

and single schools, like Turner and the frontier interpretation, or Beard and the economic interpretation. We live in an age wary of single-minded generalizations. Which is as it should be. But without some ideal of coherence, as modestly tentative as we wish to make it seem, without some notion of where we think we may be going, we will be much like Alice in Wonderland: "Cheshire-puss," Alice began rather timidly, "would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat. "I don't much care where—" began Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat.

JOHN WILLIAM WARD, *Princeton University*

DEMING BROWN, *Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing*. 338 pp. Princeton University Press, 1962. \$6.00.

THIS is an important book for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the significance of the topic: it is important for us to know how well our literature has been allowed to represent us and how that portion of it which is known in Russia has been interpreted by Russian critics.

Mr. Brown covers both the extent to which U.S. literature has been published in the USSR and the nature of its reception. More has been printed than one might suspect, though the selection has largely been determined by the political climate and the current state of the Party line. The twenties, before a fixed policy on culture had been developed, and the late fifties to a lesser extent are periods of relatively diversified publication; in between, though there have been significant variations, the picture is generally pretty black. In summarizing the direction of Soviet criticism, Mr. Brown faces a formidable task, for a study of a corpus of criticism which is, as he says, almost completely predictable in any given stage of Party doctrine might be very dull. But there is drama here, and the author is a good enough story-teller to make *Soviet Attitudes* very readable, appropriately more casual in style in its later chapters when the pattern is already clear.

Waiting expectantly for the appearance of American writers who fulfil the demands of "social realism" (protest, but positive protest, with at least one heroic character who sees the Coming of the Dawn), Russian critics have pinned their hopes on figures like Dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, Dreiser and Fast. Their disappointment rests partially on the continued intellectual development of some of these writers and the artistic limitations of others—for they have largely been unable to see that to force an artist to superimpose upon the face of reality the mask of Marxist prediction must produce flatness whenever face and mask are different. They have

envied the richness of our best writers while forbidding richness because they insist that things are really very simple, and sometimes, as Mr. Brown explains in a splendid chapter on Dos Passos, they have fought their own battles for literary freedom over the body of an American writer.

Another good chapter, on the reasons for the continued popularity of minor-leaguers like London and O. Henry, concludes that the Russians simply have a need for craftsmanlike popular fiction, and that their critics will bend a long way to find reasons to encourage its publication and to account for their own evident enjoyment of it. In the light of Dwight MacDonald's remark that much of what passes for high art in the USSR is in fact on the level of American pop or mass art, I see an easier explanation: if the most approved Soviet artists are for the most part not really artists in our sense of the word, their critics are not really critics, either; much of their stuff on the U.S. reads like articles on Germany in our popular magazines during the war. I think they make an exception for O. Henry (who is certainly not interested in class struggle) because they like to read him; he's just their speed. Other non-Party-line authors are too demanding.

This does not mean that there is nothing good in Russian criticism. The very inflexibility of the world-view gives their critic a kind of consistency, and when the better critic is allowed to speak out, he can say bright things. Remove the propaganda, and the comments on Hemingway, for instance, are on target. At times the Soviet estimate of forces at work in the U.S. in a given period is accurate and even revealing (Mr. Brown's own summaries of movements and tendencies, by the way, are excellent—one can give this book to people who are not specialists in literature without fear that they will fail to recognize errors in emphasis or interpretation of our literature: there are none). And if the Russian intervention in U.S. literary affairs in the 1930s seems benighted, it is perhaps no more so and no less interesting than the American Puritans' attempt to give counsel to the Cromwellians. If the considerable potential of a few good critical minds is often shorted out by abrupt shifts in the Line, or grounded by contact with dogma, it at least demonstrates that there is plenty of juice in the circuit. More people may know more about us than we think, and since it is a part of our political faith that if we were understood in depth, the way our best art portrays us, we would be feared less and trusted more, this volume gives reason for some hope that we are not losing as much ground to "The Soviet Cultural Offensive" (to use the title of a recent book on the subject) as we may fear.

STUART LEVINE, *University of Kansas*