

ernment, white and black authors have been driven together in an exciting way. This experience of a brotherhood of writers led to a predominantly black PEN center in South Africa for a number of years, with wonderful results. Sadly, black writers came under great pressure to separate themselves from white writers, being accused of selling out.

For the black writer the motive is revolution and reform. They must be able to function within the black society. Happily, though, there remains strong contacts between all writers, black and white.

*Some of your own works have been banned in South Africa. Paton has been placed under house arrest. Clearly there are impediments to literary expression in South Africa. How extensive are they, how successful, and how do writers and other artists circumvent or overcome them?*

This is a terribly complex situation. First of all, one must accept that literary censorship is but one part of the oppressive machinery. When people are banished, it's a form of censorship. When one is held without trial, it is a form of censorship.

But given that, it is certainly true that South African writers operate under difficult circumstances, and blacks have a much more difficult time than whites. The government can detain a black writer for weeks or months simply to break his spirit. The result, however, is usually an even greater determination to carry on writing.

Since I began writing books with a political dimension, I have been carefully watched. I'm followed, even abroad; my mail is opened; my house searched; my typewriters confiscated. If writing means not an escape from action but an immersion into action, then you accept these things.

*What do you think of exile as an alternative? Can the South African author function well and honestly outside his native land?*

It is impossible to make a hard rule saying we must stay in a country. Look at Mann and Brecht in Germany—or Nkosi in South Africa, who was completely banned, not allowed to set a word on paper.

Necessity aside, I think one pays an enormous price as an exile. I've always found it a heart-rending experience to see writers fatally tied to a society and wasting away in a foreign country. They seem to draw no sustenance from their adopted land, sucking dry the experience they grope at through memory. Some overcome this, but for many it is a continuous downhill slide.

If, as in America, you live where you have the whole alphabet of human experience available to you, it doesn't much matter which letter you choose. But when one chooses to write about that which is taboo, it acquires the weight of an action. There is an electrical charge. The South African author needn't go in search of a theme; it is already there!

As an Afrikaner, I and others came in for very stiff censorship—not as much as blacks, but far more than authors of British descent.

*As an author, do you move toward something in your art? In other words, do your social motives—and clearly they exist—have some particular direction, some ultimate end?*

This is very dangerous territory. However socially active I am, writing is a very private activity. It's only when I start working on paper that I can develop my thoughts.

If my aim were to get the system of apartheid changed as quickly as possible, I'd have become a politician or a guerrilla. The fact that one chooses to become a writer implies that one aims at something quite different.

A change in the political system would matter little unless there is a change in the sensibilities of the people who must live in that society. This is where I am working—in the minds of individuals. W.V.

## **PASSING THE TIME IN BALLYMENONE**

**by Henry Glassie**

(University of Pennsylvania Press; 852 pp.; \$29.95)

*Maureen Waters*

The critic John Wilson Foster once observed that the Irish preoccupation with place is a "preoccupation with the past" without which the self is "apparently inconceivable." This theme is familiar to readers of Irish literature. Its broader cultural implications are brilliantly explored by Henry Glassie in *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*.

A small farming community in County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland, Ballymenone comprises forty-two households that, despite religious differences, are closely bound because of their sense of belonging to a particular

place rich in history and tradition. Glassie spent approximately ten years gathering and assimilating material, recording conversations and stories, living with the people of Ballymenone, and so coming to understand and appreciate their way of life. His account offers a splendid compilation of story and song, dialogue, photographs and drawings of the people, their homes, their farming implements, their serene and beautiful landscape. History, as well as the present-day conflict in Ulster, has given these people little ground for optimism, but they have survived poverty and exhausting physical labor with an abiding sense of faith, dignity, and humor.

In Ballymenone literacy is considered a "marginal convenience"; all important exchanges are conducted orally and face to face. Details of history, genealogy, land tenure, arrange-

ments between farmers, rules of the Church—"all are held in memory." There is consequently a great hatred of lies. The people will tell you that the tongue is "the worst instrument," the "most destructive of the soul." Used maliciously, it warps the social bond.

Central to this way of life is the *ceili*, the gathering at a neighbor's house to share food, conversation, the old stories and songs. It is their way of entertainment, of keeping alive the neighborly ethic, of confirming traditional values. In a community where knowledge is "heritage," it is natural that the most sought-after storytellers, historians, and musicians turn out to be the elderly, whose memories span several generations.

Compressed in tales of saints and battles, history recalls both critical events in the nation's past and those of local interest, such as the adventures of

Souple Corrigan, the *rapparee*, who escaped hanging by leaping the Sillees River. History is organized in terms of place, "progressively and mythically." The Sillees flows away from the sea because it was cursed by St. Febor when her books were lost in its depths.

According to Glassie, memories of the past are used to consolidate the consciousness of the group, but hostility between Catholic and Protestant is carefully muted. Stories and songs about "Mackan Hill," for example, tell how Catholics in the early nineteenth century were goaded into violence during a parade to celebrate the victory of William of Orange at the Boyne. The point that is emphasized, however, is that violence brought death to both factions. That memory becomes an "exact and enduring symbol of the daily predicament" in Ulster. In this "territory of Wits" tension is often diffused by humor or by the tall tale. Mrs. Cutler, an elderly Protestant, recalls that her one attempt to commemorate an Orange victory resulted in unusual calamity:

"And the steeple in Irvinestown Church was split in two with the lightin  
And with the cloudburst,  
the drums,  
and bicycles,  
and, in fact, childer,  
was swept down the street.  
And I got the two childer in till an entry,  
must be belongin to an undertaker.

And there was a gratin in it, and we were standin on the gratin, and the first thing I saw was my young boy, he was just lifted off it with the force of the water in under it, and we were just swept out onto the street.

We were just actually soakin."

In most collections of Irish folklore, tales are treated like abstract prose narratives; very little has been written about the relationship between speaker and audience or the context out of which the story arises. Glassie has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the oral tradition by providing both verbal and social contexts. The principal storytellers and musicians are presented in the setting of their own homes. The tales and songs are recorded as they are normally heard, as part of an ongoing discourse among those present at the *ceili* or in a local pub. Stories printed in broken

lines, like the one above, reveal a highly poetic quality in their use of rhythm and inflection, alliteration and repetition, dramatic pause and silence. Glassie observes that "old tellers of tales are not astray in a wilderness of nostalgia...they fill a crucial role in their community. They preserve its wisdom, settle its disputes, create its environment, speak its culture. Without them, local people would have no way to discover themselves...."

Community values are also revealed in work patterns, which are gradually changing as young people move away or take jobs in town. Formerly the farmers worked in groups, their long hours of toil eased by song, conversation, a community meal. Neighbors shared tools, planted and harvested crops for widows and disabled men. Times were hard, people were often hungry—there are terrible memories of famine and rackrenting—but they survived through courage and mutual support. Glassie provides excellent descriptions of traditional tasks such as making brick, digging turf, rooking hay, thatching. Each has its special lore, and the resulting artifact, though simple, is often beautifully crafted. Even the dimensions of the landscape, bog, clay, moss, have their own peculiar associations, mythic as well as historic. The very structure of the traditional house, with its large kitchen and open hearth, where a peat fire burns perpetually, and its two small "sleeping" rooms, reflects the priorities of the household. Life is ordered around communal needs and interests; neighbors can stop in at any time to share tea or domestic chores.

As might be expected, the elderly speakers who dominate this cultural history have strong reservations about modern life, in which loneliness and mental atrophy are seen as the price of convenience:

"Sure, chatting as they used to call it, it has nearly went out of existence with television and radios and all these things. The people's continually listenin. They're not talkin atall. Continually listenin."

*Passing the Time in Ballymenone* is the first comprehensive record of folk culture in Northern Ireland; it should become a classic among studies of its kind. The specific details of that culture, its interlocking patterns of work, conviviality, history, and personal belief, are expertly arranged by Professor Glassie to provide a sense of the whole

structure and meaning. His account is enhanced by a considerable knowledge of Irish history and literature and by voluminous notes. It is a pleasure to read. [WV]

#### NOVY MIR: A CASE STUDY IN THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE 1952-1958

By Edith Rogovin Frankel  
(Cambridge University Press; xvii+  
206 pp.; \$39.95)

#### AN END TO SILENCE: UNCENSORED OPINION IN THE SOVIET UNION—FROM ROY MEDVEDEV'S UNDER- GROUND MAGAZINE, POLITICAL DIARY

edited by Stephen F. Cohen  
W. W. Norton; 375 pp.; \$19.95)

Judith M. Mills

These two books are studies of the continuing dialectic of Soviet intellectual life, its indomitable vitality, and its resilience. The issue for Westerners clearly is not whether there is and has been intellectual energy and diversity in the USSR, but how much is revealed at any point and what are the politics of revelation.

In the post-Stalinist thaw, when political control over ideas loosened but expression was still channeled through officially sanctioned publications, the pulse of the relationship between political and intellectual life could be taken from the liberal literary journal *Novy Mir*. Under the leadership of its respected editor, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, *Novy Mir* took every opportunity to be the platform for liberal ideas. By the mid-60s and into the '70s *samizdat* publications took over this function. This allowed for more daring writing but relieved official publications and officially appointed editors of accompanying political burdens.

Frankel begins discussion of the thaw in the year before Stalin's death and notes that even the late Stalinist period, fraught with pre-purge tension, was not monochromatic; even then conservative and liberal camps coexisted. Just how close Soviet writers kept their ear to the political ground was dramatically evident during the thaw years. Every slight turn in policy produced a spate of new literary themes,