitism. This subject Dr. Arendt attacks with characteristic courage and originality. Refusing to accept the conventional explanation that the Jews simply became the "scapegoats" for unscrupulous demagogic agitation, she seeks out the reasons why they offered the logical target. It was their intimate connection with the nation-state, she finds, that marked the Jews for destruction. As financiers of all European governments, they had won for themselves the hatred of the political movements that saw in the state the enemy to be conquered. But the irony of the case was that the real growth of anti-Semitism should have come only after the Jews had ceased to be influential. With the advent of imperialism in the late nineteenth century they had lost their near monopoly of state business. European Jewry had become "an object of universal hatred because of its useless wealth, and of contempt because of its lack of power."

Meanwhile the second movement, overseas imperialism, had "undermined the very foundations of the nation-state." As a doctrine of "expansion for expansion's sake" imperialism brought under the control of the nation-state backward areas that simply could not be integrated into the traditional political framework. Moreover, the novel experience of confronting vast assemblages of primitive and totally alien human beings taught the Europeans to forget their moral scruples. In the exploitation of Africa mass murder and unspeakable brutality became the rule. For the first time in history racism attained the status of self-conscious doctrine and practice. And it was racism—with its "contempt for labor, hatred of territorial limitation, general rootlessness, and an activistic faith in one's own divine chosenness"—that was most deeply to mark the movements of the future.

Overseas imperialism had one saving grace. It at least "drew a sharp line between colonial methods and normal domestic policies." With the third movement—what Dr. Arendt calls "tribal nationalism"—this line disappeared. In Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism the "concept of cohesive expansion does not allow for any geographic distance between the methods and institutions of colony and of nation." Under the ostensible aim of uniting all individuals speaking a common language, this new form of nationalism actually preached the world supremacy of a master-race. Its tone was vague and messianic from the start. It gave to those whose national and personal ambitions had been frustrated the consoling assurance of their own superiority.

Out of these three movements came totalitarianism—an unprecedented "madness," originating in the "mob," the "refuse of all classes," and led by déclassé intellectuals. With the subsequent declassing of vast segments of the population, the "mob" dissolved into the "masses." These masses—the "superfluous men" of our era—had nothing to lose by following their leaders into the most irrational and reckless of ventures. All they sought was to merge with something larger than themselves, to give up their useless indi-

vidualities to a movement that "thought in continents and felt in centuries." And their leaders were happy to offer them a fictitious world that could "outrageously insult common sense" by imposing its own crazy consistency upon a real world where common sense had lost its validity.

Dr. Arendt's interpretation of totalitarianism is at the same time illuminating and open to serious objections. The chief of these is that like totalitarianism itself Dr. Arendt's definition has too much internal consistency. It is insufficiently flexible to allow room for local and ideological variation. On the one hand it leads her to neglect the milder forms of fascism and to concentrate on Nazism—the extreme and hence for her the most significant case. In passing over as pre-totalitarian the one-party tyrannies of Mussolini and Franco she slights what may actually be most relevant to the history of the 1950's. For as examples and prototypes Italian and Spanish Fascism, far more than Nazism, can exert attraction today.

On the other hand, this unitary view of the totalitarian phenomenon causes Dr. Arendt to slur over the differences between German and Soviet totalitarianism. Obviously she knows more about Germany than about Russia, and we get the impression that she not infrequently extrapolates from Nazi to Bolshevist experience. For Nazism she provides a full ideological background. But in the case of Bolshevism we are left with a near void of a quarter of a century between the agitation of the Pan-Slavists and the triumph of Stalin. We are suddenly confronted with Soviet communism as the totalitarian equivalent of Nazism without any adequate account of how it got to be that way. The fate of classic Marxism in Russia, the complex process by which Pan-Slavism transformed it by fusing with it in the Stalinist credo—all this is telescoped into a few sentences.

For her knowledge of Soviet economics Dr. Arendt has relied heavily on such highly personal accounts as Kravchenko's "I Chose Freedom." If she had consulted some of the professional economic analyses, she might have been less ready to dismiss the first Five-Year Plan as "insanity." For Bolshevism conflicts with her definition by being *both* more totalitarian and more rational than Nazism. In Nazi Germany the average individual enjoyed more freedom than in the Soviet Union, but if he happened to be sent to a concentration camp he was probably worse off than someone meeting a similar fate in Russia. We may agree with Dr. Arendt that the police mentality is the decisive influence in both regimes. But we should like to see some analysis of the differences that have given to Soviet communism its greater resiliency and staying power.

Some critics would go on to say that it is Dr. Arendt's whole method that is at fault—that her procedure of constructing imaginary "ideal types" cannot fail to do violence to the facts. Here the present reviewer vigorously dissents. No doubt Dr. Arendt does push her data to the farthest limits of verisimilitude. Her account of the racist tradition in South Africa, for example, is exaggerated even for that unhappy country. But this method has the virtues of its faults. It lights up in marvelous flashes of understanding the dark corners of recent history where the documents can never penetrate. In turning to new and unsuspected purposes such familiar literary masterpieces as Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," Kipling's "Kim," Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," and Proust's "Remembrance of Things Past," she has struck out for an uncharted domain where history and fantasy can meet on common ground. The result may be unconventional history, but it is a magnificent effort of creative imagination.

For all her exaggerations, then, Dr. Arendt has written a great book. Deeply thought-out and conscientiously documented, "The Origins of Totalitarianism" will take its place among the major writings of our times. The record could scarcely be more dreadful. But as she concludes her melancholy account, Dr. Arendt rises above a conventional despair. In the very futility of totalitarianism she sees hope for its eventual destruction. To the totalitarian threat to change "human nature" itself she opposes an equally total declaration of human responsibility. Her book is a moving testament of solidarity with all the "superfluous people" now living out their meaningless days in all the concentration camps of the earth.

H. STUART HUGHES

The Art of Willa Cather

WILLA CATHER. A Critical Introduction. By David Daiches. Cornell University Press. $2.75.

WILLA CATHER was very reserved about her private life, and her literary executors have never released such documents as they possess. That is one, though it is certainly not the only, reason why Mr. Daiches has made his study critical rather than biographical. Known events are cited when they are relevant, but the emphasis is always on a systematic analysis of the novels and stories themselves.

Notoriously the text of a work of fiction is usually too long to lend itself readily to the sort of examination in which the "new criticism" delights. What two different readers remember is never quite the same novel. One must pick and choose passages; there can never be complete agreement as to which ones should be chosen, and never, therefore, any pretense that every detail of the whole has been taken into consideration. Nevertheless, and without any undue pretensions, Mr. Daiches does demonstrate how much can be accomplished by a qualified critic who refuses to be content with the impression produced by a whole and resolutely determines to discover by the analysis of specific passages how certain effects were achieved. If in the end there is something which continues to elude both him and us, if there is some lingering doubt as to what Miss Cather finally intended, that is probably because, as the reader of her last novels inevitably suspects, it eluded her also.

Mr. Daiches's minimum achievement is to establish solidly and in very clear outline certain characteristics which go to make up the general impression the attentive reader gradually formed as the novels appeared one after another. In the first place, and despite the fact that Miss Cather was properly praised for her "American" attitudes and themes, there was nothing of the folk writer about her. She was already definitely "literary" in her college days; professionalism was part of her ideal; and as managing editor of *McClure's* she must have gained considerable familiarity with the methods of popular fiction. That may even account for the fact that she sometimes conde-