

LAWRENCE LIPTON'S RADIO FREE AMERICA

"MACBIRD," MOST VISIBLE UPSURGE FROM THE UNDERGROUND SINCE "HOWL" is published in full in City Lights Journal #3 (City Lights Books, San Francisco, and available in hip book shops, \$2.50) in pamphlet form for a buck, and in part, in the forthcoming RAMPARTS, and is the subject of a review by Dwight Macdonald in The New York Review (12/1/66). Already carrying the VERBOTEN banner, the bar sinister, MACBIRD is certain, like Ginsberg's HOWL, like Lenore Kandel's THE BOOK OF LOVE, to make legal as well as literary history. As poetic drama "MacBird" is third rate parody, as political satire it is first rate, which only proves once again, if any proof were needed, how faulty a work of art may be and still pack a potent political wallop. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is a classic of the genre. Yevgeny Yevtushenko's political verse is a contemporary example. Political poetry is one of the uses of poetry and just as "legitimate" a genre as the personal, prophetic, or visionary kind, but it doesn't have to be good to fulfill its social function as an art. The prophetic books of the Old Testament are not models of the poetic Muse. In fact, "The Bible as Literature" courses (as distinguished from the Bible as the Word of God) would be hard put to it to find a single page that they could put beside Milton's "Paradise Lost" (a rewrite of the Book of Genesis, by way of an earlier Anglo-Saxon version by Caedmon) to say nothing of any comparison with, say, William Blake's prophetic books. "MacBird," then, is third rate bland verse and first rate political satire. Being political poetry it can be half-truth, even quarter-truth (in the strict sense) and still be a hundred-proof blockbuster as effective propaganda. (I have never been known to hold propaganda in low esteem and do not use the term perjoratively, as long as it propagates, moves and shakes, as it is supposed to do). Not that there isn't such a thing as good propaganda and bad propaganda poetry. That's true of all genres. "MacBird" is a purely fanciful reconstruction of the Kennedy assassination. It's "truth" is no more relevant than "Macbeth's" truth in history. To polish up an old cliché, it is truer than history (which also is an art) and its special kind of "truth" is what makes it poetry. That it is the work of a young talent with no previous experience in the art and science of poetic drama (so far as I know) is what makes it remarkable. This is not a put-down of Barbara Garson as a poet or a dramatist. Literature abounds in third rate or even fourth rate drama by great writers in their early work and often in their later work as well. I do not agree (with Dwight Macdonald) that "about all that can be said for it, aside from its being funny, is that at last the younger generation has produced a satirist." The work of the younger generation is rich in satire, some of it probably over, or under, Dwight Macdonald's capriciously unpredictable head. Hall Barbara, Knight of the Gars, "a very riband in the cap of youth" ("Hamlet"); "Once more unto the breach" ("King Henry V"); and a new abusing of King Shakespeare's English (paraphrased from "The Merry Wives of Windsor"). You draw blood and play for keeps, which is the motto on the escutcheon of Radio Free America. Lay on, lay on, and let him be damned who first cries Hold! It is enough to hurl bonbons at the battlements of MacBird.