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NO. 6

# ADVENTURES IN READING

Nineteenth Series

AGATHA BOYD ADAMS

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# LAMPS FOR THE WAYFARER

No longer is it possible, in the selection of representative fiction of a given season, to avoid books about the war; that would mean confining the choice almost entirely to detective fiction or historical novels. In The Shape of Books to Come, Donald Adams makes the statement that "the novel, since the time of its maturity . . . has more rapidly and more sensitively reflected the temper of its time than any other literary medium." If this is true, and the present writer is inclined to agree, it follows that in wartime the quality of fiction is bound to be uneven, shaken out of equilibrium by the dynamics of events, which crowd in upon the author's consciousness too rapidly and too violently for either assimilation or understanding. Few writers are capable of the detachment which enabled Jane Austin to write as if the Napoleonic wars were not even a far-off rumble, but then Jane Austin was not assailed by daily news and radio. The reader of fiction in wartime can find interest always in observing how writers, both the experienced and the inexperienced, cope with the hot unmalleable stuff of which history is being made. He can also feel grateful to the few gifted writers who offer a moment's release from the daily impact of the news.

Donald Adams, in his essays on American literature past, present and to come, provides an excellent background for a study of current writing. He contemplates current trends in their relation to the whole stream of the past, which gives his discussion a pleasant reasonableness and sense of balance. His tastes in reading are catholic, and in Henry Van Dyke's words, he is always "more governed by his likes than his dislikes."

The Leaning Tower, Katherine Anne Porter's collection of stories, offers a sample of some of the best writing being done in this country today. Most of these tales are reminiscent of childhood; only in the title story is she concerned with issues of the present day. The crystal quality of her prose gives to her stories the sort of enchantment which clear water lends to the colored pebbles and tiny mosses at the bottom of a spring. She is always and preeminently the artist in prose.

### 1. A GLANCE INTO THE FUTURE

The Shape of Books to Come, by Donald Adams

Note that the author's experience as editor of the Book Review Section of the New York Times has prepared him for writing a book of this sort.

He states his personal "bases and biases." What are they? How does he define the function of literature?

Discuss his application of Max Eastman's statement, that poetry is "unconditionally upon the side of life," to literature in general. Be prepared to apply this definition to other books studied in this program.

What does he say about the "writer's obligation to communicate"?

Apply this to certain modern authors.

Sketch briefly the period of American literature which he characterizes as "the Doldrums."

Comment on his evaluation of Dreiser and his influence; of Faulkner, Wolfe, Hemingway.

"An affirmative tone was more often heard in the work of the women." Discuss the authors whom he uses to illustrate this point.

What reasons does he give for finding Sinclair Lewis and John Steinbeck "positive in spirit"?

Discuss his comments on modern poetry; on the importance of American regionalism.

What tendencies does he see in the literature that is now in the making? Note his references to John Hersey's A Bell for Adano, to the change in Hemingway and Huxley, to the popular interest in books that affirm a faith, such as The Song of Bernadette.

As this program goes on, see if you can trace any of these tendencies in the books studied here.

# Additional Reading:

The Opinions of Oliver Allston, by Van Wyck Brooks (who agrees with Adams on the need for a literature of affirmation)

A Certain Measure, by Ellen Glasgow

#### 2. AN ARTIST IN PROSE

The Leaning Tower and Other Stories, by Katherine Anne Porter

The first six stories deal with the same group of characters and the same background. Discuss some of these, e.g. the grandmother, or Miranda. Discuss the author's treatment of the Negro characters, e.g. Nannie and Uncle Jimbilly. Note her skill in evoking the atmosphere of southern country life in the early part of this century. The Miranda of these stories also appears in *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider*.

"The Downward Path to Wisdom" has an almost terrifying cumulative effect. Show how this is built up.

"A Day's Work" is different in mood and background from the other stories. Is the author equally effective here? "The Leaning Tower" is really a short novel. Comment on the author's ability to interpret the atmosphere of a foreign country as skilfully as that of home in the first six stories. Note the symbolism of the title.

"Her stories, very simply told, leave behind them an impression of complexity and depth, of beauty as well, although they are largely concerned with hard, cruel facts." Does this statement, which was made concerning Flowering Judas, apply also to the stories in this collection?

Comment on the quality of her prose, and the harmony which she

achieves between her ideas and her style.

# Additional Reading:

Pale Horse, Pale Rider, by Katherine Anne Porter Flowering Judas, by Katherine Anne Porter

# BEYOND THE STRATOSPHERE

"Wee cam in view of a great countrie in the aire, like to a shining Island".—Lucian

On that shining island of the moon, Lucian encountered immortal warriors who rode three-headed birds, and waged constant warfare with the inhabitants of the sun. Centuries later Bishop Godwin, conveyed to the moon by the strong wings of a fleet of wild swans, found it a place without want, unrest, or war. Cyrano de Bergerac journeyed thither on the motive power of bottles of dew, pulled up by the moon's magic. Jules Verne reached it in a rocket shot from a cannon. And so on, over and over again, men have dreamed and written of sailing through interplanetary space. Recent actual achievements with rockets give an ugly practicability to these fantasies, and the dream persists. It is well to keep in mind Lemeirre's saying: "To believe that everything has been discovered is just as profound an error as it would be to accept the horizon as the world's boundary."

In *Perelandra*, and *Out of the Silent Planet*, C. S. Lewis makes an enchanting innovation in tales of interplanetary adventure. His novels are totally different from the Martian tales of H. G. Wells, or the hairbreadth series of Edgar Rice Burroughs. His rare combination of mysticism and adventure, akin to that of Antoine de St. Exupéry, the beauty of his style, and the poetry of his imagination, set these novels apart from the humdrum and the contrived. For the reader who is ready to follow his fantasy, he offers refreshing moments of escape, and some subtly suggestive reflections.

#### 1. By Space Machine to Mars

Out of the Silent Planet, by C. S. Lewis

The author has created here a whole mythology; comment on the reality with which he characterizes the "hrossa" (poets), the "sorns" (philosophers), the "pfilftriggi" (craftsmen).

Describe the physical aspects of Malcandra; how does it look and feel? Does the author succeed in making it at once terrifying and attractive?

Why is the earth, from this remote point of view, known as "the silent planet"?

Discuss the essential conflict between Weston and Ransom; implicit in Weston's ambitions is a commentary on some of the problems of our own world.

Show how the author uses this conflict to give drama to his story.

Emphasize the theme of renunciation and change: "old worlds must die and new ones take their place." You will find this more fully developed in *Perelandra*.

Comment on the author's skill in conjuring up an atmosphere of horror, as shown in the trip back in the space ship.

## 2. A New World Begins

# Perelandra, by C. S. Lewis

Here in the opening chapter the author's mastery of horror is again shown, as in *Out of the Silent Planet*.

Describe the physical conditions which Ransom finds on Perelandra. Does he succeed in conveying a sense of beauty in his descriptions of fantastic trees, flowers, islands and mountains? Perhaps only a very good swimmer could have taken such delight in imagining a land of water, forever floating.

Comment on the symbolism in this land of incessant change: all life is change; the individual must always be ready to go on to the new. Show how this theme is developed.

Weston puts on here the character of evil more definitely than in *Out of the Silent Planet*. His conversations with the Green Lady are an allegory of good and evil. Discuss the temptations he sets before her.

Comment on Lewis's mystic idea of renunciation, of submission to the inner voice. It will be interesting to return to this later when you discuss Aldous Huxley's *Time Must Have a Stop*.

What solution does he offer for the "terrible slavery of appetite and hate and economics and government which our race knows so well"?

Note carefully his emphasis on individual responsibility: "at that moment, far away on earth, men were at war, and white-faced subalterns and freckled corporals who had but lately begun to shave stood in hosrible gaps or crawled forward in deadly darkness, awaking, like him, to the preposterous truth that all really depended on their actions." Later, we shall hear Lion Feuchtwanger's Simone repeating this thought in her query "When, if not now? Who else, if not I?"

# Additional Reading:

Rockets, by Willy Ley (a historical and scientific work of great interest) War of the Worlds, by H. G. Wells
Screwtape Letters, by C. S. Lewis

# THE GROWING LITERATURE OF FLIGHT

"Every angel and demon is winged. Consequently they are everywhere in a moment; to them the whole world is one place."

-TERTULLIAN

C. S. Lewis's fantastic novels take the reader into realms beyond tomorrow. But well within the horizons of today there is developing a new literature of flight, with its own individual patterns and its own essential beauty. Antoine de St. Exupéry was perhaps the first and remains one of the most skilful in transposing into words the experience of flying. Anne Lindbergh has done the same thing with an equally sensitive imagination; who can forget her metaphor of letting the silver ribbons of the rivers slide through her fingers? Selden Rodman's anthology *The Poetry of Flight* could be added to from almost every magazine or newspaper. The literature of flight grows daily; it represents one of the "shapes of books to come" which is already most clearly outlined.

Pastoral and Pathfinder are both novels about flying by British officers with considerable flying experience. In both the technical details are authentic and real; in both there is a fine sense of the compelling fascination of flying, and also of the team work of a crew who have known long flights together.

Pastoral has an engaging clarity; the story is built up of simple things but works toward a very fine climax. It is that rarity in these days, a war novel without horror; a reticently told story of decent young people who face courageously a topsy-turvy world. Pathfinder, which follows a more intricate design, has many of the same qualities, but offers a suggestive contrast to the muted simplicity of Pastoral.

# 1. THE SECRET ARMOUR OF A QUIET MIND

Pastoral, by Nevil Shute

Sketch the location and the main characters of this story; note that the members of the crew are quite different.

None of the characters is extraordinary; are they typical of the young people who won the battle of Britain?

Bring out the team spirit of the crew, and the effect which Gervase has upon this.

Discuss the importance of outdoor things in the growing friendship of Peter and Gervase; of fishing in the welfare of the crew. Show how this love of outdoors is interwoven with the story of combat flying.

The story of the old lady whose son has just been killed, and who receives Gervase at tea and grants permission for the crew to fish in her lake, is worth comment as a separate episode.

Comment on the attitude of the older officers toward the flying crews; the importance of psychological factors in keeping them fit.

What does the author mean by "the secret armour of a quiet mind"? This is the theme of the whole book. Does the thought apply also to civilian life?

Discuss the author's method of building a quiet story up to the plausible and exciting final climax.

#### Additional Reading:

Old Captivity, by Nevil Shute
Ordeal, by Nevil Shute
Landfall, by Nevil Shute (All of these are novels of flying)

# 2. SIX OVER GERMANY

# Pathfinder, by Cecil Lewis

The scheme of this novel is a fairly familiar one in fiction; a group of very different characters brought together by chance, with a gradual unfolding of the life stories of each. Thornton Wilder followed it in his *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. Give a brief account of the six men who make up the crew of this bomber.

The author was a pilot at seventeen in the first World War, and is now a Squadron Leader in the R.A.F. Show how his experience is reflected here.

The foreword tells the end of the story; does this destroy suspense? Later in this program you will find a similar device used in Vera Brittain's Account Rendered.

Compare the feeling of team spirit here with that in *Pastoral*; the details of flying technique. Which of the two novels seems more successful, the clear simple story of *Pastoral*, or this, with its more complicated design?

Note the contrasts in the life stories: i.e., the sophisticated stories of Peter Morelli and Benjy Lukin, the pioneering adventures of Sam Dollar, the humble tale of Nobby Bligh. Are the characters too obviously selected for the purpose of bringing out these contrasts?

Discuss the quotation from Tom Cookson's letter to his Uncle Ben as a statement of what we are fighting for.

#### Additional Reading:

The Poetry of Flight, edited by Selden Rodman Steep Ascent, by Anne Lindbergh

# AGAINST POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES

In *Perelandra* C. S. Lewis speaks movingly of young soldiers "awaking to the preposterous truth that all really depended on their actions." The idea of individual responsibility for the ills of the world is a stern one to accept; it is so much pleasanter to blame climate, or geography, or economics, or other mysterious powers and principalities, than to blame the individual's sloth and inertia. But until each human being learns to accept this responsibility, the world can never be set right.

"I bid you to a one-man revolution-

The only kind of revolution that is coming," says Robert Frost.

This kind of a one-man revolution, this defiance flung by the individual to the powers of darkness, is the theme of both the novels to be studied here. All over the world countless people have had to make the decision that Srebnitz in *Guerilla* made, that Simone made; the choice between comparative safety and resistance to evil, between maintaining life, and maintaining the truth. These two novels present only very minute sections of the immense tragedy of the world, but life teems in each, as for the seeing eye a microcosm of ocean biology may be caught in a globule of sea water.

Lord Dunsany is one of the most gifted story tellers of the present day. Only Katherine Anne Porter, of the writers studied in this program, is comparable to him in her mastery of the art. The story he tells in *Guerilla* is contemporary enough to be in any day's newspaper, but he has succeeded in giving it that timeless quality which we like to call classic. *Simone* is more limited by date and locality, but it offers one more chapter in the long story of individuals brave enough to bear witness to the truth.

#### 1. THE MOUNTAIN AND THE LAND

Guerilla, by Lord Dunsany

Most of Lord Dunsany's previous stories have been laid in Ireland, or in a world of fantasy. It is not difficult to fix the locale of *Guerilla*. Note that Lord Dunsany held a chair of English Literature at the University of Athens at the outbreak of the war.

Describe briefly the situation in which Srebnitz finds himself at the opening of the story, and the decision which he makes.

The alignment of good against evil is as clear here as in the fantastic allegory of *Perelandra*; show how the sides are drawn, fifteen at first against five thousand.

Discuss some of the characters; do they seem alive, in spite of the somewhat allegorical character of the novel?

Note the symbolism of the Mountain, "that impregnable fortress of the human spirit in which liberty dwells."

Does the account of the final flight to Natal tend to spoil the effect of the whole? Compare these descriptions of flying with those previously read.

The London Times said of this novel: "In these days of jargon and journalese, a pure pleasure to read." Comment.

#### 2. JOAN RETURNS

# Simone, by Lion Feuchtwanger

Give an account of the situation in France when the story begins, in the desperate days of 1940, with the village of St. Martin full of refugees. In what part of France is St. Martin?

Describe Simone's family background, her position in the Planchard household. Her father's influence is significant, as is also her uncle's business and attitude toward life.

Trace the cumulative influences on Simone: her first sight of the refugees, the blowing up of the bridge, the books loaned her by Père Bastide, the memories of her father, the influence of Maurice. Show what steps led to her final decision.

Does the author make it seem plausible that such a young and simple girl should take such a heroic stand?

Discuss the interweaving of the story of Joan of Arc; is this done with enough skill to prevent either story losing by the contrast? Show how Joan's story clarifies Simone's problem for her.

Apply to Simone the idea of individual responsibility.

#### Additional Reading:

The Cross and the Arrow, by Albert Maltz (another contemporary one-man revolution)

#### CHAPTER V

# REVOLT OF THE MEEK

". . . There is hate's crown beneath which all is death; there's love's without which none is king; the blessed deeds bless the halo."

### -MARIANNE MOORE

All over the world today a strong ferment is working. This is no new ferment, but a very old unrest which is coming to its culmination in our time. The present World War, tremendous as it is, is in reality but a segment of a much vaster revolution, the scope of which, from a point in time so close as our own, no one can fully comprehend. It might be briefly, and much too simply, characterized as the revolt of the meek, the struggle of the dispossessed to gain a share not only of the riches of the earth, but of the opportunities of life. Thoughtful people are beginning to realize that until some equitable distribution of economic resources and of social justice can be arrived at there will always be restless and dangerous nations, there will always be wars and depressions and revolutions. As this is being written, the struggles in the various liberated countries dramatize the deeply involved nature of the world revolution.

The heroine of Margaret Shedd's *Inherit the Earth* is an idealistic champion of the dispossessed with a clear idea of what is going on in the particular part of the world in which her interests lie. The novel has an especial interest just now as a picture of the reflections of the world tragedy in Latin America, a picture which may seem lurid, but which is substantiated by other more documentary studies. From the technical point of view, it is interesting for the balanced contrast of scenes of violence and horror with scenes of a happy and tender home life.

Henrietta Buckmaster takes the reader back to an earlier struggle to free the dispossessed and disenfranchised. Her knowledge of the history of this period gives authority to her story of a sometimes forgotten yet significant section of southern thought and life, in the years preceding the Civil War.

## 1. THE PROTEST OF OUR TIMES

# Inherit the Earth, by Margaret Shedd

The author has lived in Honduras and Mexico. Observe that although she never locates the town, Los Altos, in any specific country, the Latin American atmosphere is very real. It could be anywhere in Central America.

Comment on the two contrasted and interwoven threads of the story: the home life of Clara and her children, and the political and social revolution which is brewing in Los Altos.

The characterization of the two children is very successful; discuss how this is brought about. Note the fascination which the barranca has for them; Nena's nightmares; Paco's interests and hobbies; the swimming party in the pool covered with exotic flowers. Show how these scenes are used to balance the darker moments.

Mention some of the intricate cross-currents at work in Los Altos: the German Foreign Office, the Spanish Falange, international cartels, the *Pantalones Blancos*, *Los Rotos*, the Church. Indicate Clara's relationship to these; what is she working for? Are there too many characters and too many intricacies for a clear story to emerge?

Show how Jonathan Stone finds his adjustment to life through working for Clara's cause.

Does the author succeed in convincing you of the sincerity of her crusading zeal for the humiliated and resentful people of the world?

In reviewing this book, Orville Prescott of the *New York Times* says "she has written some of the most exciting passages of current fiction." Select some passages which illustrate this statement.

# Additional Reading:

The Five Arrows, by Allen Chase (story of high intrigue in South America, with the future of democracy on the continent at stake)

Falange, by Allen Chase (a non-fictional account of the penetration of fascism into South America)

#### 2. "LET MY PEOPLE GO"

# Deep River, by Henrietta Buckmaster

In considering this book, it may be well to keep in mind the fact that only 200,000 people in all the Southern states owned slaves. This is a story of those who did not, and who saw the danger of slavery to the southern economy.

Sketch the background of both Simon and Savanna and show the reasons for the attraction and the conflict between them. Their story is interwoven with the larger story of Simon's career, and the causes with which he becomes involved.

Comment on the author's ability to convey the atmosphere of the times, tense and charged with bitterness; how is this done? Is this atmosphere at all comparable to that in *Inherit the Earth?* 

Does the author succeed in making her characters believable human beings, or are they merely mouthpieces for her ideas? Does she idealize her mountaineers?

Account for the mountaineers' hatred of slavery. Remember that Jeffersonian democracy was their ideal.

Compare these mountaineers with those in other contemporary books, e.g. Jessie Stuart's Taps for Private Tussie.

Deep River has been called "the best historical novel of 1944." In the light of comparison with others which you have read this year, do you consider this criticism justified? What qualities give it distinction?

## Additional Reading:

Let My People Go, by Henrietta Buckmaster (a history of the underground railroad)

#### CHAPTER VI

# WAR AND THE CIVILIAN

"The time comes round again;
The private life is small;
And individual men
Are counted not at all.
Now life is general
And the bewildered muse
Thinking what she has done
Confronts the daily news."

#### -YVOR WINTERS

The somewhat bewildered muse of the two novelists to be considered here is concerned with one of the many far-reaching effects of the present war: the fact that war is no longer a matter of men marching away and women waiting at home. That classic division does not now hold true; war reaches deeply into civilian life. It is fought in village streets, and women too go forth to fight, and there is less precise cleavage and distinction between warrior and civilian than formerly. Even in regions that have escaped actual combat, the presence of large bodies of troops from different countries, or different sections of the same country, has brought about profound changes in social structure and attitudes.

Such a situation furnishes the background for Pamela Johnson's *Winter Quarters*: the complicated human relationships resulting from the quartering of comparatively idle troops in a small isolated village. Although her story is completely British in setting and atmosphere, it could probably be paralleled in many parts of the United States. In *Account Rendered* Vera Britain follows a much more complicated and ambitious design, with less success from the artistic point of view. Through the life of one individual, ruined and wasted by the slow action impact of one war experience superimposed upon another, she brings an indictment against the total ruin of civilian life by war.

#### 1. WHILE THE BATTERY WAITS

Winter Quarters, by Pamela Johnson

The novelist's device of bringing together the stories of a great many different characters instead of focusing interest on a few is similar to that employed in *Pathfinder*. Show how it is worked out here.

Emphasize the time at which the story takes place: "the anxious lull that preceded the offensive of the Eighth Army in Europe." Note that this sense of anxious waiting pervades the whole story.

Comment also on the time covered by the action of the novel. The author has set herself a very definite limitation of time as well as of place. Does she work skilfully within this framework?

Select for comment some of the characters, both civilian and military, whose stories are clearly sketched in this brief span of time; e.g. Philip Strutt, Gillian Eagles, Eileen Fogg, Ron Menhenheott.

The author says, "My aim has been to explore the reactions of ordinary men to an extraordinary way of living." Does she succeed in this aim?

What effect does military life seem to have on these men? Note that as yet they have had no actual combat experience.

Discuss the hope expressed in the final paragraph: "Before very long the world will be clean again . . ."

# 2. A VETERAN MEETS WAR AGAIN

Account Rendered, by Vera Brittain

The author's experience in the first World War should be borne in mind in evaluating this book. Remember that her brother, a gifted violinist, was killed, and that she served as a Red Cross nurse in London, Malta, and France.

Outline the experiences of Francis Halkin and show how they brought about the neurosis which defeated his ambition.

Does the death of Sally seem a logical and inevitable result of these experiences, granted all the circumstances involved?

Analyze the author's indictment against war, as a breeder of neurotics, and a waster of lives. Does she plot her characters and incidents to prove her thesis?

What solutions does she suggest? Does she expect too much of psychiatry in the healing of the nations? Show how psychiatry might have helped Francis.

This is very definitely a thesis novel; does the author succeed also in creating characters and telling an interesting story?

Compare this with other novels of England at war reviewed in this program, such as Winter Quarters and Chedworth.

Additional Reading:

The Least of These, by Celia Dale (London under the blitz)

Testament of Youth, by Vera Brittain (at the time of its publication this seemed to sum up the attitude of young people toward war)

# "YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN"

That was Thomas Wolfe's phrase for the homesickness which gnawed him all his life. In New York and in Europe he yearned for the mountain-shadowed afternoons of his North Carolina boyhood. It was difficult for him to accept the law of inevitable change as a way of life which C. S. Lewis makes the theme of Perelandra. If Tom Wolfe, who was always a civilian, and spent his too-brief life in a period of comparative peace, found it impossible to return to the ways of his home, his family and his town, how infinitely more difficult must it be for those young men who have been through the profoundly altering experience of modern combat. Even readers who know it only through the safe medium of print can realize that no human being could undergo the conditions of actual front-line fighting and come out unchanged. Nor is it possible to generalize about the nature of those changes; there are those who are strengthened and exalted by a comradeship of courage, but there are also those who are embittered, and those who are broken. No matter what strong guarantees of Congressional bills, Federal loans, rehabilitation clinics and other technical aids are thrown around them, these returning soldiers need an understanding which must go much deeper than facile sympathy; they need a world which underwrites the things they have been fighting for.

Marianne Moore expresses part of that need:

"... We vow,

we make this promise to the fighting—it's a promise—'We'll never hate black, white, red, yellow, Jew, Gentile, Untouchable.' We are not competent to

make our vows. With set jaw they are fighting, fighting,—some we love whom we know, some we love but know not—that hearts may feel and not be numb."

Both Chedworth, by R. C. Sherriff, and They Dream of Home, by Niven Busch, are concerned with the question of the returning soldier's adjustment to civilian life. Derek Chedworth, in

spite of his grave handicap, is bulwarked by inherited responsibilities and loyalties. The boys in Niven Busch's story are more completely lost in their search for home, and thus illustrate more poignantly the needs of men who have had no time to learn anything except the art of destruction.

#### 1. Another Journey's End

Chedworth, by R. C. Sherriff

The author of this novel wrote one of the notable plays of World War I, *Journey's End.* His own personal experience, like that of Vera Brittain's hero in *Account Rendered*, covers two wars, a not unusual experience in these days.

Consider whether or not the author has shown growth and development as an artist in the period between his popular play and this novel.

The story begins with a rather commonplace Cinderella type of episode. Show how it gains interest from its picture of the entanglements and responsibilities of the Chedworth family. Considerable understanding of rural and feudal England is implicit here.

Show why Peggy's direct and simple solution of their difficulties is impossible for Derek. Illustrate with such incidents as that of the school prize.

Comment on the symbolism of the Tudor barn on crumbling land. Does the author think that this is what is happening to all of England now?

Discuss the factors which help Derek to adjust to his blindness; among them are his responsibility to the land, his sense of belonging. Which of his loyalties seem to you false, and which true and significant?

Describe the effects of the coming of the American Air Force to Chedworth. Compare this account of the influence of a military unit on village life with that in *Winter Quarters*.

The final scene of bombing and the destruction of the castle would seem overly melodramatic in peacetime; is it plausible here? Does the author depend too much on this outside solution of Derek's problems?

## Additional Reading:

Journey's End, by R. C. Sherriff

The Edwardians, by V. Sackville-West (a superb picture of the responsibilities of a large English estate)

# 2. WARRIOR'S RETURN

They Dream of Home, by Niven Busch
"O young man O young comrades
It is too late now to live in those houses
Your fathers built."

-Stephen Spender

Apply this quotation to each of the five ex-marines whose returns home are told of here. Give a short characterization of each, and then show how their lives are interwoven after their return to civilian life.

Cliff Harper, a veteran at seventeen, stands out more clearly than the others. Comment on his soliloguy on what it would be like to build a city; all his training has been in how to tear one down. Why does he find it impossible to stay at home, or in college?

Compare the solidarity of feeling in this group with that described in *Pathfinder* and *Pastoral*.

What might have been done to help these men? What has been done since this book was written that might help in each of these cases?

Comment on the author's vigorous realistic approach to a vital issue. He also shows considerable humor and tenderness; give illustrations of these.

In the latter part he becomes involved with the racial question (e.g. the parade). Does he seem to leave the main theme of his novel, or is this an integral part of the whole problem?

# Additional Reading:

When Johnny Comes Marching Home, by Dixon Wecter The Veteran Comes Back, by Willard Waller

# FRUITS OF SELF-ANALYSIS

An English essayist, discussing recently the qualities that make up the genuinely mature personality, spoke of the ability to bear "the intolerable burden of consecutive thought." Most of us keep our thoughts scurrying away from conclusions, either painful or just logical; it is pleasanter to follow the diverting little trails of everyday happenings and associations than to stop still and think through to ultimate consequences. Perhaps only the true mystics ever accept this obligation in all its implications. Occasionally, however, a long illness, a period of enforced quiet, or an intense crisis involving decision, will make the individual turn within to examine steadily his own motives and attitudes.

Such introspection can probably never be fully set down on paper, even by the most skilful hand. Proust and Joyce and Virginia Woolf, among many lesser writers, have attempted it. The revelation of the inner personality must always remain one of the goals of the novelist; few goals are more difficult to attain.

Joan Scuddamore, of Absent in the Spring, is forced by an unusual group of circumstances to confront her "sole self," but not so rich a "sole self" as that to which Keats returned from his magic casements. Her experience holds up to her, under a blazing light, a giant mirror which reveals every little shabby detour of her heart, all the meannesses and resentments and small cruelties of a so-called good woman. She doesn't like what she sees there, but in the end she contrives to evade the consequences. In The Women on the Porch Catherine runs away from a personal crisis to find in her own past a mirror which clarifies for her the decision which she must make. This analytical novel is a new and interesting experiment from an author who has usually been more interested in events and external observation than in introspection.

#### 1. WITHOUT BENEFIT OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

Absent in the Spring, by Mary Westmacott

Describe the means by which Joan Scuddamore is left in the desert in complete aloneness. Is this plausibly worked out? Trace the progressive steps in her aloneness; show how she attempts to fight it off until all devices fail.

What effect in precipitating her thoughts about herself is brought about by the meeting with her old school friend, Blanche?

Show how Joan had really failed both her husband and her children, while preserving all the appearance of perfection as wife and mother. What were the sources of her failure?

Comment on the delicately perceptive writing which brings out the stories and characters of her family.

What about the ending? Is it right and inevitable, granted Joan's character? Would a woman of her type be capable of so much understanding of self?

# 2. Home to Swan Quarter

The Women on the Porch, by Caroline Gordon

The publishers call Catherine Chapman "a modern Eurydice." Why? Sketch the reasons that led to her flight from New York.

Describe her first sight of Swan Quarter, with the three old women, like three Fates, on the porch.

Note and discuss the sharpness of characterization of each of these old women.

Comment on the excellence of the background and setting. The author is a superb observer, who achieves the feeling of the real South, neither romanticized nor degraded; give illustrations of this.

Compare this rural southern background with that in the very similar stories in the first part of Katherine Anne Porter's The Leaning Tower.

Is the author as penetrating in her analysis of character, in the introspective parts of her novel, as she is in observation and the creation of background?

Does she succeed as well with her main characters as with the subsidiary ones? i.e. is Catherine as real as the older women?

Outline the steps which bring Catherine to her decision to return to Jim. What part does Tom Manigault play in this?

Do you agree with the author that life at Swan Quarter was life among the shadows of the past? Did not it too have its reality?

# Additional Reading:

Green Centuries, by Caroline Gordon (Here the author's observation of and feeling for nature are at their best)

The Dwelling Place, by Anne Goodwin Winslow (a similar account of an old home in Tennessee)

# TWO DISTINGUISHED FIRST NOVELS

In examining the strange and the familiar forms of literary life cast up by the flood tide of any publishing season, both reviewer and reader are always on the lookout for books by new writers, perhaps a slender collection of poems or a first novel, jumbled with the rest but gleaming with some fresh iridescence. How to pick out the gifted from the merely competent, those which bear promise of a riper maturity from those which are sterilely limited by conformity to fashion—that is one of the unceasingly interesting problems of selecting and studying new books. No one can safely say of any current book: this is great, this will endure. But there are certain marks of distinction: vitality, richness, style, humor, power of characterization and of narrative, which raise hope that here may be a new talent whose ability is bound to increase with experience.

Such a first novel is Jean Stafford's *Boston Adventure*. In spite of its faults of prolixity, excessive attention to detail, perhaps excessive sombreness, it rises far above the ordinary in style, in irony and understanding, and in a lavish complexity which indicates that the author's imagination has many resources. Its very faults, like those of Thomas Wolfe's early novels, are the faults of exuberance rather than of meagerness. *Earth and High Heaven*, by Gwethalyn Graham, is written in a more subdued key, and its form is more chiseled and finished, but it too bears the hallmark of distinction and of promise.

In a sense both of these novels are studies of prejudice, that inter-class and inter-racial prejudice which is so important and so far-reaching an issue of the present time. Though neither deals directly with the war, they focus a clear light on some of the basic questions of both the war and the peace.

# 1. A Young Proust on Pinckney Street

Boston Adventure, by Jean Stafford

This novel falls into two distinct parts: Sonie's childhood in a town near Boston, and her life with Miss Pride in Boston. Give some account of the main events of each.

Comment on the attention to physical details throughout, to furnishings of rooms, to clothes, and so on. Is this overdone?

Is the author to be compared with Proust in her effort to follow the meanderings of memory, the casual association of ideas? Note that Proust's memory often led him through fields and gardens, among people who lived in great elegance and beauty. There is little beauty here.

Comment on the extraordinary sharpness of some of the author's pictures; e.g. her mother cleaning the summer chairs in the boarded-up hotel.

Is there too much piling up of suffering in the tale of her father's desertion, her brother's epilepsy, her mother's madness? Does Sonie seem too competent in coping with these grave situations?

Discuss the use of physical symbols throughout, e.g. Nathan's birthmark, Miss Pride's cat, her black suits, Philip's stiff back. What is the symbolism of Sonie's red room?

In the second section compare her ironical picture of Boston society with that in some other recent novel, such as *The Late George Apley*. Do you think the author has a keen understanding of the people whom she lampoons?

Are the roots of her mother's madness inherent in Sonie? Does the end of the novel mean that she too is going mad?

Discuss some of the author's abundant gifts—for character portrayal, for dialogue, for satire—and give illustrations. Discuss also her faults as a writer; does the book suffer from too much introspection?

# Additional Reading:

The Late George Apley, by J. P. Marquand

#### 2. A Young Stendhal in Montreal

Earth and High Heaven, by Gwethalyn Graham

Give an account of the setting for this novel: Montreal at the present time, young liberals, French, English, and Jews.

The only dramatic episode in the novel is the one at the beginning, which starts the conflict. Does Erica's father seem preposterous? Is his attitude essentially that of Nazism?

Discuss the different attitudes toward the war of French and English Canadians, as shown in René, Marc, and Tony Drake.

Note that all the characters are essentially fine people, people of standards and ideals, but full of damaging prejudices. They are the "good" of whom Aldous Huxley writes in the last chapter of *Time Must Have a Stop*, the good who so often block spiritual progress. Illustrate.

Comment on the very delicate analysis of the parents' feeling toward a beloved but, as they think, wrong-headed daughter.

What alternative attitude might Erica's parents have taken toward Marc? Do you think it would have worked better?

Discuss this as essentially a conversation piece; most of the action takes place through talk among well-bred and highly literate people. Does it lose in interest thereby?

Analyze the race question which is the core of Erica and Marc's problem. Discuss its handling here as compared with that in other current novels, e.g. Strange Fruit.

The author says that she would like to write like Stendhal. Do you think she succeeds in this psychological novel?

Show how the quotation from Housman, from which the title is taken, applies both to this novel and to *Boston Adventure*. Compare them as studies of prejudice.

# Additional Reading:

Some of My Best Friends Are Soldiers, by Margaret Halsey (anti-Semitism in New York)

Strange Fruit, by Lillian Smith (the race question in the deep South)

#### CHAPTER X

# OLD AND NEW CHINA

"All China is thus present in every cornor of its vast expanse and at every moment of its history: the mysterious force which through thousands of years has fashioned these myriads and immobilized them in their immutable habits is the supreme reality of this land: and this force is a social one."

-EMILE HOVAQUE

China, Helena Kuo reminds us in her autobiography, has outlived Egypt, Greece, Rome, Carthage and Persia. It is strange that our Western culture has to such a regrettable degree remained heedless and ignorant of this civilization, so much more ancient than our own; our universities for the most do not give courses in Chinese language or literature, nor are our museums apt to be rich in Chinese art. Yet the glimpses we get of Chinese poetry through translation, of Chinese painting, of Chinese art forms in jade and chiseled silver and crystal, are always enticements to further discovery in a fascinating realm.

In the past few years we have been fortunate in some of our interpreters of China. Pearl Buck and Lin Yutang, above all, have introduced to American readers the courage, the family solidarity, the gaity and the poetic charm, of Chinese life. The two novels to be reviewed in this program open two additional windows on China, one toward the past and one toward the present. Through both of them, though their settings are centuries apart, run the same veins of poetry and laughter and loyalty that we are beginning to be able to recognize as peculiarly Chinese. The author of Winter Cherry, Keith West, is an Englishman who has lived long in China, and absorbed the spirit of the land. Helena Kuo is one of the new generation of university-educated Chinese women; her fluent English and her sensitive perceptions make her an especially welcome interpreter of her own country.

## 1. AT THE END OF THE T'ANG DYNASTY

Winter Cherry, by Keith West

Look up the T'ang Dynasty as a background for reviewing this book. Show how the period, one of sophistication and interest in ideas, is reflected in this story. Note the frequent quotations from poetry and the classics.

Which of the characters are historical and which invented?

Tell the story of Winter Cherry's escape from the palace, of the Emperor's ruin, of her attempted rescue of Yang Kuei-fei, and of the idyllic ending.

Note that, although this is a highly romantic piece of historical fiction, the Chinese characters are as realistic as those in Westward to Chungking. Give examples of this.

Comment on the formalized and poetic speech, of which you will find survivals in the modern Chinese of Westward to Chungking.

Read some of the short poems which are used to introduce the chapters. Some of them are original with the author. Are they Chinese in flavor?

Family loyalty is shown here, as in Westward to Chungking. Be ready to compare these continuing traditions in the two novels.

Analyze the statement: "The Chinese are an insidious race, with no clear edges to their shadows." Does this novel bear that out?

Does Winter Cherry have some of the qualities which have made Forever Amber so popular, but much more subtly presented?

#### 2. A CHINESE FAMILY FLEES FROM SOOCHOW

Westward to Chungking, by Helena Kuo

Give a sketch of the author's life as an introduction. This can most readily be gained from her autobiography *I've Come a Long Way*, which will repay reading.

This is essentially a novel of a family. Show how the same family customs and observances obtain in the modern Chinese family as in the Peng family in *Winter Cherry*. Give a short account of each member of the family. Does the author succeed in giving life to each?

The father Tien-Min dominates the novel; comment on his philosophy: "I have three precious things which I hold fast..." What are they? Does he seem close to Christianity, in both his philosophy and his life?

What concessions had the Lee family made to the modern world? Show the contrasts within the family.

Compare the guerilla girl fighters in this novel with Honeysuckle and Clear Rain in Winter Cherry.

Observe how throughout Westward to Chungking horror and violence are balanced by humor, tenderness and beauty. The author seems to be telling us that in spite of all of this, these basic values go on. Some of our western writers of war novels might learn from her. Note the respect for life that is inherent in this story of the Lee family.

Some of the qualities that have made possible China's long resistance are implicit here; also some of the qualities which make her survival so important. Mention them.

## Additional Reading:

China to Me, by Emily Hahn
I've Come a Long Way, by Helena Kuo

# NOVELS IN VERSE

Story and Verse are ancient and easy companions. The ballad, which is song and narrative, drama and poem, all in one, is among the oldest literary forms; strange then that the novel in poetry is so seldom popular, so seldom achieves the satisfying complexity, the living characterization to be found in a really good novel. Many writers have attempted this difficult medium; few have succeeded in shaping it into a pleasurable work of art. Yet for the insatiable reader, attempts to use difficult means of expression often yield more interest than those that employ competently a familiar form.

Among writers of recent years, Edwin Arlington Robinson has been most expert in writing novels in poetry in which the values of neither form are lost, whether it is the beautiful retelling of an ancient tale, as in *Tristan*, or an involved tragedy of modern frustrations, such as *Matthias at the Door*. William Ellery Leonard told the story of his first marriage in a sonnet sequence, *Two Lives*. William Rose Benét has written his autobiography in a collection of varied verse forms, with enough action and drama for several novels, in *The Dust which Is God*. Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body* is sometimes history, sometimes fiction, but always and above all poetry.

In More Day to Dawn Harry Lee combines prose and verse to tell the story of Thoreau's life. Brief biographical episodes are followed by poems which express Thoreau's own inner reactions to people and events. The author, a poet of no mean skill, has proved himself an able interpreter of the spirit of Thoreau.

Theodore Morrison's *Devious Way* follows the tradition, and at times the manner, of Edwin Arlington Robinson. He knows how to tell a modern story in clear and swiftly paced verse. Though the beauty of the whole is flawed by an ignoble ending, there is still much to enjoy in his lyric descriptive passages and in his dexterously handled dialogue.

## 1. RETURN TO CONCORD

More Day to Dawn; the Story of Thoreau of Concord, by Harry Lee

Thoreau himself once said "My life has been the poem I would have writ." The purpose of the author here has been not to write a formal biography, but to translate into poetry Thoreau's own thoughts and feelings. Discuss the book from this angle.

Comment on the mingling of prose and verse. Are they well blended together, or do the transitions seem abrupt?

Are enough episodes given to tell the story of his life? Does the author make Thoreau seem alive and human, rather than the somewhat austere hermit which he sometimes appears?

How do you think this book would serve as an introduction to Thoreau, for some one who had never read any of his works? Would it inspire a wish to know more about him?

Some of the poems here are Thoreau's own words arranged in modern verse form. Read some of them aloud and comment on them. Read aloud also some of Harry Lee's original poems, such as "The Green Temple," or "Appointment with a Tree." The clarity and simplicity of these lyrics should be refreshing to those who complain of the obscurity of modern poetry.

Raymond Adams, an authority on Thoreau, says "These poems seem to me to have exactly the right tone to reflect Thoreau's probable feelings over the events of his life." Do you consider this a just estimate?

# Additional Reading:

Thoreau, by Henry Seidel Canby (the definitive biography)

Walden, by Henry Thoreau

The Flowering of New England, by Van Wyck Brooks (read the sections on Thoreau)

#### 2. A Modern Cressida

The Devious Way, by Theodore Morrison

The author has attempted a modern version of the medieval legend of Troilus and Cressida, which has been variously told by Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dryden, and William Morris. Look up the legend, and use it as a background for this tangled story.

Hazlitt says: "Chaucer's Cressida is a grave sober considerate personage, who has an alternate eye to her character, her interest and her pleasure. . . . Shakespeare's Cressida is a giddy girl, an unpractised jilt, who falls in love with Troilus, as she afterwards deserts him, from mere levity and thoughtlessness . . ." Discuss the heroine of *The Devious Way* in comparison with these two characterizations.

Outline the main events, then read aloud passages to illustrate how the poet handles conversation, narration, description. Illustrate also his lyric quality as shown in such passages as "Time's Arrow points . . ."

Comment on his characterizations; do his people seem alive and convincing?

Does the latter part of the poem tend to break down because of the indignity of the final episode? Does the poetic form require an essential nobility of character and event which is lacking here? Discuss this in relation to other story poems, or novels in verse, such as some of Edwin Arlington Robinson's poems with a modern theme, e.g. Matthias at the Door.

# Additional Reading:

Troilus and Cressida, by William Shakespeare

"Troilus and Crysede," by Geoffrey Chaucer in Complete Poetical Works, by Geoffrey Chaucer

# APPROACH TO MYSTICISM

A study of Aldous Huxley's novels, such as will undoubtedly some day be made, from, Antic Hay to Time Must Have a Stop, will reveal a fairly continuous progress toward mysticism in this most thoughtful of present day noveltists. There are certain constants in his gifts as a novelist, such as brilliant style, incisive and at times cruel satire, ability to stimulate thought, profound sense of the brutal and tragic elements in human life. There are also certain basic faults which hamper him as a novelist, perhaps the most fundamental being the cleavage which makes it impossible for him to decide whether or not he is an out and out novelist or a philosophical essayist. The cleavage has resulted in the exasperating blend of narrative and essay which we find in Eyeless in Gaza. When he is content to be essayist, as in Beyond the Mexique Bay, he is at his delightful best; as novelist, he is always torn between the two forms. In spite of this literary schizophrenia, no writer of fiction of our times has his power to prod the lazy mind to genuine reflection.

It is frequently said that a trend toward mysticism, or at least toward the fundamental securities of religion, is characteristic of a world scarred and worn by war. Somerset Maugham in his recent novel *The Razor's Edge* recognized and made use of this trend, which has been marked by the presence on the best-seller list of such books as *The Robe* and *The Apostle*. No one who has read Aldous Huxley's novels carefully can doubt that the religious element in *Time Must Have a Stop* is no opportunism, but a hardly won and deeply sincere belief which the author has been steadily approaching over a period of years.

In *Time Must Have a Stop* Bruno advises young Sebastian to acquaint himself with the works of the real mystics, instead of trying to acquire an understanding of them at second or third hand. Often the lives of the saints are buried for moderns in old dull volumes, in too-quaint wording or too-theological disquisitions. One of the most gifted of present day novelists, Victoria Sackville-West, has rescued from such treatises the stories of two Carmelite saints and brought them vividly to life. Her

hand is reverent, and she has withheld it from any careless retouching, but it is also skilful at removing the obscuring cobwebs and smudges. Under her touch St. Teresa of Avila, and the much more modern Ste. Therèse de Lisieux, live again as women and as saints.

#### 1. DESIGN FOR A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Time Must Have a Stop, by Aldous Huxley

Outline first the almost trivial motivation of the story: Sebastian's visit to his Uncle, his desire for a suit of dinner clothes, and the involvements which grow out of his lie. Here the story is not as important as the ideas for which it is a vehicle.

Bruno Rontini calls Sebastian the "predestined target." Show how the symbolism of the arrows is worked out.

Comment on the contrast between Bruno and Eustace. Study the character of Eustace carefully; he is the most fully realized, and the most entertaining, even after death.

Discuss the mystic passages concerning Eustace after death: the meaning of the "lattice," "opacity," "alienation." Show how Eustace resists the "light." Why?

In each of Huxley's novels there is one character who is his mouthpiece; who is it here? Or is it several?

Observe Huxley's singular blend, to be found in all his writing, of the exalted and the ridiculous, the spiritual and the grossly material, as shown here.

"There's only one effectively redemptive sacrifice—the sacrifice of self-will to make room for the knowledge of God." Does this seem to state the theme of the book? Do you feel that Huxley is sincere in his philosophy of self-abnegation?

The final meeting of Sebastian and his father serves as a commentary on the whole novel. Summarize it.

# Additional Reading:

The Razor's Edge, by Somerset Maugham Eyeless in Gaza, by Aldous Huxley

#### 2. The Reality of Mysticism

The Eagle and the Dove, by Victoria Sackville-West

#### St. Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582

Tell the story of Teresa's early life: the background of her childhood in Avila, her family and her friends. There are fine descriptions of Avila also in George Santayana's *Persons and Places*, the first volume of his autobiography.

Teresa herself said that she did not want to be a nun. Trace the

steps that led to her decision. What other careers were open to a girl of her abilities? What do you think she might have become in the modern world?

Give an account of her achievements in behalf of her order.

Is the author of this biography in full sympathy with the mystic aspects of Teresa's life? Comment especially on her treatment of the miracles.

#### Ste. Therèse de Lisieux

Contrast her background and childhood with that of Teresa of Avila. Compare the accomplishments of these two very different women; the mysticism of each. One is an intellectual, the other as naïve and childish as Bernadette of Lourdes.

For which of these saints does the author have more understanding and sympathy? Why do you think she wanted to write these biographies? The subject is totally different from her previous work.

# Additional Reading:

Persons and Places, by George Santayana The Song of Bernadette, by Franz Werfel

Carmelite and Poet; a Framed Portrait of St. John of the Cross, by Robert Sencourt

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| Johnson, P. H.             | Winter Quarters. 1944. (6)            | Macmillan  | 2.50   |
| Kuo, Helena                | Westward to Chungking. 1944. (10)     | Appleton   | 2.75   |
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# Fourth Meeting: AGAINST POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES

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- 2. Joan Returns: Simone, by Lion Feuchtwanger

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- 1. The Protest of Our Times: Inherit the Earth, by Margaret Shedd
- 2. "Let My People Go": Deep River, by Henrietta Buckmaster

# Sixth Meeting: WAR AND THE CIVILIAN

- 1. While the Battery Waits: Winter Quarters, by Pamela Johnson
- 2. A Veteran Meets War Again: Account Rendered, by Vera Brittain Seventh Meeting: "You CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN"
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  - 2. Warrior's Return: They Dream of Home, by Niven Busch

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# Eleventh Meeting: NOVELS IN VERSE

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- 2. A Modern Cressida: The Devious Way, by Theodore Morrison

# Twelfth Meeting: APPROACH TO MYSTICISM

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