

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

**In: The New Republic. Vol. LXXXXX, Nr. 1298, 18.10.1939, S.
312, 313**

Snow Man. A Child of Our Time, by Odon von Horvath.

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1939-10-18

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A Child of Our Time, by Odon von Horvath. New York: The Dial Press. \$2.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1938, the German-Hungarian writer Odon von Horvath was killed by a falling tree in the Champs Elysées. How many more important and even more horrible events have occurred since that time! Yet the strange death of that young and highly gifted poet remains a moving and terrifying fact in the memory of those who used to be his friends and are familiar with his books. Our mourning, however, is mingled with another feeling, very strong in us when anyone, and more especially a poet, "dies his own death." ("Oh Lord, give to each one his own death!" as Rainer Maria Rilke prayed.) Death often comes to writers in a way strangely befitting the style of their work; in the end they must experience what they once merely dreamed. Before the bombs actually were destroying the boulevards and avenues of the world's most beautiful city, an innocent tree had to transform itself into the deadly instrument, killing a poet who walked through the stormy night. This silent tree which became the incarnation of evil might have been an idea of Odon von Horvath, the poet.

For he always seemed to be attracted, and in a strange manner even amused, by all the manifestations of evil. He enjoyed telling grim, fantastic stories with a smile at once childlike and somewhat cruel, stories about revolting monsters and grotesque accidents. Behind this cold curiosity, however, there was hidden something different and more precious. For Horvath was a moralist too. If he had not, in his heart of hearts, been a moralist, he could very well have made his peace with Nazi Germany, where there could have been no objection to the Hungarian "Aryan" and successful playwright. But he definitely turned his back on the Third Reich. The first book he wrote in exile, the first novel he ever wrote, known and celebrated in this country as "The Age of the Fish," is not only the cool, detached description and analysis of evil, but also, and above all, an indictment. The "godless youth" which is the collective hero of this extraordinary story, the youth of Hitler's Germany, seems to be possessed by wicked demons.

The same Evil Spirit and Great Enemy appears once more in Horvath's second and last short novel, "A Child of Our Time." This book impresses and moves us by many qualities and charms we admired in "The Age of the Fish"; it has the same kind of magic realism, which, at certain moments, reminds one of Franz Kafka's prose. Yet I feel "A Child of Our Time" to be an anti-climax, compared with the earlier book. Its composition is less concentrated, the plot is less dramatic, its characters are not quite so unforgettable. From the literary point of view Horvath's last work seems to be a slight decline, although it certainly is still more interesting, even from the purely artistic angle, than 90 percent of all the novels written and published today. Its true significance, however, is not esthetic but moral.

The simple fellow who is presented as the leading character—the average man "of our time" who does not find his place in a post-war or pre-war world; the narrow-minded young soldier who enjoys taking and following

orders—suddenly and surprisingly goes through many spiritual and sensual adventures. He has doubts, and dreams and visions; he experiences forms of love and sadness and tenderness he never knew before. He endeavors, he wants to change, to improve, to become a human being instead of remaining what he was: merely a soldier. Finally he recognizes the Great Enemy. "The Age of the Fish" is dominated by the demon of coldness, and the "Child of Our Time" desperately tries fighting him. He freezes to death, and we watch, horrified, his transformation into a snow man. But his human heart keeps burning under the icy cover which eventually may melt. For I am sure that Odon von Horvath, the poet who was familiar with the Devil and has been killed by a diabolic tree, also believed in the miracle of resurrection.

KLAUS MANN

And No Sage

Hitler Is No Fool, by Karl Billinger. New York: Modern Age Books. 208 pages. 50 cents.

KARL BILLINGER, whose previous book, "Fatherland," remains in its sober poignancy one of the best descriptions of early Nazi terror, has now subjected "Mein Kampf" to a careful scrutiny, in the spirit of a historian who does not take a document at its face value, but critically checks each assertion, compares texts written at different times and places, explains inconsistencies and obscurities, and confronts all these elements with other well established facts. Wading through the mud and slime of Hitler's prose was not a pleasure; but the result obtained—a reconstruction of Hitler's personality and program from his own utterances—was well worth the trouble.

Mr. Billinger's central thesis, that the triumph of fascism in Germany "was not the victory of one single man, but of one part of the German people over another," is not entirely unfamiliar. He supports it, however, with the most convincing sort of evidence, which is internal evidence. Moreover, instead of merely rejecting other theories, quite popular not so long ago, which explain Nazism as a renaissance of German nationalism, or a revolt of the lower middle classes, or a need for living space, Mr. Billinger assigns each of these phenomena to its place, showing them as necessary phases in a more comprehensive historical development.

Hitler's own share in this slice of history is not scornfully denied in favor of anonymous economic interests, but admitted to the extent that he was the man who actually "gave these powerful interests the form and expression by which they were able to rise to dictatorial mastery in Germany." Nor is it necessary to assume that the leading Nazi circles are animated by a spirit of destruction for destruction's sake. Their lack of principles is more simply and more plausibly explained by their political opportunism: Hitler is not a mystical "nihilist," but a vulgar pragmatist, and only in his devotion to the German ruling classes, of whose imperialist policy he is the prisoner, is he a real fanatic. Today, after the most recent political somersault of Nazism, this point needs no emphasis.

This does not mean that everything in history is luminous and rational, that "foolishness" has no place in it. But