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BOOKS and REVIEWS

The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel

By Nikos Kazantzakis. 776
pp. New York. Simon &
Schuster. \$10.00.

Reviewed by
JACK JACOBS

Kazantzakis' *Odyssey* takes up where Homer's left off, and does a very good job of it. On the level of narrative alone it excels as high adventure. But more important, the author has given us, in terms of *Odyssey's* quest, a magnificent affirmation of life.

In a portrayal well-fitted to our times, he depicts Man confronting the Abyss with a tragic exultance. The heroic translation by Kimon Friar into 35,333 lines of English verse is remarkable for its sustained power and vividness. The narrative begins with *Odyssey* cleansing the blood of Penelope's suitors from his body. Longing for further adventures, he rather a crew of six and leaves Ithaca forever. They abduct Helen from his old friend Menelaus and use her to help destroy the decadent civilization of Crete.

ODYSSEUS sails on through Egypt to the source of the Nile, undermining governments all the way, and eventually builds the ideal city, which is immediately destroyed by an earthquake. He becomes an ascetic and wanders on through Africa and finally to the Antarctic.

This capsule description of the narrative may sound a bit hard, but these events merge smoothly into a book of almost 800 pages.

In the introduction, Friar notes the similarity between Kazantzakis' *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Both use the framework of Homer's *Odyssey* and both deal with modern man in search of a soul. (Both are also quite hilly.) He points out further that al-

though Kazantzakis has derived much of his hero's quest from Homer, his *Odyssey* is essentially in the tradition of Dante and Tennyson.

IN THE "Inferno" *Odyssey* speaks from a tongue of flame: "Neither fondness for my son, nor reverence for my aged father, nor due love that should have cheered Penelope could conquer in me the ardor that I had to gain experience of the world and of human vice and worth."

"I put forth on the deep sea, with but one ship, and with that small company which had not deserted me. . . 'O brothers,' I said. . . deny not experience of the unpeopled world beyond the Sun. Consider your origins; ye were not formed to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge." And the expressed desire of Tennyson's hero is "To follow knowledge, like a sinking star, Beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

KAZANTZAKIS was a student of Henri Bergson, and the philosophic theme underlying *Odyssey's* journey reflects this influence. *Odyssey* the world-shaker, the embodiment of action in the first part of the book gradually turns his energies from destruction to creative acts, and eventually moves from action to contemplation in his quest for life's meaning.

He finally realizes that in his ceaseless struggle toward a higher understanding, the goal is the struggle itself, since the ascent is endless.

Whether in actions or thoughts, *Odyssey's* involvement is total. He burns his life away with such energy that when Death finally claims him in the Antarctic, barely nothing remains but ash and spirit:

"As a low lantern's flame flicks in its final blaze, then leaps above its shrouded wick and mounts aloft, brimming with light, and soars toward Death with dazzling joy, so did his fierce soul leap before it vanished in air."

the people he encountered, and his keen awareness of, and sympathy for, their problems, needs and aspirations are evident throughout the book. One only wishes that the publishers had seen fit to include some of the many photographs alluded to, or else deleted reference to them.

The route taken by Justice Douglas often followed the trails of Marco Polo and the invasions of Alexander the Great. This land—the birthplace of forgotten cities and vanquished civilizations—has seen the great conquerors of the past, Alexander, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane. It now faces the ominous spectre of Communist imperialism. For this reason no other area in the world has a more significant role in shaping history today than the land West of the Indus.

The Bramble Bush

By Charles Mergendahl. 382
pp. New York. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$3.95.

Reviewed by
FRED MAILLENDER

The manners and morals of small New England towns have replaced the Civil War as the favorite topic for current popular novels. Charles Mergendahl climbs aboard the band wagon. Like its many glorious predecessors, *The Bramble Bush* is trite, torrid and trashy.

Our hero, Guy Montford, M.D., is dedicated, young, handsome, lonely and a dog lover. The nurses at the hospital all are in love with him and continually hatch immoral plots for snaring him, but our hero wants only his dog.

However, the muse of pseudo-

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West of the Indus

By William O. Douglas. 502
pp. New York. Doubleday &
Co. \$5.00.

Reviewed by
**CHARLES BYRON
RENFREW**

Justice William O. Douglas is America's most noted and articulate world traveler. In recent years he has traveled in areas bypassed by the main tourist stream and written enlightening and interesting accounts of what he has seen and done.

"West of the Indus," his latest effort, is the story of a 7,000-mile station wagon trip through the Middle East in 1957 with his wife and a friend, beginning in Karachi, West Pakistan, through Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and ending at Istanbul, Turkey.

Of particular interest of the matters discussed in the book is the extent of Russian aid in Afghanistan and its marked contrast with American aid. Some of the defects in American foreign policy in this area tacitly and perhaps even unintentionally raised by Justice Douglas, fall within those so strongly condemned by Burdick and Lederer in "The Ugly American." There is the vast difference in the standard of living between those conducting the aid program and those receiving it, plus unfamiliarity with the language, customs and traditions of those to be aided.

JUSTICE Douglas' respect for



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tragedy must be served. Home to die comes our hero's boyhood chum, Larry McFie, who wants to breathe his last under his stalwart friend's care.

Larry brings his wife home with him, and she is one of those oh-so-tragic women, the beautiful, aristocratic, frustrated Southern belle. Our noble hero can't leave her alone, and to help out his designs he uses morphine to dispatch his dear friend.

March 5, 1959 THE BIRMINGHAM (MICH.) ECCENTRIC 3-B

This is only a bare outline of the ridiculous plot in "The Bramble Bush." The novel is worse. A ridiculous group of characters completes the cast—a lecherous newspaper editor and his slovenly wife, a libertine lawyer and his assorted girl friends, a tramp waiter, a sophisticated drunk, a sniveling avenging parrot and a sniveling district attorney.

The reader must question whether

er a town inhabited by such characters with no evidence of basic decency really does exist. This is what Mergendahl would have us believe.

THE PROSE is equal to its subject matter, more fitted for radio than for the page. A sponsorship by one of the major soap companies, "The Bramble Bush" deserves the nomination for a book to forget.

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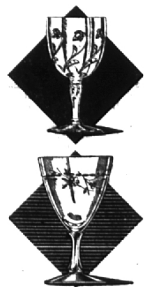
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