

NEW DEFINITIVE EDITION / BEST FICTION AND NONFICTION

Survey of Contemporary Literature

Revised Edition

UPDATED REPRINTS OF 2,300 ESSAY-REVIEWS
FROM MASTERPLOTS ANNUALS, 1954-1976, AND
SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE SUPPLEMENT
WITH 3,300 BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE SOURCES

Edited by
FRANK N. MAGILL

Volume Ten
Res - Sol
6385 - 7072

SALEM PRESS
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969,
1970, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977,

by FRANK N. MAGILL

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 77-79874

Complete Set: ISBN 0-89356-050-2

Volume 10: ISBN 0-89356-060-X

REVISED EDITION
Third Printing

Some of the material in this work also appears in *Masterplots Annuals* (1954-1976)
and *Survey of Contemporary Literature Supplement* (1972)

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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THE RESTLESSNESS OF SHANTI ANDÍA

And Other Writings

Author: Pío Baroja (1872-1956)

Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Kerrigan

Publisher: University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor, Michigan). 415 pp. \$6.50

Type of work: Novel

Time: Nineteenth century

Locale: Northern Spain, Africa, South America

Memoirs of a slave trader and man of action by an unorthodox novelist

Principal personages:

SHANTI (SANTIAGO) ANDÍA, a Basque sea captain, the narrator

JUAN DE AGUIRRE, Shanti's seafaring uncle

DOLORCITAS, Shanti's first love

MARY A. SANDOW, Juan's daughter

JUAN MACHÍN, Shanti's enemy and benefactor

TRISTAN DE UGARTE, Juan's companion

CAPTAIN ZALDUMBIDE, owner of the slaver *Dragon*

RICHARD SMALL, an English treasure hunter

MR. SMILES, his partner

Spanish novels differ technically from English or American novels—one reason why, as most publishers agree, very few translations from the Spanish have proved profitable. The most frequently translated of modern Spanish novelists, next to Blasco Ibáñez, is Pío Baroja, born of Spanish and Italian ancestry in Santander, in northern Spain, in 1872. Nine of his novels were put into English, beginning in 1917 with *The City of the Discreet*, and ending with his masterpiece, *Paradox Rey*, in 1931. The depression may have ended his popularity. During such times, readers would hardly be drawn to a bitter realist like Baroja. So twenty-eight years passed before the appearance of another of his books in an English translation.

The author knew well the seamy side of life. Graduating in medicine in 1893, after several attempts at the final examination, he practiced in a small Basque town before turning to other careers, including that of a baker in

Madrid, until fortunate investments allowed him to return to the Basque country to devote the rest of his life to writing.

His first work was a volume of sketches, *Vidas sombrías* (1900), and most of his other writing, whether labeled short stories or novels, continued to be sketches. Life to him was episodic and without plan, and he poured into his pages the results of his wide observation, with little regard for organization, proportion, or unity. In his attempts to avoid the arty and the artificial, his writings frequently seem like a novelist's notebook, rather than a polished product. From the vast amount of details meticulously and realistically reported, from the characters who for a longer or shorter time cross the path of the protagonist, the reader draws his own conclusions, and from the tangle of threads spins his own plot. Those who must be told "what happened next" will dislike Baroja. The thinking reader will hail him, as H. L. Mencken

did, as "the modern Spanish mind at its most enlightened." The great modern Spanish novelist Cela has called him "our only European novelist." Ernest Hemingway visited him as he lay dying to pay tribute to "the one who taught so much to those of us who wanted to be writers when we were young."

Most of Baroja's fiction is conceived as trilogies. *The Restlessness of Shanti Andía* (1911) is Volume I in the trilogy *The Sea*. Volume II, *The Labyrinth of the Sirens*, was published in 1923. The third title appeared in two volumes six years later.

As Shanti Andía, the first person narrator, declares in the opening words: "The circumstances of present-day life are responsible for the fact that most people are dull. Almost no one has anything happen to him." Baroja considered man of a low order and generally fanatical and uncomprehending. Interested in nonconformists, this most original and unorthodox of Spanish novelists provided his heroes with a motto: "March ever forward: That is life: to have illusions about the future even though experience proves to us by the fallibility and unpleasantness of the present how unpropitious the future will be. Despite the unattractiveness of the present, dream of the allure of the future. Live in that hope, always deceitful, yet always encouraging."

The Restlessness of Shanti Andía shows how the real and the ideal, blended in life, are also blended in a novel. The old sea captain, having lived through exciting moments in his life, had been tempted to put some of them on paper after the editor of the local *Lúzaro Courier* had agreed to publish them. To get to the adventure

part of this novel requires perseverance; and during that journey a reader can never be sure what is pertinent to the plot and what is only the author's attempt to provide an insight into the ways in which other people live. Therefore its perusal is most rewarding to those who enjoy good writing and who are content with an "adventure novel" that is partially a series of sketches of life among the Basque fisherfolk.

The beginning presents various characters and describes episodes during the boyhood of Shanti, including a visit to the wreck of the *Stella Maris*. Not until Book II, fourteen chapters later, do we get to Shanti's voyages and his eventual rise to the command of the frigate *Bella Vizcaina*.

One chapter narrates his first love affair, with Dolorcitas, who promised to wait for him to return from his voyage. Two and a half years later he returned to find her married and already tired of her husband. From her request for a secret visit resulted a pistol duel with her husband that put Shanti in the hospital and sent her out of his life.

The main story, however, deals with the elusive Uncle Juan de Aguirre, a mysterious mariner whose funeral (in absentia) Shanti had attended as a boy. But during his voyages in the Orient he kept hearing that the man was still alive and eventually he received a letter that took him to the old sea captain and his daughter Mary. The dying man had two requests: to deliver a letter to Juan Machín, a miner, and to look after Mary. The family servant Allen added a complication by producing an English prayerbook with a cipher giving the clue to slave-running profits, buried in Nigeria.

Machín proved himself a rascal by

kidnapping Shanti in order to get Mary for himself and by sending him an infernal machine to get rid of him as a rival. But all changed with the delivery of the letter that told Machín he was Mary's half brother. He left her a dowry so that she could marry the captain, and then disappeared.

The treasure hunting is mostly revealed in an autobiography left by Aguirre, ex-blackbirder, ex-pirate, of the schooner *Dragon*, Captain Zaldumbide commanding, whose career had also included ferrying Chinese to America and putting down a mutiny. Since Shanti had enough money to scorn the treasure, he gave the prayer-book to the Englishmen, Richard Small and Mr. Smiles. Later he learned, from a final letter that enclosed two immense pearls as his share of the venture, that the world is full of violent and treacherous men. Shanti threw the pearls into the ocean.

In an epilogue, Shanti declares that his life is about over. He no longer yearns for the sea. Neither do his children. In fact, the Basques are forsaking their seafaring life. But he ends with this poetic declaration:

Oh, gallant riggings! White, white sails! Haughty frigates with prows on high and a figurehead on the cutwater! Round hookers, swift-sailing brigan-

tines! How sad to think you will all disappear, that you will soon no longer be seen!

The "Other Writings" of this volume consist of miscellaneous works. Four are essays, among them "The Way I Write," a foreword to *La busca* (1904) and more an ironic commentary on the author's motivation than a technical discussion. Two short stories that show Baroja's study of Poe, Dostoevski, and Dickens are "The Cabbages and the Cemetery," and "The Abyss." The volume concludes with a long drama or fantasy in dialogue, *The Legend of Jaun de Alizate*, telling of an aristocratic Basque of the Middle Ages who vainly tried to keep Christianity out of his land.

There are two Barojas, says the translator in his illuminating introduction: the universal Castilian and the Basque. But there is also a third revealed in this book, the lover of wandering who makes his hero say: "I must speak about myself: it is inevitable in memoirs." And Baroja's novels—they number almost one hundred—are really a mirror of the man himself, hating sham, pursuing truth, and stoically marching forward despite the obstacles put by fate into his path. If he was a regionalist, as are most Spanish novelists, his true "region" was Pío Baroja himself.

Sources for Further Study

Criticism:

Friedenberg, Daniel M. "The Death of a Symbol," in *New Republic*. CXXXV (December 3, 1956), pp. 18-20. Friedenberg looks at the theme of the outcast, which runs through all of Baroja's works.

Shaw, D. L. "A Reply to Deshumanization—Baroja on the Art of the Novel," in *Hispanic Review*. XXV (April, 1957), pp. 105-111. Baroja insists that art is a spontaneous creation arising out of "loved reality." This article applies that doctrine to the author's novels.

Reviews:

Christian Science Monitor. February 18, 1960, p. 5. 1,300 words.

Commonweal. LXX, September 25, 1959, p. 544. 750 words.

New Statesman. LVIII, September 26, 1959, p. 396. 1,750 words.

New York Times. September 20, 1959, p. 49. 650 words.

Saturday Review. XLII, September 26, 1959, p. 19. 600 words.

THE RETURN OF H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N

Author: Leo Rosten (1908-)

Publisher: The Vanguard Press (New York). 192 pp. \$3.50

Type of work: Short stories

Time: The present

Locale: The American Night Preparatory School for Adults

Eleven new stories dealing with the energies, errors, and triumphs of Hyman Kaplan, a zealous immigrant enrolled in a beginners' class in English

Principal characters:

MR. PARKHILL, a patient and dedicated teacher

HYMAN KAPLAN,

GUS MATSOURAS,

SAM PINSKY,

MISS CARMEN CARAVELLO,

MISS BESSIE SHIMMELFARB,

MRS. MOSKOWITZ,

MISS MITNIK,

MISS TARNOVA,

MISS ROCHELLE GOLDBERG,

REUBEN PLONSKY, and

FISCHEL PFEIFFER, some members of Mr. Parkhill's beginners' class in English

It was the second night of the new fall term in the English class for beginners at the American Night Preparatory School for Adults. Mr. Parkhill, the instructor, had called the roll and asked for the homework assignment. While the students struggled at the blackboard with the mysteries and complexities of English grammar, Mr. Parkhill was recollecting last year's class and Mr. Hyman Kaplan, not his star pupil but his most vocal and aggressive in his assault on linguistics, who on one occasion had conjugated the verb "eat" as "eat, ate, full" and on another had given the opposite of "inhale" as "dead." Let Leo Rosten do the scene:

He started to open the window, for no good reason, when, quite without warning, the door was flung open. A gust of cold air swept in from the corridor as a clarion voice proclaimed,

"Hollo, frands, students, averybody! Grittins!" The heads of the thirty-odd pilgrims in the classroom turned as one. "Valcome to de new sizzon! Valcome to beginnis' grate!"

"Mine gootness!" exclaimed Mrs. Moskowitz. "I dun't believe mine ice."

"Lookit, lookit who's here na!" rejoiced Mr. Pinsky.

"Holy smokey," someone growled.

Miss Caravello murmured something with "Santa Maria" in it. It might have been a prayer.

Mr. Parkhill did not have to turn to recognize the heroic voice that had cried "Grittins!" He could not mistake that incomparable enunciation, that supreme aplomb, that blithe triumphant spirit. He knew only one student who would cry "Valcome!" to those who, enjoying prior residence, should clearly have welcomed *him*. He knew only one man who entered a classroom as if storming a citadel. "Mr.—" his eyes found the ebullient newcomer—"Kaplan. Well, well, Mr. Kaplan!"

Hyman Kaplan, the eager beaver, is back, as brash, as zealous, and as ready as ever to fracture English phonetics and grammar, leaving Mr. Parkhill unnerved but at the same time exhilarated by his pupil's reckless and destructive logic. His return seems as likely to please a new generation of readers as it is to delight an older one. More than twenty years have passed since Mr. Kaplan first appeared in Mr. Parkhill's class for beginners in English at the American Night Preparatory School for Adults. At the same time he entered a region of fable. Mr. Kaplan's place might not be among the demi-gods of the inner hierarchy—Leatherstocking, Ichabod Crane, Huck Finn, Davy Crockett, Babbitt, and a few others—but he stands well within the circle of those who have added to the dimensions of national myth.

For Leo Rosten has created his character in the image of the New American, the immigrant dazzled by and dedicated to the life of his adopted country, struggling to master its language yet stubbornly refusing to submerge his individuality in the standardized habits of action and thought that his new way of life frequently imposes. In this new collection of stories he proves again that he is more than a fictional beg on whom a clever writer may hang dialect jokes and comic situations. Under all circumstances, whether he is bringing new tribulations to Mr. Parkhill, triumphing over shy Miss Mitnik, or putting Fischel Pfeiffer in his place, he remains self-assuredly, even triumphantly, himself—eager, wise in a child-like fashion, but capable of scornful invective and withering sarcasm when fully aroused.

True, some changes have come about

since his earlier appearance. A few of the students in the beginners' class have gone on to Miss Higby's class in Composition, Grammar, and Civics. Norman Bloom, that discoverer of blunders, has moved to Boston to work for a raincoat manufacturer, and Jacob Rubin has married a comely divorcée and now, it is reported, lives in Far Rockaway. Otherwise things are just about the same. Miss Tarnova of the slumberous eyes and throbbing voice reminds Mr. Parkhill of a character out of some sad Russian drama. Miss Goldberg steadies her nerves with sourballs and caramels. Mr. Matsoukas, the born mutterer of the class, conducts himself as a true Greek among barbarians. Mrs. Moskowitz shrinks from the spotlight when called on to recite; her "Oys!" are the wails of an anguished Niobe. Miss Caravello is the bristling champion of Latin culture. Shy Miss Mitnik is usually right but seldom able to prove herself so. And then, of course, there is always Mr. Kaplan, who remains at all times H*Y*M*A*N K*A*P*L*A*N, as he signs himself in red crayon, with each capital outlined in blue and with green stars between the letters.

Only one new character of consequence has been introduced in this series. He is Fischel Pfeiffer, who has been demoted from Miss Higby's grade because he is not *quite* ready for Composition, Grammar, and Civics, and who has the temerity to utter an unforgivable "Fehl!" in reply as Mr. Kaplan welcomes him to the beginners' grade. That "Fehl!" of disdain begins a feud that all but wrecks the class for one distressing night, with Mr. Kaplan the champion of class solidarity, Mr. Pfeiffer aloof, Mr. Parkhill helpless, Sam Pinsky playing Sancho

Panza to Mr. Kaplan's Don Quixote, and Miss Shimmelfarb pleading, "Kep-
len, give an *inch*." The final word is
Mr. Kaplan's: "Ve can vipe ot de
'Fehl,' Pfeiffer. But vun ting you
should know: You ken write like
Judge Vashington, you can spall like
Vinston Choichill, but ve got a *titcher*,
Pfeiffer, a movelous titcher, who, on-
lass you pronouce 'sh' like a mama to a
baby an' not like you booing at a ball
game, vill kipp you in beginnis' grate
if it takes fifty yiss!"

Most of the pupils in the beginners'
class are vocal and active, but it is Mr.
Kaplan who, like Abou Ben Adhem,
leads all the rest in his furious assault
to conquer the English language.
Whether he is defining "diameter" as
a machine to count dimes, giving the
plural of "sandwich" as "delicatessen,"
or opposing "tall" with "shrimp," he
is consistent in following the laws of
his own wild logic. His chief enthu-
siasm, however, is "the glorious pest,"
the age of such legendary figures as
Judge Vashington, Tom Spain, John
Edems, Tom S. Jefferson, L. X. Hamil-
ton, and James Medicine, the fourth
President of the United States. There
are times in his presentation of these
figures when truth is revealed through
error. "To a tyrant like Kink Judge,"
he asks, "vat else vas Petrick Henry
bot a glorious pest."

In his introduction Leo Rosten ex-
plains how the first of the Hyman

Kaplan stories came into being while
he was a graduate student working for
his Ph.D. At the time, afraid that his
activities would be regarded unfavor-
ably by his academic superiors, he con-
cealed his identity under the pseudo-
nym of Leonard Q. Ross. Along with
his discussion of the phonetical free-
doms his characters indulge in he re-
marks in passing that these stories are
true even though they never happened.
So much is understandable; but Mr.
Rosten's remarks do not account for
the continuing freshness of these tales.
Dialect grows stale; malapropisms are
deadly. Yet Hyman Kaplan is in col-
lections of humor and text antholog-
ies. Perhaps some credit for the popu-
larity of these stories should go to Mr.
Parkhill through whose eyes we see
the beginners' class as "an incubator of
citizens" as well as a mixed group of
national traits and personal idiosyn-
crasies. If this is not America now in
the making, it is at least a picture of
how one phase of our society was
made.

The truths of Mr. Rosten's char-
acterizations and the incidents that
harass Mr. Parkhill will be better ap-
preciated at first hand. Therefore, read
the book, certainly one of the funniest
of the year and, like all true comedy,
close to fantasy and pathos. H*Y*-
M*A*N* K*A*P*L*A*N would
have a word for it. It's "eumoirous."

THE RETURN OF LADY BRACE

Author: Nancy Wilson Ross (1907-)

Publisher: Random House (New York). 242 pp. \$3.75

Type of work: Novel

Time: The present

Locale: The North Shore of Long Island

An American woman returns to her former home and tries to measure the meaning of large sections of her life

Principal characters:

LADY CAROLINE BRACE, an elderly expatriate

STEPHEN, her brother

ROSEMARY, her married daughter

LYDIA, her divorced daughter

FREDERICK HOLLIS, Lydia's elderly suitor

VENERABLE ANANDA THERA (VENERABLE SIR), a Buddhist monk

The title of Nancy Wilson Ross's novel suggests melodrama and retribution, as in a Western thriller. Actually, the "return" of the elderly heroine, American by birth but resident in England and elsewhere during most of her life, is an extremely quiet one. She does not alter or cut short the threads of existence that are unreeling in an old family house on Long Island. The most that her "return" gives her is a deepening awareness of those threads and the way they interweave with each other—and, finally, with that particular thread of existence which Lady Brace must call her own, even though she does not understand it. In short, beneath a highly competent surface of social observation and modern chatter rendered by a responsive ear, the novelist gives us a civilized tract for civilized times.

These times, though civilized, are also confused; the surface of physical well-being and manners both casual and perfect conceals a grim hollowness. It is a hollowness that one can and must labor to fill in during one's later years, and this is what Lady Brace learns from all her contacts. The veiled and positive answer that comes

from the Venerable Sir—the oriental visitor in the house—is finally more telling for Lady Brace than the waste and insentience she finds in the lives of persons linked to her by blood.

The novel opens with the arrival of Lady Brace for a protracted visit at Fox Meadows, her ancestral home on the North Shore of Long Island. The house, although still occupied by Lady Brace's daughter Rosemary and her household, is up for sale. Lady Brace, who has been married twice and who has spent happy years in England with her second husband, takes up with mingled feelings of regret and guilt the acquaintance of her adult daughters. These two children of her first marriage had, many years before, expressed a preference for life in the United States rather than life in England with a titled stepfather. To the belatedly anxious eyes of their mother it now seems that both of her alienated children are something less than they might have been. Rosemary is happily domestic, expending her energy on household duties, and Lady Brace soon ceases to feel concern for the chaos that Rosemary never masters. It is over Lydia, the divorcée, that Lady Brace

broods, even while she perceives that her brooding will be unavailing. Lydia, shattered by one passionate and consuming love affair, is now embarked on another, one that seems to Lady Brace doubly unsuitable since Lydia's new lover is the husband of one of Lady Brace's girlhood friends and thus her contemporary. With admirable delicacy and, for some time, with unflagging resolution, Lady Brace interviews Lydia and Frederick Hollis, her lover, alone and together; she is forced to see that she cannot deflect Lydia's vertigo of self-destruction, nor can she shatter the elderly lover's determination to protract the interests of youth and middle age.

Even more at the center of Lady Brace's awakened concern is her brother Stephen. Over the years, Lady Brace has endured a nagging curiosity about the mystery of her brother's life. She has suspected homosexuality; and this suspicion seems to be justified. She has been just as deeply distressed by the waste of a truly distinguished sensitivity and insight. She spends many of the quiet hours of her Long Island visit conversing with her aging brother, who is recovering from a stroke, and she meditates even longer hours on the kernel of truth that, she is sure, lies beneath her brother's evasive cynicism.

Her brother, she immediately observes on her arrival, has brought with him a strange companion from his home in Ceylon, a teacher of Eastern mysticism named, oddly, the Venerable

Sir. This oriental guru drives a Thunderbird, prepares his special diet on the top floor of the house, takes early morning walks in the formal garden, and is unobtrusively available for consultation. To him Lady Brace turns when she is overcome by a deep but restrained passion to reshape the lives of her dear ones. From him, in passages that echo the sacred books of the East, she learns the only sort of wisdom that will alleviate her pain: acceptance of the pattern that has already been woven; perception that no pattern is so disastrous as to alter the final destiny of all men. Most persons fall short of this destiny, true; but all persons have the chance to contemplate the ironies of human contingency and thus pass beyond them. At the end of the novel, Lady Brace sits among the comparative ruins of her life, but, instead of wailing with the despair that has assaulted her, she prepares herself for a task which she had not known before, the task of transforming her entire existence by the act of contemplation.

What lies at the center of the novel does indeed organize the entire work. But the reader, even if he regards the Venerable Sir's "solution" as no solution at all but rather an evasion, will yet concede that the author unites with her reserved form of piety both wit and malice. Beyond question there is in this novel a power to anatomize and fix in apt phrase the folly and cross-purpose that lie this side of Maya, this side of the veil of illusion.