

YEARBOOK ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST AFFAIRS 1977

edited by Richard F. Staar
et al.
Hoover, 1977, 612 pp. \$30
L of C 76-51879
ISBN 0-8179-6701-X

The eleventh volume in a series, this edition surveys Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations throughout the world in 1976 and provides profiles of their activities in 93 countries. An 8-page essay on the United States gives details on the Communist Party USA, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Progressive Labor Party, together with some information on several Maoist sects, although not on the new Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) founded in June 1977 to attack revisionism and carry on Mao Tse-tung's thought. Other features include a long article on the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in Europe, held in Berlin in 1976, and a valuable bibliography.

*Arts & Letters***RUBENS IN ITALY**

by Michael Jaffé
Cornell, 1977, 128 pp. \$55
L of C 76-20065
ISBN 0-8014-1064-9

One day in 1600, Peter Paul Rubens, aged 23, left his native Flanders for Italy. Eight years later, in a desperate and fruitless attempt to reach his mother's deathbed, he returned home—and never went south of the Alps again. This account of Rubens' Italian years, by a Cambridge professor of art history, is an inspiring Painter's Progress—a tale of talent, helped by hard work, again and again assisted by luck. With impeccable scholarship and telling detail, Jaffé demonstrates in text and 346 well-chosen illustrations the impact of those early years on Rubens' later paintings. So convincing is the commentary that it makes one wonder how so many people, specialists or laymen, can continue to insist that this painter was only, or essentially, "Flemish": he, whom many knew in his Italian Spring as Pier Paolo Rubens.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHAUCER

by John Gardner
Knopf, 1977, 352 pp. \$12.50
L of C 76-1915
ISBN 0-394-49317-6

Courtier, diplomat, squire, and poet Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400) lived in the thick of English politics. His friends included patron and brother-in-law John of Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster and Steward of England in Richard II's early reign); his acquaintances, the enigmatic Black Prince (Edward) and the tragic Richard II himself. John Gardner (author of *Nickel Mountain* and many other

works of fiction and nonfiction) brings the novelist's eye, the disciple's devotion, and the medievalist's hoary zest to a biography that may, he surmises, even be accurate: Records of the poet's life are few and scholars quarrel over what facts remain, although Chaucer's way of looking at things seems "clear as an English April day." A royalist in evil times and a free-thinking Christian who read Boethius and cultivated a taste for the bawdy, Chaucer emerges as a man who would take matters seriously if he must but humorously if he could, serenely fathering English verse in his spare time.

WALLACE STEVENS:
The Poems of Our Climate
 by Harold Bloom
 Cornell, 1977
 413 pp. \$17.50
 L of C 76-55482
 ISBN: 0-8014-0840-7

Harold Bloom examines the work of one of the foremost American poets of the 20th century. He quarrels with the prevailing critical view that Stevens' poetic self is engaged in exploring possible confirmations of selfhood in the face of the loss of traditional certainties. Instead, Bloom argues, Stevens' return to the "First Idea," urged in his "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1942) is the poet's central theme, conveying his will to repudiate the past, first by shedding inherited modes of perception, then by refashioning reality in a poem that affirms the authority and control of the poetic self. Central to this process is Stevens' struggle to escape the influence of such strong precursors as Whitman and Emerson. Not an easy book to read, but not one for students of poetry to overlook.

THE BOOK OF MERLYN:
The Unpublished Conclusion to *The Once and Future King*
 by T. H. White
 Univ. of Texas, 1977
 137 pp. \$9.95
 L of C 77-3454
 ISBN 0-292-70718-5

For reasons that Sylvia Warner Townsend's introduction fails to make clear, this intended final chapter to Britisher T. S. White's retelling of the Arthurian legends was dropped at the time *The Once and Future King* was first published (London, 1958). *The Book of Merlyn* was written in 1941, while White was living in Ireland and wrestling with pacifist scruples over joining England's war for survival against the Nazis. Delivered to his editors just before he enlisted, the book is heavily didactic and, here and there, transparently autobiographical. But White's original grand design is interesting: to take Ar-