

1957

Hungary Under the Communist Knout

GOD IS LATE. By Christine Amothy. Translated from the French by Anne Green. 191 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$3.50.

At the age of 15 Christine Amothy, a sensitive Hungarian girl, wrote a moving personal story of the Nazi occupation of Budapest before its "liberation" by the Russians. Now, grown older and sadder, she has written another book about the infinitely more sinister blight of occupation by the Russians. The second book is a novel, but its form does not conceal its documentary character. It leaves the reader with the feeling that this is what happens when a happy, sophisticated people is crushed under the brassbound mediocrity of Marxism. The knowledge that only seven months ago the Hungarians tried in vain to break out of their purgatory

adds a melancholy overtone to the story.

The book opens rather stiffly as Miss Amothy sets her scenes and introduces her characters—Janos, the musician; Gaby, his pretty fliberty-gibbet of a wife; Torzs, the sensual communist boss. These early passages sometimes creak as our inexperienced novelist tries to get her story going. About a third of the way through the book suddenly catches fire. Now the irrelevancies are dropped and we are left to concentrate on the three central characters. Janos is fearful of his future and submits to every humiliation to win the Party's favor, even to the extent of letting himself be cuckolded by Torzs. In a sense these three personify the present plight of Hungary, although the story is set about ten years ago.

The real power of the novel lies in its evocation of the fog of fear which has smothered the Hungarian people—in which respect it doubtless reflects, all too accurately, the current situation in Budapest since the Russians re-imposed their paradise-in-chains. There is the grisly, *de rigueur* show of corpses, the radio blaring out the daily list of persons executed or arrested. No Hungarian, she indicates, is ever free of anxiety—the anxiety endemic to all communist societies.

Subtle touches of irony come through—the well-to-do farmer removing his tie before calling on the local communist boss, the composer given two months to compose a symphony in honor of the Party and then

being denounced for its lack of ideological content, the women of Budapest "learning to expect every indignity from men since the sexes were declared equal."

The story has no happy ending. How could it? But Miss Amothy has succeeded handsomely in her portrayal of a hedonistic society disintegrating under the communist knout. We leave Janos and Gaby, symbols of Hungarian civilization, reduced to the primitivism of life in a peasant hut. Hungary, Miss Amothy implies, has returned to the womb. "God is late—will He ever return?" J. B.



Christine Amothy.

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