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The problem, then, is not whether the Centre's work is relevant to non-academics, but whether it can be seen by them to be relevant—does the language include or exclude them? These days it is so easy to sound like a marxist intellectual (there are a limited number of code words) that people are beginning to assume anyone using these words has nothing new to say.

The Centre certainly doesn't deserve such criticism, but this collection does feed two of my worries about contemporary cultural studies. "Who would now have the courage to insist that we ought simply to have just done more 'good empirical work'?" asks Stuart Hall. Well I still would, if not simply. My worry is not the Centre's focus on theory, but its use of theories which are based on "bad empirical work." Foucault-inspired histories, for example, are often plain wrong, and no amount of translating "fact" into "discourse" can convince me otherwise. Even Lacanian theories rest on empirical assertions about children that I am not as willing as everyone else seems to be to take on trust.

My second worry is about language and style. It is ironic that the thoughts of such individualistic, idiosyncratic writers as Barthes, Foucault and Lacan (the certainty of their author-ity is central to their unique styles) should be so often embedded in British texts as impersonal jargon. Cultural studies must be theoretical, but they should be fun, too—they should, to use Paul Willis's emphasis, *surprise*. It is heartening that the most surprising section of *Culture, Media, Language* is the last, the English Study Group's account of working through theory. This collection ends, I am glad to say, with a ringing defence of romantic fiction.

## Not so much a novel

Michael Thelwell  
*The Harder They Come*  
Pluto Press £2.95 paperback/£6.95 hardback

### C. L. R. James

*The Harder They Come* is a novel, based on a successful film of the same name. In it Michael Thelwell rejects the tenets of the west. The central character of both films and novel is Rhygin, legendary gunman and songwriter who lived in and around Kingston, Jamaica, in the late 1950s. But in his preface Thelwell says that he has added details, creating characters and situations to strengthen the essential character of the film. Thelwell teaches third world literature in the University of Massachusetts.

We see Rhygin as a small boy living in rural Jamaica. Up on the hill in the country, Ivan (Ivanhoe)—that is his real name—is surrounded by the African foods and African ways of the black people (Akan, Ashanti, Yoruba, Mandingo, Wolof, Ibo and Bantu) who have recreated African habits and outlooks, and with much talk about Marcus Garvey. The author relies mainly on dialect to convey the quality of this Afro-West Indian life.

Ivan runs away and takes a bus into Kingston—known to him and all his associates as Babylon. His two bags, of clothes and things, are stolen and he makes friends with some of the Kingston waywards, who have nothing to give him. He is reduced to sleeping where he can and eating when he can.

Finally he is taken in by a church organisation under Preacher, a black evangelist from the United States who has been sent to save the Jamaican heathen from perdition. There he meets Elsa, an attractive young woman who has been saved by Preacher. Elsa returns his interest, to the disapproval—personal as well as religious—of Preacher. Longah, who is also working at Preacher's, resents the intrusion of Ivan; they fight; Ivan nearly kills him, is arrested and is sentenced to corporal punishment.

We are now at page 275 and we haven't got a hint of the life and exploits of a great ghetto gunman. Ultimately it turns out that Ivan can sing reggae. He makes a record, which would obviously be a great hit except that the producer suppresses the record to prevent Ivan becoming a star. Ivan (at last) is admitted into a secret society of all the street boys in Kingston who live by starvation jobs or simple stealing. When the day becomes dark they meet at arranged spots for their games and adventures, bearing the names and imitating the film styles of Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Cagney and so on. The cinematic violence is reproduced and Ivan kills.

It is when facing arrest and death that Ivan becomes a legendary gunman, by what he does, by what rumour attributes to him, and by the author's excitement. Known now as Rhygin, after exploits worthy of a Bogart-Cagney Jamaican gunman, he finds his way back to his rural beginning where he dies. He has made an association with the girl Elsa and she is faithful to him through very difficult days; but in the end she betrays information about him to Preacher.

The book (392 closely packed pages) lacks a central direction and the author seems fascinated by episode after episode, many of which lack connection with anything—not even the character of Ivan. But perhaps that is what Michael Thelwell means to convey about Jamaica today. This book is no ordinary novel; it is a social challenge.

## Freudian legacy

Erich Fromm  
*Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought*  
Jonathan Cape £4.95

### Rosemary Dinnage

The flyleaf of this posthumous book lists only four books by Erich Fromm; but in fact in his 40-odd years of teaching and psychoanalysis in the United States he was one of the most prolific of the neo-Freudians. Trained at the Berlin Institute of Psychoanalysis, grounded in sociology and philosophy, and (in his own way) a lifelong marxist, Fromm produced slightly too many, slightly too long books with

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words like "freedom," "man" and "hope" in their titles, containing a limited stock of original ideas. The ideas, though, and the drift of all his work, are unexceptionably sane and persuasive as a critique of how we live now.

Fromm was much engaged, before it was fashionable to be so, in sifting the gold from the dross in psychoanalysis. It is ironic that he should have died before this concise little book appeared in English, for now that the Freudian legacy is being examined with real seriousness it is very timely. Twenty years ago, no doubt, it would have been dismissed as milk-and-water revisionism by the true believers, and ignored by the rest as irrelevant.

Fromm allots more space to the "limitations" than to the "greatness" of Freud. His greatness he sees in the discovery that "truth" lies much deeper buried in us than we had assumed; that repression has spread a layer of rationalisation over it; that we must now subject the apparently reasonable and virtuous to a new, stringent scrutiny. He also endorses (with reservations) Freud's reassessment of dreams and all that that implies, and his understanding and use of transference in the therapeutic relationship.

Chief of Freud's limitations, on the other hand, is his subjection to the bourgeois materialism of his time: his very model of superego/ego/id assumes a *canaille* kept under control by overlords, and his picture of women as frigid, narcissistic men *man-quéés* Fromm sees as the patriarchal

orthodoxy of the period. Freud's very conception of love, Fromm points out, is commercial: "libido" is invested in the "love-object," who produces a return on the investment for the buyer. Fromm might have looked even more closely at Freud's attitude to women and linked it to his distrust of imagination and creativity, and his blindness to men's envy of female fertility.

## Radical drama

Catherine Itzin  
*Stages in the Revolution: political theatre in Britain since 1968*  
Eyre Methuen £4.50 paperback / £9.95 hardback

### Raymond Williams

It is both true and, at first sight, surprising that the most active socialist cultural production in Britain in the last 15 years has been in the theatre. For theatre still belongs to a minority audience, and the problem throughout has been the relation between this minority status and the intention to produce new kinds of popular drama. Catherine Itzin's informative book records both what has been happening and the continuing arguments inside it.

The subtitle isolates "theatre," but the movement has been more complex. On the one hand, some of this work has moved very deliberately, whenever it had the opportunity, into the quite different structures and very much larger audiences of television. On the other hand, some of it has moved in the opposite direction, away from established theatres to fringe theatres, occasional performances, touring and roadshows, plays in schools and youth clubs and canteens. All this has been happening, moreover, within the major period of subsidised theatre, now a distinct sector from the commercial theatre. Some playwrights and companies belong distinctly to one or other of these tendencies, but there has also been considerable movement between them.

The factual record which Itzin offers is, then, necessary reading. For it is one of the paradoxes of the period that tendencies and plays which are very well known inside the movement may be literally not known about at all even to its friends and allies if they happen to live in the wrong place. And just what "wrong" means, in this context, is a critical question. There is an analogous situation in the comparably lively world of radical political groups and magazines. In London, in some university cities, and at certain assemblies, there is an almost bewildering variety of work on offer, with intensive production and internal dispute. Yet you can move just 20 or 30 miles and, unless by conscious effort, barely know that any of it is happening.

The most significant underlying disagreement, within this general movement, has related to just this point. Some writers, for example Trevor Griffiths, have moved into television and its majority audiences whenever an opportunity came or could be created. The argument between that option and the subsidised theatre, right up to the National which has made room for several

of these writers, is less interesting, I think, than the argument based on a contrast between the dispersed, perhaps passive, television audience and the potentially new and otherwise deprived audiences sought by the roadshows. The most interesting work and ideas, within this particular contrast, are those of John McGrath.

Within so energetic, restless and complex a movement it would be surprising if one found much coherent and consistent argument. Some of the positions taken up read like defences or rationalisations of recent choices, made from a precarious situation with many powerful external determinations. Others, such as the relation of radical theatre to marxism or revolutionary socialism often sound and are ad hoc and rhetorical. But it would be wrong to suppose that the general argument can be reduced to these characteristics.

The central controversy about the institutions was inevitable in this period, when the sites of all three possible tendencies—television, subsidised theatre, roadshows—were expanding or could look for funds to expand. What is going to have to be faced in the eighties is a steady loss of relatively free opportunities, and a consequent revaluation of the arguments from abstract principle. The climate of restriction will be miserable and destructive, but the arguments may then find a more solid general base. Some of the best contributions are already pointing this way.

What may also happen is the development of more serious argument about actual and possible dramatic methods. Some of this has begun, as in recent exchanges about realism and naturalism, but it is noticeable how much more often the discussion has centred on possible or ideal audiences, and on general political positions, than on the problems of writing and production. That is indeed the legacy of the generation of 1968, from which Itzin quite properly begins. Yet at the level of ideas, and especially of assumptions and moods, that generation is now almost as historical as those of 1956 or 1936.

Moreover, now that this is happening, it will become more and more necessary to distinguish between genuinely innovative vitality—a unique resource for the bitter period ahead—and what Lukács, writing of a somewhat comparable phase, called an "empty dynamism." Some of the emphases on the vitality of live theatre as such, and then the too easy contrast with "the box," seems to me to need reconsideration with this distinction in mind. But then the point can be applied also to ways of using television, where the discussion, recently, has taken a distinctly formalist turn.

It is a measure of the problems so many of us face, in so many fields, that it is very difficult to integrate discussion of institutions, of beliefs and of practical methods. But the attempt has now again to be made, and in this area of radical drama especially, where both the production and the running argument have been so intense. Catherine Itzin's book is very welcome as a record, but it ends with all the questions still open.

## Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

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