

these three-finger exercises, which any reasonably fair student can turn out. McGrath has a "line" of his own, based on genuine Western folk-speech (he hails from North Dakota); he hardly needs to lean on such worn props as Dali's crutches. When he wants to, he can find the right words for love, or command anger and revulsion, irony and wit. For example, he lashes out at the sentimentality which obstructs action:

But love without direction is a cheap blanket
And even if it did no one any harm,
No one is warm.

In so far as he directs his poetry toward political action, McGrath simplifies too much (as when he exalts the pure love of vagrants above the corrupt love of the rich) and loses his grip as an artist, permitting banalities of diction ("comradeship," "brotherhood," "bourgeois," "upper class," and the like) and such lines as

When cops broke up the demonstration
Or the hearse came by with the organizer

with their black-and-white distinctions.

But there is a great deal of life in this poetry, for which one can forgive the lapses into crutches or class-war.

Gerard Previn Meyer is the editor of The New Quarterly of Poetry, author of "Louder Than the Drum" and "For George Herbert." He teaches English at Brooklyn Polytechnic.

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Social Nostrum

POEMS OUT OF A HAT. By Walter Leuba. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1947. 81 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ALFRED KREYMBORG

"POEMS OUT OF A HAT" is a remarkably interesting first volume by a mature Pennsylvanian, Walter Leuba. It is just what the doctor ordered for an age ill in every member of the body social: incisive, relentlessly witty, well-controlled, and compassionate. And the language and

versification of this scientific musician are broad in their range and beautifully proportioned. In short, Leuba belongs to the postwar era of historians, philosophers, and artists who sweep aside illusions in the search for absolute truth regarding mankind in a world torn apart with error, inexperience, and stupidity, and a world in the throes of committing the same blind evils again.

The Pennsylvanian's challenging nature and style will not prove popular with sentimental flag-wavers, chauvinists, and adherents to false gods and shibboleths. The poet de-

The Criminal Record			
The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction			
Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
MY LOVE WEARS BLACK Octavius Roy Cohen (Macmillan: \$2.50)	Hollywood realtor beloved by film star finds—and loses—her estranged husband's corpse. Three more fatalities occur before realtor finally outsmarts cops.	Movie background and gaudy Calif. characters sleekly drawn. Amateur detecting adequate. Action and romance palpitate pleasantly. But it's all rather static.	Readable
NIGHTMARE Edward S. Aarons (McKay: \$2)	Inoffensive cashier for N. Y. finance company, after friendly pub-crawl, finds self tagged and measured for electric chair. He fights back.	Average guy's dogged efforts to unravel three impromptu, unpremeditated murders in which he's implicated comprise tough, moving, and amply exciting tale.	Commendable
THE BLUE HOUR John Godey (Crime Club: \$2)	Incriminating enclosure with bank-statement drags muzzy and mystified adman into murderous whirl with sadistic killer, contraband paintings, and canny homicide squadder.	Puzzled but persistent custodian of valuable bit of paper follows it through harrowing, suspenseful, and supersoni-cally-paced situations to shooting finish.	Good thriller
CATS HAVE TALL SHADOWS D. B. Olsen (Ziff-Davis: \$2.50)	Miss Rachel Murdock, "who does all that she does . . . for love of murder" helps rout triple murderer at Oregon coast hotel.	Better than last Olsen opus. Crammed with cats, alive and carved; competently plotted, occasionally shivery. But spinster sleuth may induce catalepsy.	Fair
BUT DEATH RUNS FASTER William P. McGivern (Dodd, Mead: \$2)	Asst. editor of Chicago murder-pulp shot after bickersome party. Deb with guilty secret slain later. First murderess's boss spots culprit.	Denizens of mag. office—editors, writers, and such—make first-rate background for swiftly flowing, ably written, and slightly translucent baffler.	Worth while
RELATIVE TO POISON E. C. R. Lorac (Crime Club: \$2)	Atropin-disposal of arthritic English dowager deeply involves highstrung daughters, wastrel son, well-born household help, and Insp. MacDonald of Scotland Yard.	Convincing detection, expert plotting, vital characters—including two delightfully portrayed young girls—sufficient action, urbane writing, and spectacular denouement.	Dis-tin-guished
LADY WITHOUT MERCY Roman McDougald (Simon & Schuster: \$2)	Incurable wife who won't die and whom nobody can kill suc-cumbs after twin nieces perish from poison. In-scrutable-eyed Mr. Denison elucidates.	Excellent plot idea ob-scured by emotional characters "reeling, writhing, and fainting in coils." So incessantly intense it falls rather flat.	Disap-pointing

rides the god of property, the glib patriot, the war profiteer, and the ubiquitous politician:

The air is full of political lies
and also full of fireflies
this autumn night, and as I brood
I'm moved to healthful gratitude:
for bugs I thank a godless nature,
for lies, a godly legislature.

Nor is this poet misled into accepting our latest slogans without examination—the four freedoms, the century of the common man—nor does he hail such anniversaries as Christmas Eve and Good Friday with a formal acceptance.

Yellow man, red man, black man,
white,
kiss the cross in a blaze of light.

Black man, white man, yellow man,
red,
hold the cross high and bury the dead.

Red man, black man, white man, yellow,
break the cross over the other fellow.

God the father, God the son,
God the marksman, God the gun,
which of us is the chosen one?

Leuba's dramatic transmutation of rigmoroles and nursery rhymes is devastating in impact, yet he is not a man with a single instrument playing on bitter notes and dissonant causes. He is also moved by the war of the sexes, the war of life and death, and his sensibility is attuned to the lives of the lowly—"The little people shall be shriven." His steady devotion to reality gives voice to elegiac moods and country scenes and portraits of animals and people that are truly sympathetic and original and find grace in an otherwise rotting society. He even makes poems out of Union Square cops, out of Molly Megs, the metaphysical elevator operator, out of sparrows, starved cats and dogs, and out of "cheap music on a winter night." Here, for example, is Walter Leuba's handling of a Virgilian theme—with a difference. The poet is leafing over a *Farmer's Almanac* for September and observes:

Now is the season of the porcupine
who takes his fill of the ripening apple hoard;
now does the wild deer munch the emerald bean

Course in Criticism

A CREATIVE criticism course, limited to a small group of qualified upperclassmen, has been inaugurated by the University of Vermont. Its aim will be to develop sound, effectively expressed literary judgments. John W. Aldridge will conduct the class.

and the red fox look to the hen roost;
now the skunk
rattles the rusted lid of the garbage pail.

In the wild animal heart the season of fruit
is restlessness and hunger. In the turn of the leaf,
in the stronger, darker, deeper smell of things
through the cool of twilight, in the hot and seed-filled noon

of the harvest dusty, breathless, and heavily breathing,
lies the winter await, the carrion ominous winter
when only the terrible drifts of snow will move.

And man is no less restless and a stranger
as amid the full green corn the pumpkins lie
and in the morning the harsh rain suddenly falls
while the rowan grows and the apples sweeten and swell
and the infidel grapes ripen on time-less walls.



She overheard plans
for a murder...
with terrifying results!

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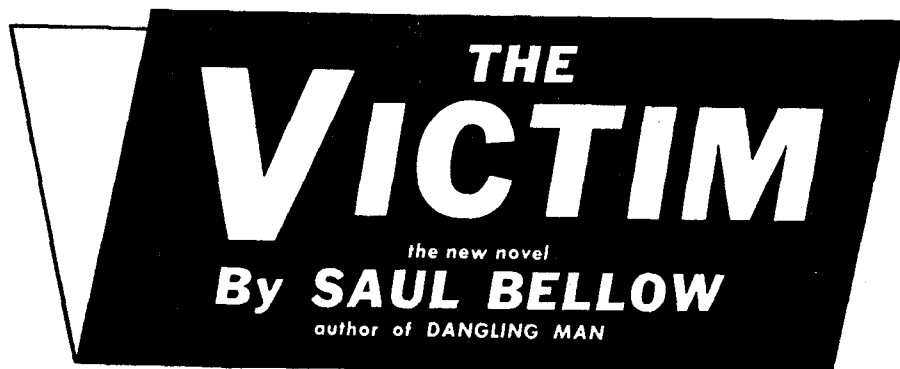
From a letter to the publishers:

"I was in Europe when Saul Bellow's *THE VICTIM* came out, and have only recently had a chance to read it. I know that some reviewers saw how original and honest the book is, but it is obvious that it is not getting anything like the appreciation it deserves. At a time when there is so much more than the usual amount of junk around, and when one sometimes has the feeling that most readers are not even given a chance any longer to discover what the art of fiction means, I think it is important to speak up for the book.

"The book moved me very deeply, and in a fundamental way, for it was not only my 'feelings' that were affected, but my total consciousness of contemporary man. I have never seen any other novel which so imaginatively lifts the theme of anti-Semitism from the plane of social disease to its real center in the universal moral condition. The book is not about anti-Semitism but about the human tragedy; it is a demonstration in living terms of man's ambiguity about himself and about his savage loneliness in the world. I put it clumsily, but for me the book is a 'central' kind of work; it is about the fundamentals of human existence. And how many contemporary American novels even hint at them? Yet the writing itself is as remarkable. Sentence after sentence so unerringly right, so sensitive and yet so unsparing, that the dramatic tension of the story is heightened by the concentration and the somber dignity of the imagery.

"For me *THE VICTIM* is a work of great creativeness and human understanding, and one that clearly demonstrates that Bellow is one of the most gifted of living American writers."

— ALFRED KAZIN



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VANGUARD

APRIL 17, 1948

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