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*Albert Camus* by Adele King (review)

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*ALBERT CAMUS*, by Adele King, Grove Press, New York, 1964, 120 pp. Price \$0.95.

A remarkable feature of English-language criticism on Albert Camus is the emphasis given to his faults. There seems to be fairly general agreement that, as a thinker, his politics are naïve and his philosophy borrowed; as a writer, his stories are full of flaws and his plays generally bad. Neither John Cruickshank, Philip Thody, nor Germaine Brée (to mention the most prominent among the critics) hesitates to speak frankly. Now Adele King adds her voice. It is nevertheless clear that they deeply respect Camus as a thinker and as a writer. There are differences among them as to what in Camus is most admirable, just as there are differences as to his faults or as to their gravity. But all, I believe, would define his over-all greatness in terms similar to those of the Nobel Prize Committee referring to Camus' work as one which "with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience of our times."

Apart and aloof in their foreign universities, Albert Camus' critics in English have been well placed to do broad, objective studies. Each may stand out for a particular feature—Cruickshank's for its erudite discussion of Camus' philosophy, Brée's for the contribution of new manuscript material, Thody's for its biographical information. But they are primarily comprehensive studies and, drawing upon the material offered by other scholars such as Champigny, Frohock, Ullmann, Viggiani, Hanna, who have scrutinized for limited areas, present a general picture of the author and his works superior to anything yet published in France.

This situation, however, scarcely justifies another full-length portrait in English, and it seems to me that Miss King's effort and talent are somewhat wasted. We go over again the biography and the chronological survey of the works. The author has no serious quarrel with previous delineations nor anything arrestingly new to add to them. Her predecessors' studies are easy to get, easy to read, and not very bulky. If a more summary treatment were really needed, there was already on the market Nathan Scott's *Camus*. Perhaps Miss King did not know this, for it does not figure in her bibliography. But the real reason for the appearance of her book is doubtless that there was a place for such an item in a publisher's series. The Evergreen Pilot Books are designed to offer "inexpensive, up-to-date and readable introductions" to major modern literary figures. Adele King's book is made-to-measure. It does read well, covers with ease and grace the material to date, and points to where the reader may find more ample treatment. It can therefore be highly recommended for what it is. But the only gap it fills is in a publisher's series. We may hope that the next work on Camus will deal primarily with his literary craft. The real gap is here. The subject of his thought has so far crowded out that of his art, and much interesting work remains to be done, say on Camus' dramatic theory and techniques. Miss King devotes less than three pages to the plays. Need I say that in suggesting Camus' art as an area deserving further exploration, I do not imply

that there is nothing left elsewhere? Emmett Parker's announced book on Camus as a journalist may contribute greatly to our understanding of Camus' intellectual career.

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ROBERT E. SHERWOOD, by Baird R. Shuman, Twayne Publishers, Inc., New York, 1964, 160 pp. Price \$3.50.

Mr. Shuman's study of the plays of Robert Emmet Sherwood is a very useful handbook which analyzes in some detail his successful major plays as well as his failures. It contains a bibliography of his plays, miscellaneous works, and his many articles in periodicals. There is also an index and a critical bibliography of the secondary source material including some unpublished doctoral dissertations that have direct bearing on Sherwood's development as a dramatist of ideas.

There is very little mention of some important aspects of his career as a writer and journalist. Only passing mention is made of the fact that he was one of the first really perceptive American motion picture critics and was the author of many screen plays; there is nothing of his friendships and professional associations in the literary and theater world; little is written of his career in Washington during the war when he lived at the White House and wrote some of President Roosevelt's "fireside chats." All of this will be dealt with, no doubt, by John Mason Brown in his long awaited biography of Sherwood.

What Shuman does with some thoroughness is to examine Sherwood's development as a dramatist from the tremendous success of his first professionally produced play, through the next plays which were consistently failures, through the unprecedented success of his next five plays and to the important failures of his last two productions. This means that he traces, as other critics have done, the theme of pacifism and a protagonist's relation to the meaningless violence of war which occurs directly or indirectly in all of his dramatic work.

In fact, Mr. Shuman's first chapter on the plays is called "Alpha and Omega" and compares Sherwood's first success *The Road to Rome* with his last, posthumously produced failure, *Small War on Murray Hill*. Not only the theme but also the plot of these two plays is identical: both are historical plays in which a charming and clever woman engages in a flirtation with an invading general in order to persuade him to re-evaluate his plan for the conquest of her country.

Subsequently, Shuman treats the intervening plays in three chapters beginning with what he calls "Sherwood's universal microcosm." In these plays Shuman feels that the author was deliberately creating little worlds in which he could reveal "representative social types." This is certainly true of a play like *The Petrified Forest* wherein Sherwood examined some of the wanderers of T. S. Eliot's wasteland; the protagonist even says he shares Eliot's fear of what modern science has made of the modern world.

However, *Idiot's Delight*, which is included in this chapter, might more logically have been included in the next chapter, "Of Men and their Wars." For in this play in 1936 Sherwood predicted with frightening accuracy the holocaust that was to begin in 1939. It is true he uses a resort hotel near the borders of France, Italy, and Switzerland where many refugees are gathered, but he is primarily interested in the effect of the coming war on these refugees.

In particular, the problem facing many of the characters considered in this chapter is that of the one-time pacifist who realizes that he must forego non-