

THE OUTCASTS OF FOOLGARAH, by Frank Hardy. Allara Publishing. 245 pp. \$2.50.

OPINIONS OF *THE OUTCASTS OF FOOLGARAH* diverge considerably from those who regard it as an outrageously comic novel to those who see it simply as the dirty wanderings of Hardy's mind. At least, this is the opinion we get from reading some newspaper reviews (the newspapers seem reluctant to review it) and from talking generally.

There is, however, more to it than that. On the one hand, it is an example of what Bernard Shaw observed of the art of Mark Twain who, he said, put things in such a way as to make people who would have otherwise hung him believe he was joking. On the other, it is the record of what has happened to one communist, who also happens to be a writer, since 1956 when this novel first began to see the light of day.

Theoretically, *The Outcasts of Foolgarah* deals with the Marcusean thesis that the revolutionary force for changing society lies in the hands of those who are no longer captives of its repressive tolerance, that is the outcasts, the human refuse, those who stand outside society having been rejected by it, minorities of all kinds — pensioners, inmates of mental institutions and prisons, coloured peoples, sections of the working class, the permanently unemployed, student elements, etc. And Hardy prefaces his work with a quote from Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* and acknowledges his debt to this philosopher in his *Author's Note*. So in one sense it is Marcuse with feathers, simplified and presented for popular consumption in the form of a novel, the thesis providing a theoretical support on which to hang the tale.

The tale itself is simple, tracing what happens to two garbage carters, Chilla and Tich, after having been sacked for sorting bottles in the boss's time. From a simple strike which results from this exercise of arbitrary power, it proceeds to the stage where martial law is declared. Hardy probably creates literary and social history when he has the garbos and fellow outcasts (a student, an Italian, assorted garbage and sanitary workers, TPI pensioners) shoot it out with Australian troops fresh from Vietnam on Anzac Day.

Before this climax is reached, blasphemous in the eyes of the "canon law" of Australian myth makers, traditional organs of social change, like trade unions and the Communist Party, are shown to be part of the establishment, not sufficiently apart from it to either influence or change it, the outcasts being the only ones sufficiently removed to be able to fundamentally (i.e. radically) reassess what has passed for reality.

Many of the inhabitants of Foolgarah, a microcosm of Australia itself, are easily identified — like Sir William Bigears, Sir Jasper Storeman, and Crazy Darcy Meanswell. However, Hardy has learnt from his *Power Without Glory* days and in creating a single character he's often gathered together a mean bunch of politicians, thrown them all into a melting pot and created a single monstrosity.

Foolgarah itself is a terrifying society, our society, riddled with corruption at all levels of public life, where decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a few, with the masses kept in their place with palliatives of all kinds —

accepted ways of doing things, right channels, rules, laws, hire purchase, the mass media — which constitute an acceptance of roles assigned to them by society, roles beyond which they will not step for to do so puts them beyond the pale and into the land of the outcasts. Even the outcasts do not initially want to be outcasts for in creating them Foolgarah has failed and will seek to destroy them, they being the evidence of its failure.

One could read *The Outcasts of Foolgarah* simply for laughs. In places it is hysterically funny. Stylistically, it's an extended bawdy joke, what with cans of human excreta being upturned everywhere, over local councillors, politicians, even the Royal Her and Him. In fact, it would appear that Hardy has recognised the anal idiom of Australian life and simply written a novel exploiting it. If people are revolted or put off by this, then in the long run, they are only being revolted by themselves.

However, it's not all laughs. The homosexual rape of student revolutionary Albert McKakie in Penbay Prison is powerful and shocking, coming as it does in the midst of comedy. In fact, this is the way Hardy works in this novel; he has the reader laughing and at the height of this laughter sticks him in the guts with a knife. At that point you realise it's more than an extended piece of humorous writing.

Indeed, the whole novel constitutes a powerful work, leaving us with a scramble of emotions — like anger, hate, and what are we doing against this society Hardy has described. In turn, this means that Hardy has created, in the midst of all the bawdiness, human characters with which one can identify and not the cardboard cut-outs one critic has referred to.

Whether or not Hardy believes in the Marcusian thesis does not really concern us here. That is a matter for the author; and perhaps as he describes himself in the ruthless self-portrait (F. J. Borky) this is just a straw grabbed by a man disillusioned by the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the reappraisal of Stalin and stalinism. To that extent it is a statement of his current ideological position which is not necessarily his permanent one.

Given his history as a writer, one must admit that Hardy is unpredictable, save to the extent that his one consistency is his tenacious, combative, struggling spirit. This is probably the final value of the book — not that it says what many of us already know, admittedly in a powerful and entertaining way, but that the spirit of struggle against oppression of all kinds and the affirmation of human dignity are the values asserted in an age which seeks to subvert the former and deny the latter.

PAM AND ROWAN CAHILL

MARX IN HIS OWN WORDS, by Ernst Fischer and Franz Marek. Allen Lane The Penguin Press, \$4.50.

THE SPATE OF REASSESSMENT of Marx's work over the last two decades was a necessary and useful exercise, both to save Marx from the clutches of the dogmatists and to reinterpret him in the light of present social reality and events since his death. However, if this process continues to the detriment of our own analysis and understanding of modern capitalism, the left will run the risk of merely creating for itself another reified image of Marx, somewhat more sophisticated than the last one, but no better in its overall result.

Marx has provided us with a wealth of profound and creative insights into the workings of class societies, and this heritage has yet to be exploited to the full, particularly since much of his important work has lain unknown or forgotten until recently. But this is no reason to build ourselves a new set of scriptures. Rather, we should utilise Marx's insights and framework in our own work, for which latter Marx's work can be no substitute.

Whenever a new book on Marx appears, one gets the uneasy feeling that here is a new attempt to rewrite or reinterpret the scriptures for the author's own (often quite legitimate and reasonable) purposes. Fischer's book hopefully was not intended in this way, and indeed Fischer's own original works on art suggest that he is not a "scripture quoter".

In any case, this book is a useful introduction to, and view of, Marx's (and Engels') ideas. The authors give an exposition of these ideas in their own words, with plentiful quotations of Marx's words. The book is divided into a number of sections (e.g. Division of Labor and Alienation/Profit and Capital/Theory of Revolution) which provide a useful structure for anyone new to Marxist theory. As an introduction, it has much to recommend it, and it is therefore a pity that the publishers have chosen to print it in hardcover form at about four times the price it would sell for as a paperback.

As a collection of excerpts from Marx, the book is probably not as good as that edited by Bottomore and Rubel (in Pelican paperback) while, as a commentary on Marx it is not as interesting, nor valuable, as some others.

However, its value as an introduction certainly justifies its existence in the somewhat overcrowded "Marx market". It is to be hoped that it will soon appear in paperback, at a price more likely to guarantee large sales.

BRIAN AARONS

AUTHOR'S LETTER

To All Members of the Editorial Board,
Australian Left Review.

This is a complaint. I write in connection with the review of my book *A New Britannia* which appeared in *Australian Left Review* number 30 by Mr. Max Teichmann. In *ALR* 31 I asked for certain matters to be cleared up by number 32 which has appeared without further mention of this matter. I am sure you will be aware of the seriousness of the allegations made by Mr. Teichmann and why I am anxious that a retraction be obtained from him. Nor have I heard from your editor on this matter although I sent my letter by registered mail some months ago. In conclusion let me restate that Mr. Teichmann's charges of plagiarism are totally untrue.

HUMPHREY McQUEEN

We assure Mr. McQueen and our readers that communication has passed and is passing between ourselves and Mr. Teichmann.—Ed.