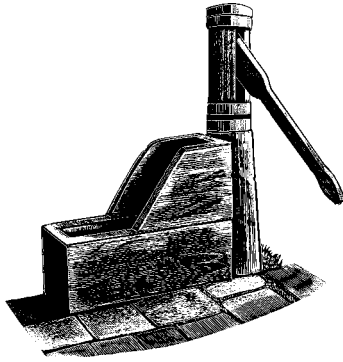


Requiescat



"Your wooden arm you hold outstretched
to shake with passers-by."

APRIL 22 was the centenary of the birth of J. Robert Oppenheimer '26, S.D. '47, leader of those who built the atomic bomb. He had had a "left-wandering" youth, and after the war he was accused of being a member of the Communist party and even a spy for the Soviets, charges he denied and which security agencies never proved. His role as a governmental science adviser ended in 1954 after the Atomic Energy Commission revoked his security clearance, a decision upheld in a famous, trial-like hearing. The attack on Oppenheimer was one of the most vicious of the era for which Senator Joseph McCarthy was the poster boy. Indeed, the senator provided the AEC with ammunition when a witness at a McCarthy hearing in 1953 alleged that he had attended a Communist party meeting in Oppenheimer's home.

An excellent profile, *Oppenheimer: Portrait of an Enigma* (Ivan R. Dee), by Jeremy Bernstein '51, Ph.D. '55, a physicist, professor emeritus, and former *New Yorker* writer, appeared just before Oppenheimer's birthday. Bernstein was at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton in the late 1950s, while Oppenheimer was its director, but they first met at Harvard in the

spring of '57 when Oppenheimer gave the William James Lecture, a multipart series that he called "The Hope of Order."

"Of course the physics department was out in force," writes Bernstein. "At the time, since there was not much mention of it, I did not fully realize how many members of the department had been involved either with Los Alamos or with Oppenheimer in California. The chairman of the department, Kenneth Bainbridge, had been in charge of preparing the test site at Trinity. After the explosion he had said to Oppenheimer, '...Now we are all sons of bitches'....Norman Ramsey, a professor in the department, had been on the team on the island of Tinian that had assembled Fat Man, the bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki."



At the site of the
first test of the
atomic bomb

The audience filled the 1,200 seats of Sanders Theatre, and the New Lecture Hall held nearly another 800 people listening on speakers. "Nothing that has been written about his charisma as a public lecturer has been exaggerated," Bernstein attests. "It was a mixture of phrasing that was both elegant and somewhat obscure. You were not quite sure what he meant, but you were sure that it was your fault that you didn't see why."

Peter W. Roberts, Ed '65, then a freshman at Boston University, now of Eugene, Oregon, also heard Oppenheimer lecture and "was accidental witness to a historic footnote," he tells *Primus*. "I've never seen the moment mentioned anywhere else." Roberts's testimony:

"I have here in my hand Richard H. Rovere's book *Senator Joe McCarthy*, which

states that the junior senator from Wisconsin died in 1957 at 6:02 P.M. on May 2. The stage from which Oppenheimer spoke on May 6 was set for a performance of *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*. That meant that as he addressed us over the lectern, his background was a long table in front of several chairs, with a single chair on a platform off to the side. On the wall at the rear of the stage was a huge American flag, very red, white, and blue. By May 6 the remains of Senator McCarthy were lying in state in the Senate chamber. Oppenheimer came onto the stage at 4:30, and before he hooked on the microphone, he walked to the blackboard and wrote, 'R I P.' The audience murmured; his face was expressionless. Then he put on his microphone and began the lecture."



ELEEMOSINARY CAUTION: Reese Alsop '36, a retired physician in Huntington, New York, offers the following caveat to Ivy League fundraisers who stress that "We are training leaders."

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Our leaders very strictly trained
at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton,
Are often quite occult about their
proper destination.
In fact their goals defy the polls,
are hard to understand,
No matter how politicians contrive
to beat the band.
The course they plot, without remorse,
as guided by their staff,
To me has often seemed to be: right up the
garden path.

~PRIMUS V