Vaclav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts

By Mark Abbott, Charlotte Gold, and Sarah F. Rotella

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emergence of the futurists, socialist politics. In this milieu, the alchemy of Joyce's most potent art transformed many of the people, places and incidents of Trieste into important sections of Ulysses, which Joyce himself described as "the epic of two races (Israel and Ireland)." Laboring in relative obscurity, Joyce struggled not only with Leopold Bloom, but also with timid publishers who balked when it came to releasing Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. While honoring the work of his predecessors in Joyce scholarship, McCourt (who was born and educated in Dublin and now teaches at the University of Trieste) also examines material that was until recently unused or unavailable. This, along with his understanding of the culture and dialect of the once-vibrant port city, deepens our appreciation of Trieste both as a crossroads of cultures and as a profound influence on Joyce's thinking and writing. As one critic has it, "Joyce was born in Dublin... but grew up in Trieste." (July)

HUNTING WITH HEMINGWAY

By Hilary Hemingway and Jeffry P. Lindsay

Riverhead (272p) ISBN 1-57322-159-7

This is a disappointing narrative based on audiotaped accounts left by Hemingway's younger brother Leicester (himself a writer overshadowed by Ernest) and revealed here by Leicester's daughter. These tales, ostensibly related by Leicester to an anonymous professor researching the Hemingway mystique, are said to be ones "Papa never made public."

The death-defying feats by Leicester and Ernest in Africa include escaping from a pack of man-eating wild dogs, killing a cobra that hovers inches from Leicester's head, even planting explosives on Nazi U-boats. Through listening to these tapes, an epiphany comes to Hilary about her father, who, like Ernest and his father before him, committed suicide: "Dad's stories are all that's important,... The stories are for you, me, for everyone, to know my Dad as he really was, a man who had the courage to love life." Never before able to forgive his suicide, Hilary "for the first time... could mourn my father." The entire work seems apocryphal, which is forgivable; and the adventure stories themselves, while predictably misogynist, are relatively absorbing, but two factors ruin the integrity of this work. First is the mocking portrayal of the literature professor on the tape: he seems to have no manners, no real life experience and ridiculously symbolic interpretations of Hemingway stories. The stereotype is overdone to the point that few readers will sympathize with Hilary's father, a man who is hostile to even the most basic questions about himself and his brother. Second, while some of the information documented is important for anyone wishing to learn more about Hemingway's family, Hilary's frame narrative about her discovery of the tapes is so insipidly written that it reads like a work of young adult fiction. (July)

MYSELF WHEN I AM REAL:

The Life and Music of Charlie Mingus

By Gene Santoro


Santoro, who covers music for New York's Daily News, has attempted not only to capture the complex, contradictory character of jazz bassist and composer Mingus, but also to assert his music's towering significance in American culture as a whole. Such an ambitious goal in mind, it is hard to understand why he dispenses with a critical approach to the man and his music in favor of hagiography, portraying Mingus as a larger-than-life genius who was beyond reproach. Misdeeds often attributed to Mingus, whether they be numerous betrayals of friends and lovers or an alarming tendency to pull knives on people, are explained away as the eccentricities of an artist. This rambling book is not without revealing details about Mingus's life, however. In the Watts section of Los Angeles, where he grew up, Mingus, with his light complexion, could pass for neither black nor white, which, Santoro argues, cemented the feeling of being an outsider that both haunted and drove the musician for the rest of his life. When writing about Mingus's actual music making, Santoro is in his element. He does an admirable job of describing the rough-and-tumble atmosphere of the jazz workshops. There is also an abundance of anecdotes about Mingus's legendary onstage hijinks, including smashing his bass (he did it before Pete Townshend), haranguing the audience and sitting down to a steak dinner in the middle of a performance. Yet Santoro ultimately fails to marshal his sources into a nuanced portrait, producing a mythological figure, not the man himself. (July)

LESBIAN ART IN AMERICA:

A Contemporary History

By Harmony Hammond


Lesbians have an uneasy relationship with the art world establishment. When painter Jody Pinto wanted her work to appear in the 1978 "Lesbian Show," her art dealer informed her that "if she exhibited as a lesbian, she could say good-bye to the gallery's representation of her work." More than another decade passed before artists openly celebrated their sexual identities in a Houston show entitled "Out Voices from a Queer Nation." Hammond, an art teacher and cofounder of Heresies Magazine as well as an artist, documents three decades of post-Stonewall efforts to find acceptance and recognition for painting, sculpture, mixed media and photography by lesbian women. The author contends that "lesbian art is not a stylistic movement but rather, in its simplest definition, art that comes out of a feminist consciousness"; she then shapes her inquiry to those who fit her definition. Hammond combines a historical overview of art shows, conferences and publications with written portraits of, and interviews with, representative artists from diverse backgrounds. Internationally recognized artists like Kate Millett, Louise Fishman and Catherine Opie rub elbows with those known primarily within political circles. While the writing offers little in the way of formal analysis, the collection itself is a handsome tribute to lesbian creativity. Illus. (Aug.)

VACLAV HAVEL: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts

By John Keane

Basic, $27.50 (532p) ISBN 0-465-03719-4

As a Communist-era dissident, successful playwright and leader of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution and democratic government, Vaclav Havel is timely and deserving subject for biography. Unfortunately, while Keane's authorized study fills some gaps, it is not the biography many have been waiting for. For those who seek the basic outline, this volume provides ample (though select) material on Havel's prominent prewar family, his marriages and numerous affairs, and his political and literary activities over the years. But this is, by no means, for the casual reader. It strives to be much more than an ordinary biography, and it doesn't suc-
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