

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

ies method consists in part of relating a traditional academic discipline to American culture, past and present, seen large, then the field is already much more than promises. For surely it is this method that has animated, during the last decade, such works as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, David Potter's *People of Plenty*, Louis Hartz' *The Liberal Tradition in America*, Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*, Daniel Boorstin's *The Americans*, R. W. B. Lewis' *The American Adam*, and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, to mention only a few. This is harvest, both early and rich.

ROBERT H. L. WHEELER

THE LITERATURE OF POSSIBILITY: A Study in Humanistic Existentialism. By Hazel Barnes. *University of Nebraska Press*. \$5.75.

Although there is no lack of books on existentialism, works combining breadth and depth are still rare, and no previous study even aims to do such ample justice to both the philosophic and the literary creations of several of the major figures. Hazel Barnes has an excellent background for her undertaking. She has translated the only major work of philosophic existentialism that has yet appeared in English: Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. And she is a professor of classics with a feeling for literature, at home with the myths taken up by some of the existentialists, and able to bring historical perspective to her work.

This study concentrates on Sartre, Camus and De Beauvoir, and it deals in detail with their philosophic analyses and literary representations of, for example, bad faith, *engagement* and existential psychoanalysis. Hazel Barnes is extremely thorough and perceptive in unraveling plot upon plot and relating it to the writer's philosophy. Those who want a real understanding of existentialism instead of the usual superficial generalizations are certain to gain it from this book which, no doubt, will lead them on to read some of the plays and novels discussed in it. This is a scholarly study and an excellent introduction to existentialism.

WALTER KAUFMANN

MAN AND THE SACRED. By Roger Caillois. Translated from the French by Meyer Barash. *Free Press*. \$4.50.

This translation of Roger Caillois' book (written in 1939 but later supplemented by three long appendices) brings to American readers an example of the European humanist approach to social science. The author, who is known as a literary critic and as editor of *Diogenes*, draws on anthropology, on history, on literature and mythology in outlining what one might call the "ideal type" of the sacred.

Rather than analyze in psychological or economic terms, Caillois accepts the sacred as a primary experience and sets out to show the function of the metaphysical order in shaping society. Whether it be marriage in New Caledonia, ostracism in China, or a Roman Saturnalia, the ritual defines a common area of experience, removed from the everyday and dominated by violent emotion, but serving nonetheless to bind society together. Modern man, he argues, suffers from the lack of such communal experience as the festival and has turned instead to war as the alternative.

In defining the sacred, Caillois depends on anthropological studies for suggestion rather than proof; but his series of speculations is an impressive collection. The discussions of the function of taboo in forming a society's structure, the ambiguity of ritual (alternations of purification and defilement), and of the festival are rich developments of Durkheim's theories; yet the question remains as to whether sacred experience such as he describes is possible in a civilization in which ritual has lost its social function.

J. H. ATHERTON

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ARTIST. By Jacques Maritain. *Scribner's*. \$2.95.

Building on the earlier *Art and Scholasticism*, this volume of lectures gives Maritain an opportunity to consider more directly the question of the moral responsibility of the artist to others and to himself. No one can be a better writer simply by being better in the ethical sense, and it must be admitted that many pious works