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*Arts & Letters*

**EVELYN WAUGH,  
A LITTLE ORDER:  
A Selection from His  
Journalism**  
edited by Donat Gallagher  
Little, Brown, 1981  
192 pp. \$12.95

**THE LETTERS OF  
EVELYN WAUGH**  
edited by Mark Amory  
Ticknor & Fields, 1980  
664 pp. \$25

Before Evelyn Waugh achieved best-sellerdom with *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), he supported his novel-writing and his country estate by doing assignments for newspapers. Later, he could pick and choose his topics. Yet, whether hackwork or serious essays or polemics, his journalism, anthologized in *A Little Order*, was never dull, and it has yet to fade. He described British politics as the "cocaine of the people," deplored the emerging "two-class state of officials and proletariat," cheered the vigor of Catholicism in America, and regularly lamented aristocracy's decline at home. "I was driven into writing," he said, "because it was the only way a lazy and ill-educated man could make a decent living. I am not complaining about the wages. . . . What I mind so much is the work."

Like his early novels, his *Letters* are far funnier than his *Diary* (1976). They provide a lively running portrait of English high life and of Waugh himself (in public, an outrageous Tory; in private, a loving husband and father): his unhappy war experiences; his bibulous "raids" on London; his travels (Ethiopia, Italy, Rhodesia); his spirited exchanges with Graham Greene, Anthony Powell, Nancy Mitford, Randolph Churchill; his devotion to work and to gossip. Waugh did not like the telephone. He prodded, lectured, and entertained his friends by mail until his death in 1966, and the letters survive to stir us as well.

**IDEAS AND THE NOVEL**  
by Mary McCarthy  
Harcourt, 1980  
121 pp. \$7.95

Henry James "has a mind so fine that no idea could violate it," quipped T. S. Eliot. McCarthy, the highly opinionated author of such novels as *The Company She Keeps* (1942) and *The Group* (1963), agrees. But James, nevertheless, set the trends of 20th-century fiction, she adds. James invented a refined, stately way of writing nearly devoid of "physical action, inventory, description of places and persons . . . and moral teaching." Similarly,

many modern novelists have chosen a shapely literary style over a hard reckoning with the world around them. They work mainly at conveying their own sensibilities or their characters' psychology. McCarthy longs for books by the likes of Dickens, Balzac, Tolstoy, and Flaubert. These were authors, she says, who, because they dealt with subjects that affected their readers' lives, were "looked up to as [spokesmen] on all sorts of matters: medicine, religion, capital punishment, the right relation between the sexes." McCarthy does not rebuke her contemporaries by name. But she lauds John Updike's *The Coup* (1978) and the works of some American Jewish novelists—those few (Bellow, Malamud, Roth) probing questions of politics, class, or religion.

**STONE**

by Osip Mandelstam  
Princeton, 1981  
253 pp. \$17.50 cloth,  
\$7.95 paper

In May 1934, Mandelstam, a 43-year-old Russian poet, was arrested and exiled to the Urals. His offense was reciting to friends a poem, included in this anthology, about Stalin: *His fat fingers are shiny, like slugs, / and his words are absolute, like grocers' weights.* But most of his early poems, written when Mandelstam was in his late teens and early 20s, are about cityscapes. St. Petersburg, made of stone, is the image by which he proclaims that the poet is not a creator but a builder: *Stone, become a web, / A lace fragility: / Let your thin needle stab / The empty breast of sky.* St. Petersburg later became, for Mandelstam, a symbol of Western order and respect for people, virtues lacking in Stalin's tyrannical regime. Mandelstam died of "heart failure" in 1938. He was "rehabilitated" in 1956, but his poems were not allowed to appear in the Soviet Union until 1974, and then only in an edition intended primarily for sale abroad. He once compared a poem to an Egyptian funereal barge in which "everything needed for life is stored . . . and nothing is forgotten." Mandelstam's own "ship of death," as translator Robert Tracy notes, has already carried him "into many alien harbors; someday it will even reach a Russian port."