

Preface

I'M TEMPTED TO SAY that this is an old man's book. The temptation is a geriatric self-inoculation, an excuse: "Please read this book in a charitable frame of mind because it's not as good as the books I wrote when young(er)."

This won't do. Why should the reader, who may have on his night table a dozen books, each one bought to enlighten, deepen and divert him from more vulgar, superficial diversions or from the tiring, perhaps deadening, routines of his life, choose to read a second-rate book, unless he's so devoted a fan of the author that the least effort of the now old brain somehow augments the special beauty, knowledge and feeling he's long enjoyed?

The book has been almost entirely written and assembled by a man in his late seventies. If that man, me, can be trusted to assess his powers, then he goes on record here saying, "In some ways, I'm a wiser, more knowledgeable and even abler writer than I was ten, twenty or fifty years ago. I believe that some of my opinions should be even more seriously considered, although in some cases, the weariness of age has stopped me from defining them as clearly or backing them up as carefully and fully as my younger self would have.

"As for some of the reflections, these have been marinating a long time and should thus be more flavorful than those written years and decades earlier."

This is the sixth book of the sort I call an "orderly miscellany," a book which includes different sorts of work, reportage, commentary, observations, poems (including translations), reviews, plays or playlets and fiction. Much of the writer's pleasure comes in its assemblage, the juxtaposition of pieces written on different occasions for different pur-

poses now connecting to and playing off each other. Of course, all are connected to the author by whatever it is that constitutes his way of expressing whatever prompts him to write.

The hope is that the assemblage will reveal not repetition, a parade of old skills and tricks, but expansion and development. Yes, some may expose the deficiencies of old age. If such deficiencies as, say, senile garrulity diminish or extinguish a reader's interest, the writer has failed to do what he's tried to do, and that's to attain and stimulate a high level of mental energy. In short, this writer feels that he's still on call.