



“one of the worst crises” of his emotional life, his failed eight-year relationship with sculptor Emilio Aladren. The 34 poems that came out of his stay in the bewildering metropolis (June 1929–March 1930) constitute a compelling—if often tortured—vision of place and passion.

Urban North America both fascinated and repelled Lorca: “Such a wave of mire and fireflies above New York!” The city, in Lorca’s imagination, was the setting for a phantasmal confrontation between the manmade and the natural: “Cobras shall hiss on the top floors./Nettles shall shake courtyards and terraces./The Stock Exchange shall become a pyramid of moss.” But even as he railed against the city’s automated, technologized deadness and its social alienation, the great Iberian poet of death and tragedy found New York a powerful correlative for his own suffering. In one poem he identifies himself “Bumping into my own face, different each day,” or becoming a “poet with arms, lost/in the vomiting multitude.” In the black arts movement of Harlem, moreover, he found a vitality that defied the city’s inhumanity: “It’s necessary to cross the bridges/and reach the murmuring blacks.”

Simon and White’s new translation ably captures both the elegance and hardness of Lorca’s Spanish. The poet’s letters and a lecture enrich the poetical text, as do Lorca’s nightmarishly suggestive drawings.

**THE COMPANY
OF CRITICS:
Social Criticism and
Political Commitment
in the 20th Century**
by Michael Walzer
Basic, 1988
260 pp. \$19.95

How detached should the social critic be from his own society? Without some distance, obviously, there can be no fidelity to ideas or ideals. But those critics who are completely alienated from their own societies will never touch the souls of their audience. They will fail to instruct.

Walzer, a political philosopher at Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Studies, looks at 11 modern critics, including Julien Benda, George Orwell, Albert Camus, Herbert Marcuse, and Breyten Breytenbach, to tell the story of “the making and unmaking of critical connection” in the 20th century. During the early decades of the century social and political struggles opened paths to true engagement for critics such as Ignazio Silone and George Orwell, but things have grown more problematical during recent years. Critics such as the German-born Herbert Marcuse, who came to re-



ject almost everything about his adopted American homeland, felt compelled to “recover authority by establishing distance.”

But in Walzer’s view, that extreme distance, an understandable response to disappointment, is unnecessary and unfruitful. He holds up as a model Albert Camus, who, when forced during the late 1950s to “choose between eternal justice and French Algeria, . . . rejected eternal justice,” even though he had long been a critic of his fellow *piets noirs*. Today, similarly, Breytenbach, an Afrikaner exiled in France, refuses to give up the hope that his own white South African tribe will find some way to make its peace with the other tribes. The best critics, Walzer holds, never forget that “even people in the wrong have rights and can rightly lay claim to a secure future.”

Science and Technology

HEAVY DRINKING: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease

by Herbert Fingarette
Univ. of Calif., 1988
166 pp. \$16.95

“First the man takes a drink . . .,” runs an Oriental adage, “Then the drink takes the man!” But is overuse of demon rum an illness, as Alcoholics Anonymous and many other reputable organizations claim? Fingarette, a philosopher at the University of California, thinks not. The notion that alcoholism is a disease has become, he claims, a “myth” of exceptional persistence and pervasiveness—and one that flies in the face of extensive scientific research.

The “classic disease concept” of heavy drinking holds that chronic intoxication results from an individual’s innate and incurable inability to moderate his consumption of alcohol. The alcoholic’s manner of metabolizing alcohol tends to be qualitatively different from that of nonalcoholics, and heredity may make some people more susceptible to the disease than others.

While not completely rejecting the utility of the disease concept for some individuals, Fingarette finds inadequate evidence to support its largest claims: that the pattern of the “disease” is universal; that its development is inevitable; that no designated “alcoholic” can moderate his drinking. Acceptance of this “myth” has produced treatments that fail to acknowledge the many problem-drinkers who do not fit the accepted profile. Moreover,