

The Thinking Mask

THE SPIRIT OF MOLIÈRE. By Percy Chapman. Princeton University Press. 1940. 250 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by GILBERT HIGHET

LIKE all great comedians, Molière found it difficult to continue being merely funny. The bright stream of his humor flowed on, but, as its channel deepened, there were cold current and dark gleams beneath the surface. So Aristophanes's last plays, written after the Athenian defeat, are plaintive half-allegorical fantasies which he vainly tries to enliven by jokes which he himself knows are unsuccessful—it is embarrassing to read them. Shakespeare's last "comedies" are very far from being funny. We laugh at drunken Stephano, but he is always too near Caliban for us to forget ourselves in laughter.

Molière started in the simplest, hardest school. After a failure in Paris, he began his double profession of actor-playwright in the "sticks," by writing and playing one-act farces, in which he approached the clown as closely as possible by wearing a funny mask. It was that training that made him a comedian (his only heroic play failed, and was converted into a comedy), and kept him a comedian till the end (on the day he died he was clowning his death-spasms). The actor of farce has only one aim. He must make the customers laugh without stopping. So he must combine great economy of words and action with great fertility of invention. These early farces were not unlike the first Chaplin comedies—the American *commedia dell' arte*: improvisations by a few set figures around a familiar helpless character baffled by a new situation. Thus, Molière introduced himself to the King in a farce called "The Professor in Love." Another such was "Elmer at College"—about the agonies of a yokel striving for education. The farces of the Romans had the same kind of recurrent buffoon caught in the machinery—"Pappy Buys a Farm," "Big-mouth Joins the Gladiators"; so had the first Chaplins—"The Fireman," "The Convict," and so on.

Molière never really abandoned that attitude to life and the stage. His greatest play, "Le Misanthrope," is simply a string of painful situations, not very closely connected, which embarrass poor Alceste more and more frightfully until he rushes off-stage in despair. If we see him as Hamlet struggling with an impure world, the play is a tragedy manquée. If we see him as a likable but shockingly inadequate man ruining his chances by his own folly, the play is a searchingly witty comedy. Only—Alceste is more a misguided man than a clown. Tartuffe is more a wicked man than a clown. Although Molière never stopped playing for the laughs, the central clown-figure and his torturing situations grew, each of them, more like

humanity and real life—at which we can never laugh whole-heartedly.

These remarks are suggested by the new book on Molière, which Mr. Bédé has edited after its author's death. "The Spirit of Molière" contains much wise reflection on that admirable playwright, too little understood outside France. Structurally, it suffers greatly from Chapman's premature death: it tails off towards the end, there are several inconsistencies and dropped threads, and there ought certainly to have been an index. But these faults do not spoil the wealth of the book: it is full of rich ore and unsuspected treasures—the best memorial to its author, and to Molière himself.

ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. Sherlock Holmes, in *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*, from *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, by Conan Doyle.
2. *Abou Ben Adhem*, by Leigh Hunt.
3. Pooh-Bah, in *The Mikado*, by W. S. Gilbert.
4. Polonius, in *Hamlet*, by Shakespeare.
5. Wilkins Micawber, in *David Copperfield*, by Dickens.
6. Humpty Dumpty, in *Through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll.
7. Pippa, in *Pippa Passes*, by Robert Browning.
8. Jacques, in *As You Like It*, by Shakespeare.
9. Dr. Pangloss, in *Candide*, by Voltaire.
10. Philip Nolan, in *The Man Without A Country*, by Edward Everett Hale.

America South

THE PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY from the Rio Grande to the Canal Zone. By Harry A. Franck and Herbert C. Lanks. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company. 1940. 249 pp., with index. \$5.

Reviewed by CARLETON BEALS

IN a previous story, "Sky Roaming above Two Continents," Mr. Franck, who has tramped more widely over the inaccessible parts of the globe than perhaps any other American, succumbed to the lure of Pan-American Airways; and in this volume, he succumbs to the lure of the motor-car—except for those uncompleted stretches of the highway. In this account he waves a hand of gratitude at the humble Indian, "just such swarthy little men in big straw sombreros . . . as you see along the finished highway today," whose primitive toil has made it possible to travel in comfort rapidly over one of the finest and most scenic roads in the world.

But if the motor car and a remarkably well-built road imposed some limits on Franck's customary wide-ranging curiosity, it is a long, long way from Laredo to Panama, about as far as from Boston to San Francisco, and it traverses seven countries, each of them, as the author points out, unique in its natural characteristics, personality, and way of life. Five of his previous twenty-seven books deal with Panama, Central America, or Mexico, one of them dating back to days long ago when he was Canal Zone policeman 88, so that here we also get the benefit

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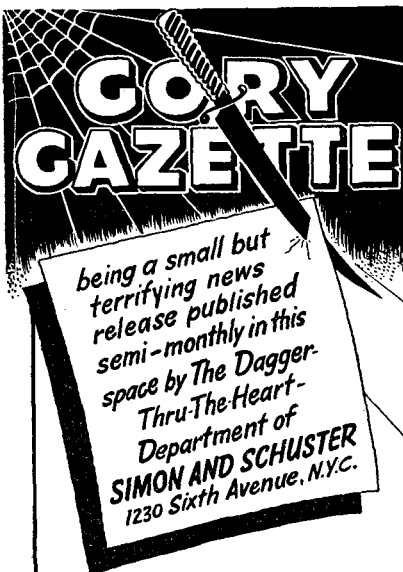
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SHELDON CHENEY in *The Saturday Review of Literature* recommends it as:


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 *The Gory Gazette* is a paper for people who shudder. It will be entirely about Inner Sanctum Mysteries, which have been appearing with fits and starts (our editorial fits, reader's starts) for the past few years now. It will be uncompromising in printing no advertising but its own. And it will appear in this space twice a month.

 Here's why. We (or I, if you're going to quibble) are Simon and Schuster's No. 1 murder aficionado. Armed with Sales Charts and a blunt instrument, we recently went into a huddle with other members of the Dagger-Thru-the-Heart Department. We discovered that, while we'd published a couple of plugs (publishing term for palooka), the Past Performance charts showed that Our Public had given us the nod and was asking for more of the same brand of sudden death.


 So we said we'd publish one Inner Sanctum Mystery a month. We said we'd get a new trademark (note the Perfect Mystery Fan below). And that we'd talk about ourselves in a semi-monthly column. Q.E.D.—*The Gory Gazette*.


 All right — *The Gory Gazette's* first beat — guaranteed to be covered by no other advertising column — is *The Goose Is Cooked* by EMMETT HOGARTH (\$2).

 It's the first of the Inner Sanctum Mysteries of the Month. It's so far been greeted by

1. BRENTANO's, who have selected it as their own Mystery of the Month, hand-picked from the September crime crop, and to be featured in all their branches.

2. GEORGE ROSS of the *World Telegram*, who says: "Our hat's off to *The Goose Is Cooked* for spine-chilling from between book covers."

 Mystery fans will get none of the Whos, Whys, Whens, and Where's of the plot from *The Gory Gazette*. But it would be a crime in itself not to tell you—read *The Goose Is Cooked*.

 The second Friday every month is Inner Sanctum Mystery Day

of his previous roamings and firsthand information about the ways of the people.

Mr. Franck does not stray far from the things that would interest the average tourist. He gives more attention to the bull-ring and *jai-alai* games than to the frescoes of Diego Rivera, who rates two sentences; those of Clemente Orozco are not even mentioned. But what makes this book something more than the useful tourist guide, is the author's keen eye for the warm flow of life, its pageantry, color, and novelty. Franck is fascinated by mountains and rivers, the rich savor of rain on the desert, by plants and animals and birds, and above all by human beings. They can be as primitive and ragged as the Otomi Indians or as modern as an engineer, but the author is too interested in their creative tasks, in what they eat and wear, what they are doing, why and how, to be bothered about race or class prejudices.

Mostly his book is one of surface impressions, with flashes of good humor, of historical perspective, and all is told with sympathy and tolerance. He gets in a good word about Mexico's new efforts in building schools, a dig at politicians desecrating the beauties of the landscape with campaign billboards, and finds the Jim Crowism of the Canal Zone, with its signs for

"Gold" employees and "Silver" employees, "a class distinction at variance with American ideals of democracy," but on the whole he is content with the swiftly unfolding kaleidoscope of travel incident, particularly the startling contrasts between the luxurious modernity in the larger cities and the primitive ways of folk still close to the soil and engaged in handicrafts, riding their burros, prodding their oxen, patting tortillas, gathering pulque, and making their own fun and reverence out of bizarre religious dances and festivals.

The book is all very unpretentious, enjoyable, and painlessly informative.

Fully half of this review should have been devoted to the extraordinarily fine photographs by Mr. Lanks. They are in themselves a real adventure in time and space, truth and beauty, and they reveal the same warm enthusiasm for the people and lands to the south. This is one of the best "picture books" I have ever had on my knee, a satisfying piece of book-making. Franck and Lanks provide an excellent introduction to things south, and it should whet the appetite for more.

Carleton Beals, prominent authority on Latin America, is the author of "The Coming Struggle for Latin America," "American Earth," and a forthcoming book, "The Great Circle."

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
A MURDER BY MARRIAGE Robert George Dean (Scribner's: \$2.)	Lusty, hard-drinking Uncle Horace, head of ditto family, becomes a New Haven corpse. Detective Tony Hunter, free-lancing, is stuck worse'n ever with case his agency rejected.	Wenchies, delicious. Banter, amusing. Lore of idiosyncratic, N.Y. NH & H stations—G.C.T., New Haven, South Sta.—raises familiar memories. Tip-off so simple, it's brilliant.	The guy can pitch
FUGITIVE FROM MURDER M. V. Heberden (Crime Club: \$2.)	Red headed Desmond Shannon routs, with much bloodshed and sundry personal injuries, murderous mob of Manhattan extortioners.	Except for feeling that no such "socialites" as author describes ever existed, this has everything it takes to thrill and mystify.	Ring-tail roarer
DEATH CONDUCTS A TOUR Ruth Darby (Crime Club: \$2.)	Peter Barron extracts Virgin Island sleuth Christenson from retirement to solve snuffing out of aged virago in Havana hotel.	Venemous old lady so richly deserved killing that subsequent deaths to cover up initial crime seem needless. Plenty of action.	Average
THE STATION WAGON MURDER Milton Propper (Harpers: \$2.)	Tommy Rankin helps Penna. state cops solve midnight murder of no-better-than-should-be widow with mercenary social aspirations.	Regrettable moral lapses of Phila. suburban society leaders, with ensuing blackmail, give pungency to deftly constructed yarn with surprise finish.	Standard Brand
THE BOWLING GREEN MURDERS Helen Woodward and Frances Amherst (Random House: \$2.)	Hapless youngster serving term as brutal slayer of night watchman for Manhattan comm-merchants saved by young wife's persistent investigating.	Stenographer-sleuth gets into tight places, and perfervid yarn has numerous lurid ramifications before love—and poison—conquers all.	Middlin'