

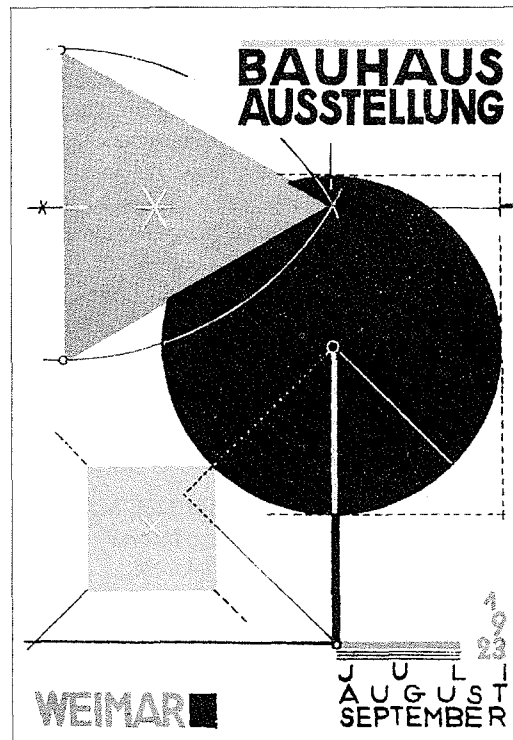
to acknowledge that it is not "age-old hatreds" but new combinations of political theory and historical contingency that we need to fear. After all, in 1912 Mussolini was a vaguely leftist editor of *Utopia*. By 1934 he was congratulating himself on having "buried the putrid corpse of liberty."

## Arts & Letters

**THE BAUHAUS: Masters and Students** by Themselves. Ed. by Frank Whitford. Overlook. 328 pp. \$85

In *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981), Tom Wolfe wittily argued that Bauhaus architects—figures such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, who gathered and taught at the influential German design school between the wars—were narrow-minded soldiers of socialism who created unadorned, ugly buildings that sacrificed the aesthetic and practical desires of the individual for an ideological ideal. "Every child," Wolfe charged, "[now] goes to school in a building that looks like a duplicating-machine replacement-parts wholesale distribution warehouse." Wolfe's sarcastic indictment of the Bauhaus has now become part of the conventional wisdom about the German design school. But the history and influence of the Bauhaus are a bit more complicated, as this first high-quality, full-scale art book on the school reveals.

Whitford, an art historian, has culled first-person accounts from art critics, journalists, and politicians of the day, as well as from the Bauhausers themselves, and supplemented the usual reproductions of paintings and product designs with such original documents as notes, sketches, postcards, and book jackets. Although one of the aims of the school was to create economically efficient housing for workers, the book shows that the Bauhaus was anything but a source of dogmatism, political or otherwise. Founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar, the school was devoted to uniting all of the arts under architecture, which Gropius considered the supreme art, and to enhancing quality of life through design that was both economical and artistically sensitive. Remaining true to his original manifesto, which called for "the avoidance of all prescription" and



"a preference for the creative," Gropius consciously brought together people with different and conflicting views.

One of those people was Hannes Meyer, a Marxist who believed aesthetics should play no role in design. Gropius chose him in 1926 to head the newly formed architecture department and then to succeed him as director two years later, but Meyer's attempts to steer the Bauhaus toward communist purity repeatedly fell flat. His followers were few, and he met formidable resistance from independent-minded artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. In 1930, Mies van der Rohe replaced Meyer and tossed the party line out. Unfortunately, the school, which had moved from Weimar to Dessau and ultimately to Berlin to flee Nazi repression, was finally shut down three years later.

While the Bauhausers were trying to unite form with function, their guiding principles, as this book makes clear, were always aesthetic ones—line, balance, and beauty. Indeed, the Bauhaus was responsible for some of the more celebrated buildings of this century, including Gropius's Bauhaus school building in Dessau,

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with its spectacular expanse of exterior glass wrapped elegantly around the workshop wing. And the Bauhaus's influence in the United States has been on balance positive, bringing a clean, streamlined look not only to architecture (see, for example, the indisputably gracious Mies Lake Shore apartments in Chicago), but also to graphics, furniture, and consumer products. Most of the ugly "modern" buildings that Wolfe (rightly) denounces were designed not by Gropius, Mies, or their students but by architects who clumsily appropriated the deceptively simple look of modern architecture and have now given it a bad name.

**THE INTELLECTUALS AND THE MASSES:** Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939. By John Carey. St. Martin's Press. 256 pp. \$19.95

That turn-of-the-century literati were by and large hostile toward the masses hardly comes as news. Every British literature survey adverts to the aristocratic elitism and snobbery of W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and other masters of modernism. It comes as no greater revelation that the intellectuals' notion of the "masses" was largely a convenient fiction, spun from such demographic facts as the population explosion (which in Europe was marked by a jump from 180 million to 460 million people between 1800 and 1914), rapid suburbanization, and the growth of the clerkly trades.

What distinguishes Carey's examination of all this is what he makes of it: very much, one might say in his favor; too much, one might object. Consider, for example, the modernist cult of difficulty, the urge to make the art object as complex and demanding as possible. Carey attributes this occultism entirely to the literary artist's contempt for the vulgar, uneducated tastes of the common man, and Carey is not altogether wrong. Many of the archmodernists held that only the priestly few should have access to Art; after all, Art was intended to separate the human wheat from the (barely) human chaff. T. S. Eliot's decree that poets "must be difficult" was widely understood and approved by those whom Coleridge had dubbed the clerisy. Such willful obscurantism led the modernists to

undervalue some of the simpler (but no less important) pleasures of art, including sentiment and story, a bias that in turn has contributed to the marginalization of serious literature to this day.

Yet it is hard not to feel, even on this strictly literary point, that Carey presses too far in one direction, never acknowledging the possibility of a more generously motivated concern. Weren't modern intellectuals right to be opposed to the oversimplifying and sensationalizing tendencies of a modern popular culture that began to emerge at the turn of the century? Carey, a professor of literature at Oxford University, plays too easily the friend of populism when he discounts the virtues of difficulty. He would seemingly reduce art to entertainment. And doing so, he ends up indulging in a form of counter-snobbery, as when he asserts that a person like Leopold Bloom would never read the novel in which he figures so centrally, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, because more than any other 20th-century novel, "it is for intellectuals only."

But art—important as it is—is not all that is at stake here. Carey sees literary values shaping political and social attitudes. And, again, there is great virtue in his driving home just how ugly and inexcusable many of the opinions of literary intellectuals were. Too often these have been lightly passed over, but Carey shouts where others have whispered. We learn of the extent of H. G. Wells's obsession with eugenics and his horror of undesirable types and races. We hear of George Gissing's vitriolic contempt for democracy and his yearning for a Nietzschean superman. We are treated to the full blast of Wyndham Lewis's fulminations against suburban man and his ghastly paeans to Nazi storm troopers. ("The Anglo-Saxon would feel reassured at once in the presence of these straightforward young pillars of the law.") And Carey rightly derides Ezra Pound's excuse for his anti-Semitism—"a suburban prejudice"—as obscuring the true high-culture origins of his attitude.

But Carey insists upon a simple determinism where a more nuanced analysis is called for. Modernist, elitist notions could as easily be used to attack Nazism as to underwrite it, and they were. It is more than an oversight not to mention that Gissing's beloved Nietzsche specifically loathed everything about anti-Semitism, includ-