

dows and water. Her visions—and ours—fade slowly. Bonnie and John attend school for a while, but then their small earning power must be called upon. They are more intelligent and more aggressive than their immediate neighbours; as they grow older, marry, and have children of their own they question the Power that gives to a few so much more than they can use and to a great many so much less than they actually need. Eventually Emma dies of pellagra (“a poor man’s disease”); John, after a short period when he seems headed for the side of the “higher-ups” against his own people, organizes a union; and Bonnie is killed in a strike. John appears at Bonnie’s funeral with a red band on his arm. “‘I was feeling’, John said, ‘as if everything was finished’.—‘No,’ John Stevens [his Master] said, ‘This is just the beginning.’” Communism. Salvation.

A synopsis necessarily skips a good deal: the humour of some of the mountain talk; the McClures’ abortive attempt to buy a cotton farm on the instalment plan; Grandfather on a Civil War Jubilee;—the persistent and brave struggle put forth by the family to make their bread.

“Fielding Burke”, in a beautifully lyric book, has argued that the hill people should stick to their farms. Erskine Caldwell, in *Tobacco Road*, points with cruel comedy to the deterioration that may be expected from those who stupidly cling to their farms instead of leaving for the mills. Following the fortunes of Grace Lumpkin’s characters we see their plight without the distortion of either lyricism or “realism” whether or not we agree with the implied solution. Not as talented a writer as Mr. Caldwell or “Fielding Burke”, Grace Lumpkin has given us a better book: an honest, sincere picture, well set and well developed.

CYRILLY ABELS

THE INFINITE LONGING by Marie Verhoeven Schmitz (HARCOURT, BRACE. \$2.00)

It is easy to understand why *The Infinite Longing* should have been translated into two languages since its publication in Holland in 1929. Adam Heemdrift, the main character, might well be the prototype of many contemporary financiers in any country. More than that, his loneliness, though of a different *genre*, is as tragic as Tonio Kröger’s, and his egotism, though more crushing, is as human as Swann’s. Furthermore, his abandonment of his one devastating desire for power (which he believes is to bring happiness) and his spiritual growth toward a comparative selflessness is compellingly told.

The intensity of Mrs. Schmitz’s main character carries over into her style. Her prose (and here credit must be given her translator) has the masculine quality of Sigrid Undset’s, though it lacks the variety and grace. It has, too, especially towards the end of this book, a tendency towards a moralistic sentimentality that is never found in the Norwegian writer.

This tendency is implicit in the very title. Heemdrift’s longing is infinite and perpetual, almost *ad nauseam*; there is too great a concentration on one type of emotion. Fortunately, however, his desire is not usually nostalgic; it is power he wants, power over his business associates and over the numerous women who are invariably taken in by his egotism and strength. But from the very start we are aware that this Hercules will some day bear his burden. And in the last two sections, where the author’s skill suddenly slackens, we are told too obviously what she had implied before; indeed towards the end there is so little subtlety that Heemdrift’s fall seems a bit too true to type, and

the final episode with the prostitute anti-climactic and trite. Nevertheless, the tenor of the book is essentially fine, and renders *The Infinite Longing* moving and often profound.

VIVIAN O. WEINER

SKERRETT by *Liam O'Flaherty* (LONG & SMITH. \$2.50)

THE island of Nara is off the coast of Ireland, dismal, rocky, unproductive, cut off from the mainland by storms, where the struggle to live is appalling and the uncertainty both of the means of existence and of the very weather whip the minds of the inhabitants into a perpetual anxiety. Such an environment does not foster gentleness or help generate human warmth.

David Skerrett, the principal character in Liam O'Flaherty's new novel, arrives with his wife on this island. Essentially a sort of Colossus, attempting to bestride his narrow world, crude in emotion, limited in perception, he should never have come to this wracked place. He arrives—the year is 1887—at the invitation of the parish priest, in the capacity of school-master; but before long he makes it apparent that they who talk of Nara are to say that it encompasses but one man. In this error of judgement lies his tragedy. The almost overwhelming misfortunes that descend upon him are not brought on by any real depravity. As a teacher he is harsh, as a husband he is blind; but his early devotion to the priest (his later enemy), his pathetic attempts to love his dull wife, and above all his piteous worship of the little son who is killed by a falling rock, these indicate his latent tenderness.

This part of his nature becomes effaced as much through the bitterness that follows the death of his son—the only misfortune, by

the way, not brought on even indirectly by Skerrett himself—as through the relentless-ness of the ill fate that seems to pursue him. Each stroke of fate falls with the intensity of a bolt of thunder, and each is preceded by some act of Skerrett's in its effect as disastrous as lightning.

O'Flaherty achieves this intensity partly through his technique of plot structure, partly through his style, partly though his conviction that good writing must come out of reality. Each incident in the narrative, although distinct from the others, is like a radius pointing towards the central development of the main character, lending a fullness to the tale even though Skerrett's growth proceeds along a straight line. The setting is sufficient to lend the atmosphere, but his style has a consistent grotesqueness and compression that are increased by his trick of repeating certain sounds. In describing, for instance, the terror of some sheep that are terrified by the approach of Skerrett, O'Flaherty writes:

They left a *trail* of sodden wool where they had passed and they were *swallowed* in the fog, while their *mournful* bleating became *more* distant until it died out and there was nothing left but the *dark fog* and the sea.

The letters in italics have a very woeful sound. In another passage, the repetition of the *b*'s and the *l*'s create a blubbering effect quite appropriate to its context:

The fear of hunger becomes an evil demon, whose horns are emblazoned on the bright face of the sun as well as on the drooping bellies of the thunder clouds, that belch a blight upon the meagre soil, washing from the half-clad rocks the budding seeds and throwing a barricade of mountainous waves over the sea's rich treasure.

Realism is the chief approach throughout. The plight of the peasantry is not pastelled by any sentimental admiration of the simple