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DISSENT

In the March/April issue:

TEACHING NEGRO HISTORY

Henry Pachter

"'Black History' can be studied independently; but fully to understand it, we must see it as part of American history. Black people are neither entirely passive in the stream of that history, nor are they isolated from it or connected with it merely through resistance. Black history is deeply enmeshed with the history of the country; it is a country which black people (however much against their will) will have helped build and to whose resources they have an equal claim. Even their resistance movements have at various times contributed to the shaping of American character."

DISSENT, 509 Fifth Ave.,
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"WHEN ONE SEES how pervasive negations are in the American culture one perceives the true meaning of 'trust no one over 30.' Perhaps an imprisoned dean will provide some definition, some resistance. Alas, there is only emptiness: the permissive smile. The tolerant liberal culture defines itself as 'open' — that is, value-less. The student understands the pun: the liberal culture is worthless."

For a free copy of
Wm. F. Buckley's
NATIONAL RE-
VIEW, write: Dept.
D, 150 E. 35 Street,
N. Y. 10016.

And, quite unlike his father, he ended his life, as he says, with alcohol and animals.

Pity is neither sought nor forthcoming. His coolness deliberately prevents it — such passages as his technical objections to fellatio or the remark that "two or three hundred young men were to pass through my hands in the course of years." (What heterosexual male, however profligate, would have made that remark about girls?) The book can almost be exemplified in one sentence: "For a long time I disliked the smell of semen, unless it was my own." It is shocking; funny; extremely informative though quite compact; poised; and somehow very English. It

is Ackerley's autobiography in little.

His style is his preservative and preserver. His jokes are both self-mockery and a mockery of the world for making mockery necessary. ("... This superficial sketch of myself may be of value when I lie under another sort of sod.") The psychoanalysts of print can easily move in on him — his father arrived late in his life, most of his childhood was spent amongst women, and so forth. But the analysis cannot affect his literary quality. Minor literature, certainly, but any higher stature might have upset him. He was born to be rejected, in considerable measure, and to have the lonely last laugh by writing well about it.

in: New Republic 160:13(Mar. 29, 1969), 28-30

Kenneth E. Boulding: Tragic Nonsense

An Essay on Liberation by Herbert Marcuse

(Beacon Press; \$5.95, paperback; \$1.95)

It is hard to review with justice a book with which one is completely unsympathetic. Furthermore, what this ninety-page essay requires is mercy rather than justice, and I am not sure that I can provide even that. Herbert Marcuse has a reputation of being a somewhat fallen idol of the New Left, who seem at this time to be moving towards a more hard-line Marxism and away from the more gentle, humane, revisionist, "unitarian" Marxism which Marcuse represents.

One could almost interpret this volume as a sad little monument to a loss of faith. At one time, I imagine, Marcuse was a real Marxist. The horrors of Stalinism, Maoism, and even what he calls the "gray on gray" of the Eastern European socialist countries, have battered his true faith into a queer shapeless mass, which represents little more than a vague aspiration toward a more utopian sensibility in man. It would be easy to make fun of Marcuse's "liberation," for it seems to be liberation from soap, from fathers,

from work, from the beastly world of productivity and exchange; and indeed it is hard to avoid visualizing Marcusean man as the remittance man of the cartoons, lounging away his life in idle fantasies on a Tahitian beach.

Even if Marcuse's utopia were more attractive than others, he seems to have no way of getting there. Revolution is hopeless, the working class is entirely corrupted by middle class standards and all he seems to have to fall back on is student revolt, the hippies and something called biological solidarity, with "bodies unsoiled by plastic cleanliness." One fears that the biological solidarity lies mainly in the sense of smell.

The depressing thing about nonsense is that it remains nonsense no matter how well dressed in utopian fantasies and German philosophical circumlocutions. I am afraid my verdict on this essay is that it is nonsense, not even attractive nonsense like the "Yellow Submarine." The "great refusal" which

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DISSENT

In the March/April issue:

ON MODERN TYRANNY

(A critique of Western Intellectuals)

Nicola Chiaramonte

"... just because it is a question of freedom, the freedom he thinks he owns as if it were a piece of furniture—the Western intellectual, faced by the movement of protest in the countries of Eastern Europe, believes he is watching something already well-known and so not really significant. Hence the widespread general idea that the ferment for freedom which is shaking these countries, although it merits our sympathy, does not at bottom concern us, since it is a matter of gaining a social benefit which we already enjoy... indeed, among us, by dint of using it, is already worn-out and cheapened. We need something else; stronger medicines, one would say. Or drugs. Or systematic violence."

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Marcuse talks about in the rebelling young is, one fears, almost identical with the great refusal of Peter Pan. The class war of youth against age, which is perhaps the only class war that is real, must remain eternally inconclusive, for if youth ever wins, it will by that time be old and will regret its victory. Perhaps Marcuse's

nonsense is distressing because it is tragic, and nonsense should always be comic. It is the tragedy of a man betrayed by his own sensitivity and humanity into a failure to see the complexity of the social path by which these virtues are actually achieved, and advocating the shortcuts that lead to disaster.

Stanley Moss: Joy out of Terror

Shall We Gather at the River by James Wright

(Wesleyan University Press; \$4.00, paper \$2.00)

James Wright has written a book of great passion. In an age when the President's English (the language of evasion) and business English (the language of selling) are becoming standard in our public and private discussion, poetry has become the hot line on which our generation says what is necessary to its survival. Wright gives speech to dumb, horrible human suffering. In an essay on Neruda published a few months ago, Wright wrote, "I want poetry to make me happy, but the poetry I want should deal with the hell of our lives or else it leaves me cold." This is a book rooted in the dumping grounds of American life: barren steel towns, the slums of Minneapolis, the drunk tank, the home for senior citizens, the graves of the forgotten dead. Even Wright's birds are cast down by nature.

How can such a book make us happy? Wright makes poetry of materials the world leaves for dead, defiles or throws out. We can find joy in these poems, experiencing what used to be called a sacred mystery. The fact is, Wright's poetry—unpretentiously, unavoidably—flashes a light into the unknown universe and on the unknowable itself.

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The carp are secrets

Of the creation: I do not
Know if they are lonely.
The poachers drift with an almost
frightening
Care under the bridge.
Water is a luminous
Mirror of swallows' nests. The
stars
Have come down.
What does my anguish
Matter? Something
The color
Of a Puma has plunged through
this net, and is gone.
This is the firmest
Net I ever saw, and yet something
Is gone lonely
Into the headwaters of the
Minnesota.

James Wright has written a dark book
—but stay with it a while. After we
read the poems over and over, beauty
purges out the terror, just as in the
painting of Bosch; we do not pity a
man crucified upon a harp:

I have gone forward with
Some, a few lonely some.
They have fallen to death.
I die with them.
Lord, I have loved thy cursed,
The beauty of thy house:
Come down. Come down. Why dost
Thou hide thy face?