

theologizing. Cushman is not carried away by the fads of the moment. He is eager to preserve the continuity of Christian thought even as he wishes for repristination through better knowledge of the Scriptures. He is a generalist in theology rather than a specialist. And this should be a healthy lesson for all of us, who are assailed from so many sides by special interest theologies.

Reviewed by GEORGE H. TAVARD

The Voyeur as Prophet

Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life, by Ian Hunter, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980. 270 pp. \$13.95.

THERE IS no orthodoxy as rigid and unyielding as secularism, and to its adherents Malcolm Muggeridge is bound to appear as a hectoring voice from some long-forgotten age. The things he protested against—the rise of totalitarianism and the acquiescence of intellectuals, the growing disbelief in objective morality and the belief in “fantasy,” his favorite word which describes the cult of the twentieth century—seem, today, to be part of reality itself, insofar as reality is believed to exist. It is no surprise to hear a philosopher like A. J. Ayer declaim: “I came to like [Muggeridge] for his moral courage, his kindness in private and his acerbity in print. Unhappily, his transformation into a religious zealot has put an end to any show of friendliness between us.”¹ Likewise, Michael Foot, the new hero of socialism and the leader of the British Labour Party, refers in his most recent book to “the modern Muggeridgean gloom.”² By “modern” Foot means, of course, “ancient”: gloom belongs to the past, to Christianity, and to tradition; it ill-befits

modern man. Muggeridge, in short is all washed up.

Or is he? All one can say is that optimism and pessimism about human nature and our calamitous times are in the eye of the beholder. If you believe in a kingdom of heaven on earth, or at least a chancellor, Muggeridge will inevitably appear pessimistic. But if you take a cue from actual history and don't believe in it, Muggeridge is purely a realist. Anyone who admires Bertrand Russell's sense of reality, as Michael Foot does, has necessarily taken the wrong point of view.

The present volume is the first biography of Muggeridge (the blurb on the back cover describes it as “the first definitive biography,” which suggests, alas, a misunderstanding of what “definitive” means—can there be a second definitive biography?). The life of Muggeridge is a good twentieth-century tale, told in the prophetic vein, with many famous people clashing cymbals (and ominous symbols) in the background. Unfortunately, there is very little background in this book. Where is everybody? Where are the internal tones and the external shades and colors of the successive stages upon which Muggeridge performed his farces? It is sad to find no physical descriptions, so essential to the art of biography: how does the subject walk, talk, and look scornful? What shadows and curious flittings does he observe when he looks out on his favorite landscape? Mr. Ian Hunter lacks the biographer's knack for penetrating the scenes of a life. It isn't enough to record the facts; one must create and interpret at every point of the way. There is little here that one could not learn from Muggeridge's own far more interesting writings, especially the remarkable autobiography *Chronicles of Wasted Time*.

The facts, at any rate, are that Muggeridge was born almost at the beginning of the century to a kindly, socialist father and a provincial, perpetually worried mother. The family was close, and the son greatly admired his father who stumped the socialist pulpits at a time when it wasn't enormously popular to do so. Muggeridge

married Kitty Dobbs, niece of Sidney and Beatrice Webb; he became a leading writer and later a household face on BBC; and, in his sixties he became a Christian—to the dismay of all those who suggested that senility had, at last, set in. I'm forced to be brief because, actually, Muggeridge knew just about all the important intellectual figures of the first half of this century, and it is a hopeless task to tell that very long story here. Those dozens of illustrious names just popped into his life as if by accident—he was never worldly ambitious—and his anecdotes concerning them are endlessly informative and amusing.

Very early he grew tired of the stale rhetoric of liberalism and, when he and Kitty were married, they burned their wedding license and other official certificates as emblems of a dying bourgeois society. They moved to the Soviet Union, which was becoming the fashion among the intelligentsia, but Muggeridge was quickly disabused of his utopian dreams and saw that the heirs of Marx had in fact created a monstrosity. *Winter in Moscow* and *The Thirties* are his excellent accounts of the political evasions, twaddle, and acrimonies of that period of intellectual schizophrenia. Later, with the rise of Hitler and the coming of the Second World War, he clearly saw how fascism and communism were but two sides of the same coin. By this time, according to the very funny and self-effacing account in his autobiography, he was bungling his way innocuously from Algiers to Paris while serving in the British Secret Service.

If Muggeridge has often betrayed the quirks of a witty and vehement personality, he has the ability to pierce the dramatic narrative of life with his own accidental initiative. He was sedately productive as a journalist who interspersed wry commentary with pious conjecture. Not many men have succeeded so artfully by happenstance and by so brutally incommoding the spirit of the age. Here is one relic that can give a good clubbing to the unwary. His laughter never fails as it glides mercilessly from sentence to sentence: "One of the sorrows

of life for a Western journalist or diplomat in the USSR was the enormous repetitiveness of everything. Thus, there were veterans who had been forced to sit through *Swan Lake* on thirty or more ceremonial occasions. I myself sat through it five times; it seemed like fifty." As he describes the *Guardian* and other leading journals of opinion, his satirizing prose dashes along madly but with perfect clarity: "Easily, smoothly, the concluding words are ejected like brushless shaving cream from a full tube—Devoutly to be hoped that resort to brute force will be eschewed....Self-interest in the narrower sense put aside....Solution hammered out at the conference table...of...thereby ensuring that....Hurrah! The job is done." If incessant and indiscriminate newsgathering is the voyeurism of today, then he, "telly Mugg," journalist *par excellence*, has become a prophet inveighing against the flim-flam of film: "The camera has spoken, and before it tongues and pens are powerless. No instrument hitherto devised has been a thousandth part as effective in the creation and propagation of instant myths.... We are far more likely to perish of a surfeit of celluloid than in consequence of any subversive conspiracy of nuclear explosion."

To get a perspective on Muggeridge (something the present biography never quite gives us), we can turn to his old friend Anthony Powell. In *Faces in My Time*, the third volume of his autobiography, Powell writes:

Disillusionment with Communism, dismay at the methods of the Soviet Union, are nowadays such familiar themes that the force of Muggeridge's virtually one-man onslaught in the 1930s is hard to grasp to those who did not experience those years. The Muggeridge impact, for its cogency to be appreciated, must be understood in relation to the intellectual atmosphere of the period. At that time many people were apt to think of what was happening in Russia as no worse than a few rich people being relieved of their surplus

cash, a proceeding of which some approved, some disapproved....Muggeridge has some claim to be the first writer of his sort to disturb this Left Wing complacency in a lively manner.³

But the essence of Muggeridge remains, as far as I can see, yet undiscovered. Who is he really? His writings have depth of personality, but no writer can get completely out of his skin and see himself as others see him. This is especially true in Muggeridge's case, for he confesses to an exorbitant egotism. The biographer's task is made more difficult exactly because Muggeridge converted to orthodox Christianity. It is inescapable that in the modern world a Christian personality will appear superficial and somehow fraudulent. This is what T.S. Eliot no doubt meant when he said there could be no Pascal in the twentieth century. But, one way or another, the difficult job needs to be done, especially, in the present case, because Muggeridge is the most interesting recent example we have of a Christian in concord or discord—with the world.

Reviewed by KENNETH ZARETZKE

¹*Part of My Life* (London, 1977), p. 273. ²*Debts of Honour* (London, 1980), p. 124. ³*Faces in My Time* (New York, 1980), p. 84.