Books

THE OPIUM WAR, 1840-1842
by Peter Ward Fay
The University of North Carolina Press. . . $14.95

Reviewed by Charlton M. Lewis

Peter Fay's richly textured, evocative account of the Opium War revives a familiar question, asked by Commissioner Lin Tse-hsu in a letter to Queen Victoria in 1839 and still asked by Chinese today. Why did the British send naval artillery and troops to China in order to protect the import of a pernicious drug? For the Chinese there has been only one answer: incorrigible greed.

With precise and copious detail, Fay illuminates the historical complexities of that verdict. From the initial description of the brown gum drawn from the seed capsule of the opium poppy (*papaver somniferum*), with its smell of new-mown hay and look of tar, to the concluding scene where mandarins "in their cumbrous boots, long petticoats, and conical caps," crowd the quarter-deck of Pottinger's flagship to sign the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the story moves with lilt and style.

Fay confirms what has not always been clear in Western accounts: that as the cloistered world of the old Canton trade burst apart in the late 1830's, the root cause was the English import of opium. Thirsting for tea, but short of exchange commodities with appeal in China — sandalwood, bird's nests, ivory, rattans — English merchants resorted first to bullion and then, as the trade burgeoned, to opium.

Made contraband by imperial edicts, the drug was delivered by "agency houses" such as Jardine's, Dent's and Russell's to receiving ships well out in the Gulf of Canton. Chinese took delivery in their "scrambling dragons" and "fast crabs," and vanished into the Pearl River estuary. As the Canton delta became saturated, smuggling spread up the coast. After 1830 the bullion flow was reversed, arousing the concern of the Court: Silver was leaving China along with the tea.

Fay brings out the irresponsibility on both sides. For the English, the firms which bought the opium from the East India Company in India did not import it into China; the agency houses that imported it did not actually smuggle it. No one was to blame. On the Chinese side, officials who were schooled to foster harmony in their jurisdictions averted their gaze, or perhaps squeezed from the traffic themselves. By the time Commissioner Lin forced the confrontation in 1839, opium so dominated the market that the British would not consider commercial relations without it.

In interpreting the war, Fay is sensitive to cultural anachronisms within China. While the ironclad British gunboat, *Nemesis*, wreaked havoc on the inland waterways, Chinese officials marshalled troops trained by shooting whistling arrows at paper targets. The Confucian world did not prize military efficiency. Weak and disorganized, the Chinese successfully reverted to an impermeable moral righteousness. In the treaty negotiations, they refused to accept responsibility for the opium traffic, and the settlement (ultimate irony) said nothing about the drug.

Fay modestly disclaims qualifications as a China specialist. Yet this splendid popular history fills an urgent need that the specialists have too long neglected.

Charlton M. Lewis, a Sinologist, is associate professor in the Department of History at Brooklyn College, City University of New York.

ROMANTIC REVOLUTIONARY
A Biography of John Reed
by Robert A. Rosenstone
Alfred A. Knopf..... $15.00

Reviewed by Peter Ward Fay

Ten Days That Shook the World, John Reed's firsthand account of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, was written in two months, sold 5,000 copies in three, and has since been published in translation in Russia (of course), Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Italy, Poland, Cuba, France, and God knows where else. (Only He does, by the way, since there exists no international register of these things.) Rosenstone happening to be in Japan — he and his wife, the artist Cheri Pann, spent the past academic year there — he was told that the Japanese translation of 1957 has already run through 21 printings. It is enough to make even Lafcadio Hearn turn whatever color the Japanese equate with envy.

Many people, myself included, have supposed that *Ten Days* is the only thing John Reed wrote, and that his short career — he died in the fall of 1920 at the age of 32 — was one continuous preparation for the writing of it. Not the least of the merits of Rosenstone's biography is the attention he gives Reed the poet, Reed the producer and playwright, Reed the journalist, lover (extended affairs with Mabel Dodge and Louise Bryant punctuated with briefer liaisons), adventurer, and bohemian. Rosenstone is two-thirds done before we reach revolutionary Petrograd. If Reed's life pointed from the beginning in the direction of serious political involvement, Rosenstone does not show it and Reed did not know it.

What Reed *did* know even as a sickly child in Oregon was that life is something to be seized, experienced, lived furiously and heroically. At Harvard (Class of 1910) this made him pushy. In New York — Rosenstone is marvelous at recreating the social and intellectual life of Greenwich Village just before the war — a growing talent for writing led him to Max Eastman and the *Masses*. Covering the violent Paterson silk strike of early 1913 added four days in jail (the kind of raw encounter Reed loved) and generated the first installment of that radical conviction that eventually made him one of the found-

ers of the Communist Labor Party — and thus drew him back to Russia, to the 2nd Congress of the Communist International and the typhus that killed him. But that came later. It was years before political commitment occupied the center of Reed's personal stage. The work, for example, that made him the most sought-after journalist of his day was his account of two months with Pancho Villa in Mexico. And what fascinated him about Villa was less the Mexican's politics than the larger-than-life quality of the man, the heroic in him.

Perhaps Reed never stopped trying to be a Villa. Here he is in Petrograd: "Seizing one of Lenin's dramatic phrases — 'History will not forgive us if we do not assume power now' — he enjoyed rolling it off his tongue as he roamed about the city, notebook in hand." Did he ever really pass from adolescent fantasy to adult reality? It is the theme of the biography, the reason for its title "romantic revolutionary," the question Rosenstone never fully resolves. One reviewer has already remarked that Rosenstone is very close to his subject, so close it is often hard to tell which of the two is speaking and in whose prose. A fair comment; if Rosenstone does not swallow Reed whole — he allows, for example, that *Ten Days* is "streaked with bias" — he nevertheless identifies with him, embraces him, speaks through him. But perhaps that is the key to the biography's success. Rosenstone literally relives Reed's life. And though I am even now not fully convinced of the depth of Reed's political radicalism, though he is so little my kind of person that I am not certain I even *like* him very much, there is no question that I am a great deal closer to an understanding of him and his age than I was before I read this thorough, continuously interesting, and sometimes quite strangely moving book.

Robert Rosenstone and Peter Fay are both professors of history at Caltech.

Letters

Guaranteed a Fegger

Potomac, Maryland

This afternoon I received my copy of *Engineering and Science* for October-November, and it could not have arrived at a better time. I had just finished teaching my Advanced Physical Science class and was contemplating the complexities of Markov Chains, a topic which my students are presenting for me, and thinking about how we would ease into an elementary example of a stochastic process, when a particularly tenacious student, once again started to question me about "Caltech." These scenarios generally start out with questions like, ". . . just what kind of a place is Caltech?" Today, I had some concrete evidence about your school.

I first pointed to the "FEG" formula. The student then asked, "Is that *the* Gray of that old battered chem text you have us read for the Advanced Placement Exam in Chemistry?" "The same," I said. The student then added ". . . and don't we have some books by Feynman in the school?" Again I concurred. We then talked about the "FEG" formula. Before the conversation ended, I turned to the back page of *Engineering and Science* and asked, "Are you so dedicated to science that you could ignore a 250-pound lion, in favor of a science lecture?" The student pondered this a moment and then said, "Caltech sounds like a fun place; I'm going to consider that school!"

Now, I don't know if this student will apply to Caltech or not, but I can guarantee that he will be a "fegger" — you can spot 'em while they're young — they're different. Whether or not you get this student, I want you to know that we enjoyed your publication. I might also add that science is alive and well in the secondary hinterland of this great nation.

CHARLES C. PHILIPP,
Chairman,
Science Department
Winston Churchill High School

Poetic Justice

Ricketts House, Caltech

Dr. Fowler's passage, "Resonance," (*E&S* October-November) is competently written, as prose. It is not poetry. A comparison of:

> The realization
> That the red giant stage
> Of stellar evolution
> Involved helium burning
> Which transforms helium
> Into carbon and oxygen
> Was just as far-reaching
> As the discovery
> That the main sequence stage
> Involves the conversion
> Of hydrogen into helium.

with this passage by e. e. cummings:

> What if a much of a which of a wind
> gives the truth to summer's lie;
> bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
> and yanks immortal stars awry?

will make that fact clear.
Turning good prose into bad poetry does Dr. Fowler a disservice.

NICK OKASINSKI, '78

Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (Act of August 12, 1970: Section 3685. Title 39. United States Code). 1. Title of publication: Engineering and Science. 2. Date of filing: September 26, 1975. 3. Frequency of issue: 4 times a year. 4. Location of known office of publication: 1201 E. California Blvd., Pasadena, Calif. 91125. 5. Location of the headquarters of general business offices of the publishers: 1201 E. California Blvd., Pasadena, Calif. 91125. 6. Names and addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: California Institute of Technology Alumni Association. Editor: Edward Hutchings, Jr., Managing Editor: Jacquelyn Bonner, 1201 E. California Blvd., Pasadena, Calif. 91125. 7. Owner: California Institute of Technology Alumni Association, 1201 E. California Blvd., Pasadena, Calif. 91125. 8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: none. 10. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. 11. Extent and nature of circulation: A. Total no. copies printed: average during preceding 12 months, 10,750; actual number of latest issue, 10,400. B. Paid circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales: average during last 12 months, 20; actual number of latest issue, 20. 2. Mail subscriptions: average during last 12 months, 7409; actual number of latest issue, 6148. C. Total paid circulation: average during preceding 12 months, 7429; actual number of latest issue, 6168. D. Free distribution by mail, carrier, or other means: Samples, complimentary, and other free copies: average during preceding 12 months, 2878; actual number of latest issue, 3704. E. Total distribution: average during preceding 12 months, 10,307; actual number of latest issue, 9872. F. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: average during preceding 12 months, 443; actual number latest issue, 528. 2. Returns from news agents, none. G. Total: average during preceding 12 months, 10,750; actual number of latest issue, 10,400. I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete. Edward Hutchings Jr.