

## Of Blood and Iron

The Fox in The Attic. By Richard Hughes. Harper. \$4.50.

by Edwin Kennebeck

"IN ENGLAND the ending of the war had come like waking from a bad dream: in defeated Germany, as the signal for deeper levels of nightmare." *The Fox in The Attic*, Richard Hughes' first installment of a long novel of his times, begins in 1923 as a kind of diptych—England in one panel, Germany in the other—which illustrates another division, stated by Bismarck in the previous century: "The great questions of the day will not be settled by resolutions and majority vote . . . but by blood and iron."

Hughes' central character, Augustine Penny-Herbert, is, like the author, just as old as the century. Not caring to become involved in national life, whether it be waking from a dream or writhing with nightmares, Augustine departs from the England of resolutions and votes to visit some distantly related cousins near Munich, where he gradually senses that, only five years after the "death" of Germany, the blood and iron are already in preparation.

It takes Augustine some time to realize this because he is not much interested in the curious preoccupations of his Army-officer hosts. He is bored by the talk of the Bolshevik menace and the hated Weimar Republic; he doesn't understand or care why a servant in a Munich hotel should give him millions of marks for his ten-shilling note. He is scarcely aware of the meaning of the abortive *Putsch* of November 1923.

But he is not an insensitive man; soon after cousin Walther has met his train, he sees Walther's two little girls take a nasty little fall on their sled, and watches with alarm as they stiffen under the sharp, mocking shout of their father. (Back in England his own six-year-old niece had bounded from her bathtub to greet him, with only affectionate grumbles from her nurse for comment.) He is deeply stricken with love for Walther's older daughter Mitzi, who is going blind. And final-

ly he realizes that he is not going to find the kind of "new Germany" he had expected.

Richard Hughes personalizes these moments in history with remarkable vividness and pace, ranging boldly away from his central character to tell us what is going on in the minds of others. A funny old coroner in Wales gets drunk and tries to tease the bishop at a banquet. The hyper-emotional wife of a nearly fanatical English minister of religion tries to rationalize the accidental death of their little girl. A young man who lives in a castle attic in Germany, quite insane from the horrors he endured in the local Baltic wars after 1918, plots murder for the sake of the fatherland. His brother, who works in a Munich hotel, spends his spare time in a gymnasium, proud to belong to "a noble sodality, the very flower of German youth." We even look in on the mind of Adolf Hitler, hiding from the police after the November fiasco—the Hitler who is on the verge of writing *Mein Kampf*.

Hughes, when he chooses to be, is a master of indirection. Not for him an opening sentence that says, "Augustine was planning to visit his German cousins." No, we start with the "steady creaking" of swans as they fly out toward the sea, and a man (who turns out to be Augustine) carrying a dead child. A few pages later, as Augustine stands in the billiard room of his large manor in Wales and muses over the uncles from whom he had inherited the place—because the primary heir had been killed in the war—we learn in casual parenthesis that Augustine's sister had visited the German cousins ten years before. Then the matter is dropped until Hughes sees fit to pick up that thread and weave it in again *naturally*: all of which is to say that we have a book by that rare type, a man who recognizes novel-writing as an art. Whatever else he is up to, we know that he is especially concerned with constructing a novel.

But we might question the master constructor on at least two points. Why does he allow himself to intrude, now and then, with little essays on the nature of self and nationality? His comments are interesting;

primitive man, he says, knows that "there is always some overspill of self into penumbral regions . . . He accepts as naturally as the birds and beasts do his union with part of his environment. . . ." This is to lead later to an explanation of the madness of Hitler: "The universe contained no other persons than him, only things." He was "an ego without a penumbra." But Hughes also develops a "we-theory," valid enough but not particularly original, which causes a break in the flow of images—something that could possibly have been worked more solidly into one of the character's point of view.

A second criticism is that our central point of interest, Augustine, remains dimmer than most of the other characters. This may be only a relative matter, attesting to the clarity of the others; but it keeps the story from being firmly based; the effect is a little like that of a family portrait in which Father's face hasn't been filled in.

The reasons for this may have to do with Hughes' plans for the future volumes; as we read *The Fox in the Attic* we can strongly feel the pull of the sequels. Hitler is arrested and must bide his time; a little English boy named Sylvanus, whom his mother subconsciously blames for the deaths of both his sister and his father, must, presumably, grow up and watch World War II overtake his adolescence; Augustine, not having spoken for his beloved Mitzi in time to prevent her being packed off to a convent (what good is a blind girl to the new Germany?), must flee from that insane land.

But despite an occasional falter, this first installment promises a skillful, compelling nightmare-tale of blood and iron calling down blood and iron upon themselves.

### Fromm's Act of Faith

May Man Prevail? By Erich Fromm. Doubleday. \$3.50.

by Daniel M. Friedenberg

MR ERICH FROMM, the noted psychoanalyst and apostle of a humanized Marx, has written a pas-

sonate plea for sanity in the nuclear age. Fromm's *May Man Prevail?* is a study of American and Russian relations which attempts to cut beneath what the author considers the myths on both sides to arrive at a basis upon which universal disarmament and peace may be founded.

Mr. Fromm first discusses the "fictions" of foreign policy. United States attitudes, in his thought, are dominated by a series of clichés. The most important of these is the conviction that the Russians want to conquer the world for revolutionary communism. Another is that Soviet philosophy has imposed atheism and a new concept of morality on the people of Russia. A third is that the best defense against a policy of force is counter-force.

But the "facts" of foreign policy are quite different, the author is convinced. Russia is a managerial and conservative police state whose revolutionary ideology is only a rationale to cover her desire for a stable *status quo*. The Communist chiefs fear German unification and rearmament more than American capitalism. The Soviet party is most terrified of China becoming head of a revolutionary bloc of truly aggressive states. And thus peace would be possible if only the United States would understand the tensions under which the ruling elite of Russia operate and accommodate accordingly.

It is a tribute to Mr. Fromm's humanity that he wants peace so badly he is willing to give the benefit of the doubt to every Russian position. But the sum total of the arguments is unconvincing. One is reminded of the story concerning Heinrich Mann. This novelist, who before World War I was more famous than his brother Thomas, had been a Communist for many years and had followed the tortuous Stalinist line with absolute fidelity. When Russia and Germany signed their pact in 1939, the exiled Germans were called to a meeting by the Comintern. The "new line" was explained while the men sat around a marble table. There was silence when the Russian delegate concluded. Then Heinrich Mann got up.

"You have been explaining the line to me for years" he said, "and I al-

ways managed to believe you. But when I am told that this marble table is a fish pool and the colors in the marble goldfish, then I can believe no more."

Many of the arguments Mr. Fromm uses are goldfish of the species 1961. Russia is threatened "by the growing onslaught of the underdeveloped countries under China's leadership." The neutral countries are attracted by "democratic, decentralized socialism," represented, among others, by those hu-

manists Tito and Nasser. The Cuban Communist Party was held in contempt by Castro and "Castro was never a Communist." When the Communist catechism says "Communism will be victorious all over the world" or Khrushchev states "We will bury you" this does not imply that the Soviet Union believes in force or subversion, and indeed, Khrushchev's policy is "evolutionary, non-aggressive."

In fact, "The Soviet Union's policy is strategically speaking a defensive

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one." We are told by fiat that "Germany is already the strongest military power in Europe," that Germans are wrong to want a reunified country and that Germany is the great threat to world peace. Though Mr. Fromm wants universal disarmament, he asserts that arms control "is part of a theory of armament, not of disarmament."

Perhaps it is unfair to take sentences out of context. But these quotations are typical of the theme. At bottom, Mr. Fromm has deposited an act of faith, namely that if the United States would neutralize West Germany, give China long-term credits and submit to disarmament without inspection and controls, then Russia would be happy to live in peace with the West. But the author is not content to accept this as an act of faith, but must prove that his position is correct. Since the evidence is at best most dubious, he has to juggle the facts.

One might even say that Mr. Fromm is repeating in politics his private profession; as a psychoanalyst, he is embroidering his faith (Freud) in what he considers science (Freudian hypotheses). If we do not accept his "sane" premises, we are told that our thinking is "pathologic." And the learned analyst has a bad habit of attributing not merely pathology to those who disagree; he revels in name calling; his opponents are suffering from "illusion . . . fantasy . . . demagoguery . . . naivety . . . paranoid thinking . . ."

Disregarding the polemic cast and strained rationalizations, much of value is embedded in *May Man Prevail*. It is always useful to see who refuses to accept prevailing thought. Erich Fromm is deeply concerned with the dehumanization implied by the acceptance of the possibility of nuclear war. The pages that analyze the psychological background of Herman Kahn's *On Thermonuclear War* are certainly the most passionate in the book.

It serves well to be reminded again and again that it was Germany which twice invaded Russia in our lifetime, inflicting frightful loss of life on the Russian people. The author is correct in pointing out that

certain Soviet tactics are a result of pressures from China. And Mr. Fromm is anti-Communist in the best way, starting from the idea of spiritual degradation under a totalitarian state principle rather than playing statistical game with automobile and refrigerators. Actually, Dr. Fromm's approach resembles in many ways that of many leaders of the new African and Asian nations. In their view, Russia practices only a very limited form of imperialism in Eastern Europe since she is concerned with her own security. But whatever position America takes, it is viewed as imperialist and anti-progressive.

This reviewer happens to agree with some of Mr. Fromm's presuppositions. Yet *May Man Prevail* is irritating since its author resolves serious problems and contradictions too easily. He has a glib quality, superficial integration of psychology, history and politics, which disqualifies him as a profoundly original thinker. But only time will tell whether his basic act of faith—as distinguished from the facile argument he uses to support it—will be justified by future events.

#### REVIEWERS

John Ratté is a member of the history department at Harvard University. This is his second appearance in *The Commonweal*.

Edwin Kennebeck, a regular reviewer, is on the staff of a leading New York publishing house.

Daniel M. Friedenberg is a frequent contributor of articles and reviews.

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#### Periodical

• Have you read the March issue of THE CURRENT Harvard-Radcliffe Catholic Club Quarterly \$3.00 per annum 20 Arrow Street Cambridge 38, Mass.

## Correspondence

(Continued from Page 2)

when he reads out of a book toward the wall, performs a few gyrations and busies himself with a golden cup?"

Why do so many American Catholics choose to tell this to a French priest? Maybe as an homage to the European liturgical movement, or because they have found in their parish priests too much of this "conservatism" that Father Reinhold depicts as unjustified and spurious.

Anyway, after six visits to your country, I can say that many Catholics are ready to adopt with enthusiasm the reforms promoted by the Holy See, despite the "few pockets of resistance." Too often, isn't this resistance passive, made of a lack of information, and an easy acceptance of the famous posture of laymen at Mass: "on his knees, the right hand holding his rosary, and in his left a collection envelope!"

May many journals like *The Commonweal* convince American priests (and especially pastors) that the harvest is at hand; they will be helped by all these Catholics who are thrilled by the participation of the congregations here.

"With patience and tenacity," Father Reinhold writes: with confidence, I'll add, for the victory will be easier than many think.

(ABBE) F. L. DUPRE

#### HINDU STARGAZERS

La Crescenta, Calif.  
TO THE EDITORS: Your whimsical editorial [Feb. 16] on the Hindu astrologers' appeal to Khetu as the savior from their predicted catastrophes sounds a little thin to one who is constantly exposed to the agnostic mind.

Of course you and I know that there's all the difference in the universe between a celestial body that can't be discerned and the illimitable, invisible presence of our heavenly Father; but to the agnostic it will look a good deal like the Pop calling the Khetu black.

I swear that line was the end point, not the beginning of this train of thought.

But lately I have been warning my agnostic friends of how they are doomed to spend their purgatory—waiting to say, "I'll be damned," but not daring to. LEON LUKASZEWSKI

#### A REQUEST

London

TO THE EDITORS: This April *The Wind and the Rain* is coming to life as an Easter Book. Apart from poems, stories and articles, there will be a hundred-page section devoted

to the writings and influence of Teilhard de Chardin.

Future Easter Books will include special sections devoted to such subjects as "The Infant Prodigy" and "Brainwashing." I am anxious to hear from writers who have studied either subject, as well as from those who may have been or met infant prodigies themselves, or who may have undergone any form of brainwashing—political, social or religious.

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE

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