

ford. Would he continue with these activities together with his fiction?

"No, I'm giving up reviewing to spend all my time on fiction. And I'm leaving Oxford at the end of the term. I'm a fairly steady writer and can see myself putting out a book every two or two-and-a-half years. I'm also interested in working on film and television scripts as well."

Boyd is more than merely "interested" in film work. He is one of several young authors invited to provide scripts for a new British television station that is not unlike our own PBS network.

"There is good opportunity in England to do serious television work—something one needn't be ashamed of." Boyd's submission, which probably will be aired in England later this year and might eventually make its way to our own Sunday-evening Masterpiece Theatre series, follows the lives of three students through public school and ten years beyond. When I suggested to Boyd that the idea has already received some play (for instance, the recently aired "To Serve Them All My Days"), he was quick to respond.

"Americans have been fed a lot of nonsense about the English public school system. Either they're viewed through rose-colored glasses as a kind of pastoral existence, or they're portrayed as the setting for delicate homosexual relationships—the older boy trying to help his friend get

on the cricket team, that sort of thing. It's terribly inaccurate. I'm a product of the public school system, and I can tell you they are very different from what you've been shown."

And what of Boyd's next novel, due, he says, in September of '84?

"I'm returning to the more overtly comic tones of the first book, *Good Man in Africa*, but this time the setting will be the United States. I enjoy taking an Englishman, together with all his English trappings, and dropping him into an unfamiliar culture. The action will move between Manhattan and some small Southern town, where my central character will live.

Boyd, the Oxford don, writing about a small Southern town?

"After leaving New York, Susan [his wife] and I are going to drive around the South for a few weeks, stopping off at Charleston and, ultimately, New Orleans. We're very excited about the idea. We love New York—this is our third visit—but I'm anxious to see more of this country."

And we in this country, I assured him, are anxious to read more William Boyd. Fortunately, it appears we will be able to do so for quite a while to come.

—J.T.

generation, especially artists, for their lack of commitment. Finally, the narrator says on taking leave of a friend, "Goodbye, Hope. If freedom doesn't come after me as sudden and surprising as the beginning of summer, then it will come after one of the next poets, workers, students." Like Konwicki, we will all have to wait to see if this proves true.

THE WANDERING UNICORN
by Manuel Mujica Láinez
translated by Mary Fitton

(Taplinger Publishing Company; 322 pp.; \$16.95)

John E. Becker

This is a book with nobody in it—except, perhaps, its gossipy narrator. She/he is a medieval faery with a blue-and-white tail, bat-wings, and prominent bare breasts. She was once a lady, Melusine, human enough to inaugurate a lordly line of Lusignan knights. She must live forever. Out of love for Aiol, a handsome young bastard several generations down the line, she sojourns for the major part of the tale in the handsome male body of a young knight, Melusin. She sojourns unhappily, having begged her body from her faery mother out of lust for Aiol, but having neglected to specify its sex. Aiol, the wandering unicorn of the title, wanders

over the map of France and then over the map of the Holy Land.

The book jacket calls this an allegory of love. So does its faery narrator, well toward the end, when it is time to tell the dogged reader what all of this has been about. But Jorge Luis Borges in his introduction suggests Ariosto, which in turn suggests the whole pyrotechnic panorama of medieval and Renaissance romance. Yet those books were somehow peopled. One felt the passion and the madness of their characters as the anchoring reality behind their wild proliferations of landscapes, monsters, and costumery. Here, by the time the faery narrator gets around to telling us that this is an allegory of love, we find that we have been following him/her around for about three hundred pages and have no way of understanding how Aiol could be either the subject or object of love. He is a name, a costume, and a gesture or two, as inarticulate withal as one of D. H. Lawrence's coalminers. It is actually a shock, whether we have read the book jacket in advance or not, to find out at this point that we have been reading an allegory of love.

Perhaps the book is meant to evoke medieval tapestry with its superabundance of formally arranged detail. But there is more of the encyclopedic quality of the medieval mind here. This is an unending recital of names—noble names of knights and ladies of many countries, perhaps historical, per-

haps not. It is similarly a recital of the names of places, some recognizable, some recon-dite, some perhaps fictional. One feels, as he traces his way through this maze of names without people attached, names without places evoked, that he should know more, that he should find a history book somewhere, of medieval France, of the crusaders' Holy Land, and then, perhaps, the book would be more meaningful.

Soon, however, the imagination revolts. One remembers too many stories full of exotic names that yet carried their full burden of drama and believable place. At this point a suspicion arises. Perhaps the names are a kind of screen, a defense; perhaps they are actually a refusal to engage in dialogue or drama. For one thing, the abruptness of climactic events is disconcerting. It is not that they happen without warning. Rather, when they happen they happen in simple declarative statements, and are quickly gone by. Even moments of high ritual, processions, exotic banquets, are only lists.

Manuel Mujica Láinez lives in Argentina, and there is no reason we should expect all Latin American writers to write about Latin America's past, present, or future history. Yet this book is so distant from its own subject of medieval Europe, so obviously disengaged from its own narrative, that one feels the author's distance as profoundly disconcerting. Not only has he chosen not to engage the realities of his own

time and place, he has chosen not to engage the realities of the distant time and place we thought he had chosen. In such a case, the detachment of allegory looks suspiciously like the detachment of evasion.

At a point in her narrative, the faery Melusine explicitly refers us to the Unicorn Tapestries at The Cloisters in New York. This famous museum stands high on the top of a rocky outcrop at the Northern tip of Manhattan, far from the sweat and noise of the contemporary city. There is a beautiful view of the Hudson River with its traffic of tugboats and oil barges. It is a museum of real cloisters, dismantled stone by stone and carried off from their native soils to be reassembled here into a new artifice. Uprooted though they are, they make a microcosmic world of their own, rich and satisfying to their many visitors. It is what we ask of any fiction. But while other Latin authors, disdaining the conventions of Northern realism, have nevertheless made us accept their surreal worlds, Láinez's world remains unachieved. Its author has not created it for us. WV

THE SOVIET VIEWPOINT

by Georgi Arbatov and Willems Oltmans

(Dodd, Mead & Co.; 240 pp.; \$13.95)

DANGEROUS RELATIONS: THE SOVIET UNION IN WORLD POLITICS, 1970-1982

by Adam B. Ulam

(Oxford University Press: 325 pp.; \$25.00)

Thomas M. Magstadt

It is fortunate that these two books should appear at precisely the same time. Both deal for the most part with the same phase in the history of Soviet-American relations—the era of détente, which included the so-called “SALT process” and the general search for a political basis that would permit a new and more positive *modus vivendi* than the one associated with “peaceful co-existence.” *The Soviet Viewpoint* offers a wide-ranging set of discourses by Georgi Arbatov, the director of the Institute of United States and Canadian Studies and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. *Dangerous Relations* by Adam Ulam of Harvard's Russian Research Center offers an incisive analysis of Soviet foreign policy during the '70s and, incidentally, of the American response to challenges that détente may have masked but hardly mitigated.

The titles themselves are highly revealing. Professor Ulam looks at the period that Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev hailed as the dawning of a new age of superpower collaboration and characterizes the time as one of “dangerous relations” rather than decorous diplomacy. Professor Arbatov looks at the same period and finds much to criticize in U.S. foreign policy, not without good reason, but nothing for which to fault the peace-loving and humanitarian folk who selflessly serve the noble cause of world communism. Significantly, Arbatov's book, based on a series of interviews with Dutch journalist Willem Oltmans, present *the Soviet viewpoint*, not *a Soviet viewpoint*; the very choice of title, which was obviously approved at the highest levels of the Party leadership, should dissolve any doubts about the monolithic mind-set of the Soviet oligarchs.

For all its flagrant faults as scholarship, *The Soviet Viewpoint* is well worth reading. Arbatov, at Oltman's prompting, addresses a broad range of issues, including the importance of détente, the history of Soviet-American relations, peace and war, the arms race and arms control, ideology, human rights, dissent, the Soviet-American rivalry in various regional subsystems, and, finally, prospects for the future.

The tone of this book is at least as instructive as its content. A quality at once polemical and self-righteous permeates Arbatov's commentary. Thus, when Oltmans asks Arbatov why the Soviet Union does not share in the blame for recent arms control failures, Arbatov replies in a manner that belies his status as “academician”:

“... the United States and NATO, as far as we can see, are still after military superiority, and, seeking such superiority, have recently accelerated the arms race. This kind of policy does not leave much room for successful negotiations and agreements on arms limitation. Is the Soviet Union to blame for all this? Certainly.... It is blamed for the sheer fact of its existence, and for its desire to go on living as an independent nation. It is blamed for not putting up with American superiority.... It is blamed for being unwilling to be left at the mercy of the superior military might of the United States... and for an unwillingness to make unilateral concessions.”

Blaming the United States for accelerating the arms race without so much as acknowledging the awesome Soviet arms buildup during the Brezhnev years takes some cheek. The fact that “scientific socialism” does not preclude such exercises in self-delusion bodes ill for the future of arms control in particular and East-West

cooperation in general.

Even so, this book deserves to be read with an open mind. There are criticisms of America and Americans we would do well to heed. For example, Arbatov comments that “when the antinuclear movement shook Western Europe [the Reagan administration's] first reaction was to blame it on Russian propaganda.” He goes on to say:

“American ignorance about the Third World is even greater. I don't think Americans have any awareness of how the Third World peoples live, how they feel, or what they want—including America's closest neighbors, like the peoples of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Panama, or the whole of Latin America.

“It often occurs to me that the Americans have been exclusively fortunate in their history, perhaps too fortunate, to be capable of fully understanding and harboring genuine sympathy toward nations with more difficult histories.”

In this manner, the views expressed by Arbatov alternately enrage and enlighten. Indeed, few readers will fail to find this book thought-provoking or just plain provoking. A final observation: *The Soviet Viewpoint* provides not so much a glimpse of the Soviet leadership's real view of the outside world as a fairly comprehensive record of what the leadership wants the outside world (and particularly the West) to think it thinks about the great issues of the day.

Ulam's analysis, in contrast to Arbatov's, is sharply critical of both superpowers. *Dangerous Relations* is really an adjunct to Ulam's earlier work, *Expansion and Co-existence: Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1973*. For those who already have been impressed with his scholarly exposition, this latest contribution will come neither as a surprise nor a disappointment.

Except for the first chapter, which is a rather unprepossessing recapitulation of the quarter-century that preceded détente, *Dangerous Relations* is uncommonly edifying and has several clear and recurrent themes. *First*, the Soviet Union retains an inherent advantage over the United States in the conduct of foreign policy. Without public opinion, a recalcitrant Congress, or the pleas and importunings of commercial interests to impede or distract the Kremlin's decision-making process, there is greater continuity, consistency, and coherence in Moscow's approach to international relations.

Second, the Soviet foreign policy establishment has become increasingly aware of its advantage here and increasingly sophisticated in its understanding of the ways and