In researching her book *Leonard Bernstein*, Joan Peyser has talked to many relatives, colleagues, friends and enemies of the maestro and they have told her many personal stories. She seemingly presents each of them, whether they mean anything or not.

A childhood friend, Sid Ramin, is quoted as saying: "We had a laboratory where we did scientific experiments ... We would get rubbing alcohol ... put it on a Bunsen burner ... heat it ... When Lenny grabbed the flask he would say 'It's hotsky-totsky' or something like that." How's that for an anecdote?

In psycho-biography the obsession is usually the author's, and indeed I for one barely recognize Leonard Bernstein (in this book, though Peyser writes with maniacal passion about someone who shares the maestro's name. Thus she prefers to spend pages with the third wife of a deceased jazz musician, who thinks her husband had an affair with Mr Bernstein 40 years ago, rather than confront Bernstein's music. She quotes pages from a 1970 trash novel, Philharmonic, in order to give credence to her moralistic stand regarding what she thinks is Bernstein's personal life.

"Bernstein is just such I a terrorist of the mind," she writes.

When she does talk about the music she says things such as "the primary influence in the opera (A Quiet Place) is Wagner". This is simply embarrassing since Peyser is the former editor of G. Schirmer's A Music Quarterly and yet does not seem to have the ears with which to hear and interpret music in words.

There is no Wagnerian music in A Quiet Place.

Peyser reports (accurately) that when all the authors of West Side Story got together in 1985 no one could agree on anything regarding the creation of that show. At that moment Peyser should have realized the folly of anecdote-as-history, taken all her cassettes and floppy disks, put them in her microwave and started afresh.

She proceeds to tell us the story of Romeo and Juliet ("Shakespeare's plot centres on two star-crossed lovers . . .") and then tells us that the show received excellent notices from all the major New York critics except Walter Kerr. "Kerr," she writes, "is Roman Catholic and heterosexual." And here, gentle reader, I threw the book across the room.

Now I was paid to read this book and I think that is the only condition under which you might consider reading it, Bernstein's music and performances are still regularly available direct from the maestro himself, and you will learn a lot more about him that way.

Bernstein recently transferred his entire catalogue of published music from G. Schirmer to Boosey & Hawkes. Peyser has dedicated her book to Ray Hagel, the former chairman of the board of the publishing company which owned G. Schirmer. Smoke on your pipe and put that in.

Leonard Bernstein by Joan Peyser is published by Bantam Press at £14.95.

John Mauceri is music director of Scottish Opera.
Mockery of the maestro

In researching her book Leonard Bernstein, Joan Peyser has talked to many relatives, colleagues, friends and enemies of the maestro and they have told her many personal stories. She seemingly presents each of them, whether they mean anything or not.

A childhood friend, Sid Ramin, is quoted as saying: "We had a laboratory where we did scientific experiments... We would get rubbing alcohol... put it on a Bunsen burner... heat it... When Lenny grabbed the flask he would say 'It's hotsky-totsky' or something like that." How's that for an anecdote?

In psycho-biography the obsession is usually the author's, and indeed I for one barely recognize Leonard Bernstein in this book, though Peyser writes with maniacal passion about someone who shares the maestro's name.

Thus she prefers to spend pages with the third wife of a deceased jazz musician, who thinks her husband had an affair with Mr Bernstein 40 years ago, rather than confront Bernstein's music. She quotes pages from a 1970 trash novel, Philharmonic, in order to give credence to her moralistic stand regarding what she thinks is Bernstein's personal life.

"Bernstein is just such a terrorist of the mind," she writes.

When she does talk about the music she says things such as "the primary influence in the opera (A Quiet Place) is Wagner". This is simply embarrassing since Peyser is the former editor of G. Schirmer's A Music Quarterly and yet does not seem to have the ears with which to hear and interpret music in words.

John Maucheri finds much to criticise in a new biography of Leonard Bernstein

Bernstein: buy the records
There is no Wagnerian music in A Quiet Place.

Peyser reports (accurately) that when all the authors of West Side Story got together in 1985 no one could agree on anything regarding the creation of that show. At that moment Peyser should have realized the folly of anecdote-as-history, taken all her cassettes and floppy disks, put them in her microwave and started afresh.

She proceeds to tell us the story of Romeo and Juliet ("Shakespeare's plot centres on two star-crossed lovers...") and then tells us that the show received excellent notices from all the major New York critics except Walter Kerr. "Kerr," she writes, "is Roman Catholic and heterosexual." And here, gentle reader, I threw the book across the room.

Now I was paid to read this book and I think that is the only condition under which you might consider reading it. Bernstein's music and performances are still regularly available direct from the maestro himself, and you will learn a lot more about him that way.

Bernstein recently transferred his entire catalogue of published music from G. Schirmer to Boosey & Hawkes. Peyser has dedicated her book to Ray Hagel, the former chairman of the board of the publishing company which owned G. Schirmer. Smoke on your pipe and put that in.

Leonard Bernstein by Joan Peyser is published by Bantam Press at £14.95.

John Maucheri is music director of Scottish Opera.