OBITER

BRAQUE (Tate Gallery, September 29-November 11). The present exhibition magnificently confirms Braque's stature as one of the most significant painters of the twentieth century. His mastery of still life has led to comparisons with Chardin. However, although his pre-eminence in this field is an obvious characteristic of his mature art, he only gradually recognized its full importance as an imaginative vehicle; for his interpretation of the objects around him is essentially imaginative. Nevertheless his imagination is firmly controlled by a profoundly intellectual analysis of the laws of design allied to an almost unrivalled colour sense, resulting in a superb decorative synthesis.

Like many French masters he was attracted by Corot's portraits and landscapes which spurred him on to youthful emulation. The *fauve* paintings too reflect an interest in nature which continued to play a part in some of the early cubist canvases and was most successfully realized in the 'Roofs at Ceret'; while others confess to a growing awareness of interiors which was destined to develop into his obsession with still life. In the 'Man with a Violin' he achieves a convincing transcription of the abstract qualities of music into visual terms through the endlessly repeated shapes broken into small segments which somehow manage to suggest the vibration of sounds in the atmosphere.

Apart from the *fauve* period his colour remained relatively restricted, although in some of the *collages* the harmony he evolves using almost monochromatic sequences is colouristic in feeling. His attitude to colour goes hand in hand with his approach to form and is controlled by his formal experiments. Each period of experiment and formal renewal leads to a tentative restricted palette which is dominated by sonorous blacks and umbers enlivened only by gamboge, ochre or stark white. As the new formal pattern takes shape so the colours become more varied until finally emerging in the exhilarating diversity of the 'Pink Tablecloth' with its vermilion, plum and pinks delightfully combined, or the full orchestration of 'Studio VIII' completed last year.

The surfaces of his paintings are frequently enhanced by a novel approach to texture and the handling of his material, but are never marred by expressionist extravagances. This obsession with texture culminates in his latest picture, 'On the Wing', where the pale blue encrusted background evokes the forms of small cumulus clouds without their actual representation. The simplification apparent in this composition is the crystallization of an image which has haunted him

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for many years and seems also to be a direct break-away from the ever-increasing complexity of his recent arrangements. It is undoubtedly the promise that his imagination will continue to yield beautiful and stimulating inventions. MARIA SHIRLEY

BRECHT AND THE BOLSHOI. About six months ago it suddenly—almost overnight it seemed—became impossible to open any self-respecting literary periodical, French or English, with pretensions to modishness without finding discussion of some aspect of the work of Bertolt Brecht: his theory of stage-craft, his corpus of plays, or his ideological aims. So that when the Berliner Ensemble actually arrived in London, soon after the untimely death of Brecht himself, it might be difficult, one felt, to approach a production of theirs without self-consciousness when all that stuff about the a-effect was breathing heavily down one's neck. But hardly had the curtains gone up on *Mother Courage* than the calm ineffable flood of light over the empty stage floated all one's uncertainties away. Mother Courage and her three children pulled their squalid little cart for what seemed centuries and miles; the stage revolved, the song went on and on and one was caught up into a trance. World enough and time there certainly was for the situations, bawdy or tragic, to coil and resolve themselves before one's bemused eyes; and the richness of Helene Weigel's incomparable acting as Courage proved an experience that was half-realized at the time and only fully grasped after the curtain fell. As enduring as Ulysses and as cunning, corrupted in the end by the war which was her living and yet indomitable in defeat, she was as basic as bread or salt, and in the end it was when the salt had lost its savour that we plainly perceived the tragedy. To see her plucking a chicken, indulging in absent-minded tenderness with the cook, losing first one son, then another, and lastly the dumb daughter—all added up to a character as real as a farmer's wife and as ruthless. A décor almost entirely in tones of grey and brown and black; the sketchiest suggestion of props; an astonishing fluidity of movement; an acting that was a flat statement of reality—nothing, it seemed, could have been more contemporary, and nothing more timeless. One went out, dazed, into the night and felt astonished to find London still there.

The visit of the Bolshoi Ballet, with the fabulous Ulanova, had been heralded by cultural fanfares too, though of a less intellectual kind, and expectation exacerbated by other, now notorious, causes so that *Romeo and Juliet*, on the first night, was given in an almost indescribable atmosphere of pleasurable excitement. Waiting for the curtain to go up, one had the impression of being inside a hive before a new swarm took off. It was clear from the beginning that, so far as this

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production was concerned, Diaghilev might never have been. The sets were pure Alma Tadema, most of the costumes unfortunate, and the colours impure; we seemed to wait interminably before anybody began to *dance*—all through there was far less dancing than mime, and pretty ham it was, some of the time. In fact, it was less like ballet, as we recognize it today, than some kind of unsung opera. But the great moments far outweighed the indulgent disappointment; the mounting excitement of the street fighting, for instance, when the attack spread exactly like fire in dry grass, running irregularly in outbreaks of flashing steel, and the orchestra rose to frenetic climax. And Sergei Koren as Mercutio was all that we had been led to expect of the Soviet male dancer; athletic, virile, he looked like Villon with his long nose and his long legs, and danced with the same mordant wit. Ulanova is extraordinary: not beautiful, yet, like Garbo, with something more than beauty; fragile as a rapier is fragile, with a lyricism never weighed down by her intrinsic nobility. To have seen her dance in Friar Lawrence's cell, coming with Romeo to her marriage is, like Florizel, to wish her a wave o' the sea, that she might ever do nothing but that.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

THE NEW HERO

J. A. CUDDON

MR GEORGE SCOTT'S *Time and Place*[1] is a semi-autobiographical analysis of the influences which he believes have contributed towards the formation of a new kind of hero in everyday life—echoes of whom are to be found in fiction—and also of the state of contemporary society in Britain. He posits an imaginary, composite hero—alluding to Mr Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim as an indicator—whose passions are ended before he starts on his journey; who distrusts his own intellectual pretensions and emotions even more than those of others; one who is 'fearful above all of not being "wide" enough to forestall delusion' and who 'is forced back into the defence of laughter, at himself and at the world'. And if he finds within himself 'any weakling inclination towards constructive ideas for the world, for "crusades" or any phoney nonsense of that kind, then he must secrete them in some dark cellar lest the neighbours discover them and subject him to ridicule. . . . He brings with him the supposed coarseness of the hobnailed navvy and the Teddy Boy's fear of being thought soft.'

1 Staples; 16s.

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