

**Fiction.** *Modern fiction, apart from its gifts of entertainment and emotional satisfaction, has an imposing role to play. In a moment of change, when the normal and secure routine of life is disintegrating, it must explain the past and the present and give some glimpse of the future. Fiction has become one of the necessary processes of education. It satisfies our demand to know something about the world, about ourselves, and even how we might behave in abnormal situations. For example, Sinclair Lewis's "Kingsblood Royal" and Laura Hobson's "Gentleman's Agreement," though they are now descending the best-seller ladder, have already taught hundreds of thousands of readers to consider the ugly facts of racial discrimination as it may exist in their own community. From the other side of the world, H. M. Tomlinson's "Morning Light," reviewed this week, is in part autobiographical as are all his books of British seafaring and dockside life. For the full flavor of this writer's work the reader should turn back the years to his early and memorable "The Sea and the Jungle" and "London River."*

## ***Ships and Women***

**MORNING LIGHT.** By H. M. Tomlinson. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1947. 304 pp. \$3.

**VESSEL OF WRATH.** By Simon Gentillon. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1947. 187 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

**I**T WOULD be interesting to speculate on what precise operation of Fate brought these two curiously alike, yet unlike, books to the desk simultaneously. Fate of some kind it certainly was; for Fate itself, that favorite theme of writers of sea stories from Melville to Conrad, is in both books mixed up with a ship and a woman to form the underlying point of discussion. It is perhaps not wise to insist upon this resemblance, however. If the two volumes sail from the same port, they steer courses so widely different as never to be in sight of each other, and if they arrive somewhere in the same country, it is in completely different harborages.

Mr. Gentillon's book is a much better and more closely-knit piece of work than it appears to be in the beginning; Mr. Tomlinson's is a much worse book than his technical mastery would allow him to write. Indeed, the latter is hardly a novel at all, in the ordinary usage of that term. The author has been unable to overcome the habits acquired in many years exercised in practising his profession as the prince of English essayists. The book is hopelessly episodic, the basic theme merely underlies the incidents without being illustrated, many of the characters appear and disappear for no apparent reason except that the author wishes to have a look at them, much of the action is insignificant, and the surface theme—which is the replacement of sail by steam—received a strong

buildup in the first chapter, only to be lost to sight later.

These should be defects enough to condemn almost any book. Yet "Morning Light" is so utterly delightful, so completely readable, the people in it are so much alive, that one is tempted to set down the criteria normally applied to novels as professorial formalities. They certainly are as applied to this book. Long before one reaches the chapter inevitably called "London River" the reader's reaction is certain to be—who the devil cares about a connected story or the development of a central character? I'm having a good time.

The book is in fact a series of essays brought to life, with many of the essayist's observations thrown into quotation marks. Moreover the essays and observations are in Mr. Tomlinson's very best manner, than which there are few better in the world at the moment. That the book is supposed to be a historical novel and a story about a boy who ran away to sea in a moment of terror lest a really brave action be interpreted as something else, makes no particular difference. Everything in it is as timeless as the sea itself, and as convincing as the old lady who is only slightly cracked on the one subject of the return of a ship which has long ago gone down.

In contrast "Vessel of Wrath" has a faintly dated atmosphere—at least along the surface. Such observations of life and character as are offered end, as they not infrequently do in French novels, with exclamation points, implied or expressed. Most of



the men in the story behave less like human beings than lay figures with phonograph attachments, and either Mr. Gentillon's or the translator's seamanship is often open to question. (Tomlinson offers another contrast here, most of the action takes place ashore, but a shore by the sea and, as always, he is nautically impeccable.)

There is a good deal of direct statement of character from the author, a poor replacement for self-revelation of character through speech and action. But to this there is one exception—the woman who wrecks everything and calls down wrath on the vessel of wrath. As an illiterate mestiza, a creature of pure impulse and emotion, she cannot be permitted to have thoughts. The result is that she is by far the most convincing character in the book, and, indeed, one of the most convincing in a good many books. Up to the moment she appears, the story has been hortatory and not very important; when she is on stage all the writer's bad habits fall away, the book becomes a unity and rushes toward its climax with a fine sense of inevitability, and a really significant picture of the struggle between the woman and the ship.

One could wish that the ending had been a little better contrived in a mechanical sense; it somehow lacks the conviction of the passage that follows the parting of Maria and the ship, which is the real ending of this short novel. Mr. Gentillon apparently also acquired habits from his earlier writing. He has done a good deal of it for the movies, and has been unable to overcome the movie habit of tying all the threads together before the curtain comes down. But he has achieved a dramatic intensity that Tomlinson lacks, and the two together remind us that there are almost as many kinds of sea as there are people and ships that sail it.

## ***Loo and O Lud***

**PAMELA FOXE.** By Dorothea Malm. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1947. 278 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by RICHARD A. CORDELL

**T**HIS spirited yarn of eighteenth-century England appears just in time for late-summer vacation reading. The entire novel consists of excerpts from the "Journal of Lady Pamela Foxe, Being her Account of adventures in England, in the Colony of Massachusetts and at sea, Together with the story of her one True Love and her Reflections upon the Vicissitudes of Fortune, all the Events narrated having occurred in the Year of our

Lord 17. . . .” Here this ancient literary device, which is pleasant in itself, has two advantages: it suggests the eighteenth century, and it mercifully restricts the narrative to Lady Pamela’s own affairs and spares us the interminable period novel with its endless ramifications and repetitions.

It is straight romance. Although Lady Pamela is only twenty (the events occur in one year) and as far as we know possesses only the sketchy education of the average girl of fashion of her day, knows no Latin and less Greek, is ignorant of politics, history, social problems, etc., she composes her journal with astounding literary finesse. She tells an anecdote vividly, is both psychologist and philosopher, and a rare casuist. As is proper in a romance, Lady Pamela’s adventures are as implausible as her literary style. Excitement begins when she rashly dons cousin George’s clothes and seeks evening adventure in coffee house and club. Then rapidly follow the inevitable love duels, flight across the Atlantic, adultery, wrong marriages, abduction, etc., all miraculously leading to a happy ending.

But “happy” only in the fabulous world of romance, for under the cold eye of reason both Pamela and Richard are detestable liars, cheats, and voluptuaries. They are endurable only in the factitious world of this journalist’s invention. These gentry of the late eighteenth century behave or misbehave with the same abandon as those of the Restoration; virtue is absurd, truth-telling dull and often unwise—here are the morals of “Love for Love.” Even Pamela’s occasional freshets of remorse arise from a sense of insecurity or fear of exposure.

In fact, the ending is cynically Restoration: the deceived wife dies, the honest, cheated husband loses his calculating wife through a legal technicality, and the dissolute lovers are

free to marry and live happily ever after.

This first novel of Dorothea Malm, formerly an editor of *The Ladies’ Home Journal* and recently a short-story writer, reveals a careful study of certain aspects of eighteenth-century London—and Boston; perhaps too careful, for the age is thrust upon us in every paragraph—link men, sedan chairs, hoops, mountainous hair-dos, plum-colored velvet, White’s, Ranelagh, loo, macaroni, O Lud, etc. There are more direct tokens of the



—Erich Hartmann.

Dorothea Malm’s is a nimble and well constructed novel, without . . . banalities of style . . . or tedious repetitions.”

age in five pages than in fifty of Fielding. Antique spelling is sensibly limited to a few typical words—“cheerful,” “desart,” “publick.” There is little attempt to picture the life of any except the well-to-do of Mayfair, other than the lively account of the precarious ocean voyage, and of the brief interlude in Boston. In Boston we meet Bessie, the New England servant, who provides the only intellectual interest in the novel. Bessie is not an English colonial but an American with commonsensical, sometimes revolutionary, attitudes towards marriage, class distinction, individualism. Unknowingly a disciple of Locke and Rousseau, she is as incredible as the other characters, but she furnishes the novel’s only ideas.

“Pamela Foxe” is a nimble and well constructed novel, without the banalities of style of “Forever Amber” or its tedious repetitions. Its small quota of coarseness is intrinsic, inevitable in the age and story, never merely gratuitous. It is the right sort of yarn for the reader whose tastes include the well-written, cynical romance.

## In Dublin’s Slums

LIFFEY LANE. By Maura Laverty. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1947. 231 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by HORACE REYNOLDS

ANYONE who has read Maura Laverty’s first book “Never No More” is certain to remember her as an Irish writer of much natural charm. In this her fourth novel, she moves from village life in the County Kildare to the slums of Dublin, taking some of her people along with her, too. These Dubliners who live in Liffey Lane—slum on one side, middle class on the other—Miss Laverty sees and judges with a quick eye and a warm heart.

Her leading character in this new book is the slum child Chrissie Doyle, a combination of Peter Pan, the Little Match Girl, and James Stephens’s charwoman’s daughter. Chrissie is a small, frail embodiment of the best side of human nature. She walks down Liffey Lane, as Fred Allen moseys through Allen’s Alley, delivering papers and thinking her thoughts.

This book is her story and the various stories of her neighbors. Some of it is naturalistic: Miss Laverty doesn’t spare her small heroine the premature knowledge which coarsens the lives of the chiselers of families who live in one-room tenements. Some of it is as desperately gay as the fish-and-chips party in “The Informer.” The rich pageantry of Dublin street life here streels and stravages behind the main action, Cut-the-Rasher begging her pennies and Danny Buckley wheezing out “The Rose of Tralee” on the melodeon for the hooley on the night of Jim and Bride’s marriage.

Miss Laverty is good at getting inside people. The reverie of the lame girl is a fine piece of portraiture. As Mary Morrissey remembers all the twists and turns she practises to protect herself against her lameness, as she thinks of the way she turns up early at appointments and finds ways to be the last to leave a room, we recognize all the pitiful dodgeries of the maimed. Maura Laverty also gets inside the checking clerk Sam Rooney whose grotesque fatness is his psychic bruise. Sam beats up his brother to elevate himself, and then, big in himself for once and a short time only, goes home and for once makes love to his wife without feeling grateful and apologetic. And Miss Laverty also does a fine inside job on Mattie Herlihy, the mama’s boy whose mother ruined his life with prohibitions.

This young Dublin writer is a born storyteller, but she can be cloyingly

(Continued on page 27)

## LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

1. Gilbert: “The Mikado.” 2. Milton: “Lycidas.” 3. Tennyson: “The Eagle.” 4. Coleridge: “The Ancient Mariner.” 5. Longfellow: “Wreck of the Hesperus.” 6. Kipling: “Song of the Dead.” 7. Miller: “Columbus.” 8. Poe: “Annabel Lee.” 9. Cowper: “Alexander Selkirk.” 10. Byron: “Don Juan.” 11. Lear: “The Jumbles.” 12. Wordsworth: “Peele Castle in a Storm.” 13. Shelley: “Love’s Philosophy.” 14. Keats: “Ode to a Nightingale.” 15. Arnold: “The Forsaken Merman.” 16. Shakespeare: “The Tempest.” 17. Noyes: “The Highwayman.” 18. Masfield: “Sea-Fever.” 19. Swinburne: “The Garden of Proserpine.” 20. Stevenson: “Requiem.”

SEPTEMBER 6, 1947