

Ficton. Readers who are watching for new writers to indicate in which direction the compass of American writing may point will find several novelists reviewed below who are worth examining. Merle Miller's semi-autobiographical novel marks him as a correspondent who has successfully turned to fiction. Josephina Niggli furnishes a romantic but vivid story of Monterrey. Robert Gibbons's second novel, "The Patchwork Time," is a clear indication of a developing and sensitive talent for small-town realism and an inclination for experimental prose. For lighter entertainment this week, there is Kathryn Forbes's charming story of a bewildered pre-adolescent girl, "Transfer Point," as destined for success as was her earlier "Mama's Bank Account."

Sad Young Men of World War II

THAT WINTER. By Merle Miller. New York: William Sloane Associates. 1948. 297 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by MAXWELL GEISMAR

THIS is an honest, skilful, and very touching novel. As such it is a New Year's gift to the trade—and to American letters.

On the surface it is an unpretentious tale about all the sad young men of World War II. It even has such fashionable phrases as "the sickness of our time." What sets it off from its genre is simply that it has some basic elements of a novel: warmth, human affection, and humor. It has these in such abundance—and one is so grateful to discover them again—that it illuminates the failure of a whole section of American writing, particularly that of such young sophisticates as Truman Capote or Gore Vidal, and it puts Merle Miller right up in the ranks of more serious and mature American artists.

The ranks, incidentally, are pretty thin right now. Most of our younger novelists seem to have received the gift of expression before they received anything to express. Mr. Miller is also under thirty, but he has had the good fortune, apparently, to come from Iowa. During the war he organized the Pacific and the Continental editions of *Yank*. He has also been an editor of *Time* magazine (which organization forms the background of the present novel) and he is now, a perhaps equally gloomy fate, an editor of *Harper's*. Along with this, Mr. Miller has learned not to accept the answers supplied by either Henry Luce or Cyril Connolly; he isn't even quite satisfied with *PM's* Max Lerner.

What he does believe, as an American citizen, is the fact that he is not living in the best possible society, and that its basic trouble is not really the younger generation. Probably all the major characters in "That Winter"

drink too much, and they all know it. They learned it in the Army, but the Army, too, is not quite responsible for it. Ted Hamilton lost his arm in the war, but before that his father had had too much money and couldn't think of anything to do with it except to buy drinks. In a way, Ted is glad that he has lost his arm. All his life Lew Cole has been ashamed of his family and his religion; he had hoped that combat duty would restore some of the self-respect denied to him by the prejudices of his society. But he won't volunteer again because he isn't sure that they will want Jews in the next war.

In its time sequence "That Winter" alternates between unfolding the story of these figures and cutting back into their past. What makes the study of army life interesting and valid here is that the "war neuroses" are always superimposed upon a pattern of personal or social maladjustment. The hero of "That Winter" is also obsessed by his memories of death and destruction. But Peter has never written the novel he wants to write; meanwhile



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he is working for a magazine he distrusts and, like the rest of his group, he has known too many women too well.

In this sense, and for all Mr. Miller's intense convictions about present social evils, "That Winter" is not a "social" novel at all. At least it is raised considerably above the level of a tract for the times by its insight into human character and human weakness. In the background there are really acute satirical portraits: from Jonathan Lee, the liberal editor, to Leo Martin, the Luce "radical." And Mr. Miller is particularly good at something we used to call disappointed love. The story of Peter and Joan, ironic, entertaining, and nostalgic, is at the center of the novel, and it may remind you of those other touching and perennially frustrated human relationships in the early novels of Ernest Hemingway.

Probably the tone of "That Winter" is superior in the end to its content. Mr. Miller's theme sometimes seems a little too autobiographical; the development is panoramic rather than strictly dramatic, and the novel just fails to achieve the kind of solid impact it ought to have. Even so, it is a considerable accomplishment for a young novelist, with the promise of more. I hope I have made clear that it is a delight and a pleasure to read.

Chop Suey China

CAROLA. By Felix C. Forrest. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 1948. 307 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ARTHUR C. FIELDS

SOMEWHERE, Mr. Forrest ran off the track and what started out to be the interesting story of Carola Lainger, an American girl who marries a Chinese, became so utterly confusing through a complex style of constantly shifting flash-backs, that a good point was lost and the book itself failed. There are so many concurrent themes throughout (*Carola*, *Pauline*, *China*, *America*, *bolshevism*, *treason*, etc.) that picking the one central focal point of the novel is, indeed, difficult. Assume it to be *China*; Mr. Forrest writes well about *China*. There is even some modicum of truth in the jacket's bald proclamation: "perhaps the first authentic novel of *China* which, without being anti-Chinese, clearly reveals that tortured country's 'bad' earth." For certainly, the complete domination of family orders, the venerability of age, comes in for a sound thrashing in the sequences on *China*. Likewise, the drabness and monotony

of China's rural life (doubly emphasized when seen through the eyes of an American college woman) is excellently portrayed. Even the basic Oriental attitudes, the mysteries of the East, are brought to light as Carola tries to take her place in Chinese life and fails. But Mr. Forrest loses the directness of his approach by weighting down the book with so much extraneous sensationalism that before the reader realizes it he has become entangled in the labyrinths of flash-backs, and has lost the point in the general whoop-de-doo.

The story is told in flash-back Novembers (Mr. Forrest is as reminiscent in this month as was James Benson Nablo in "The Long November"), as from the "glassed-in rectilinear world" of America, Carola thinks back to the Novembers: of seeing her Little Dead Brother, of falling in love with a girl named Pauline Gerstenbacker, of practising liberalism in college. Losing in love to muscular organizer Ugo Antonini ("You tell me you sleep with me just to make up your dirty little bourgeois mind which you like better, men or women,") she marries, for spite, the frail-bodied, frail-minded Chinese, Carson Ding, renouncing her American citizenship to live in his family home in Yungchowhsien.

Here, the book becomes informative. Mr. Forrest draws his excellent pictures of the rigid family rule predominant in China, and of the physical world from which it can never shake itself loose.

The sun governed the Chinese world. . . . Everything grew. . . . Even the birds had the air of belonging to someone. The Chinese had conquered the earth, conquered it by living with it, until their copulation and reproduction had become vegetable not mammal. . . . The Chinese became angry only about vegetable things—they fought by shoving, not by honest slash for blood. . . . The people of this land had found a way of living. It gave them strong bodies, good tempers, immense patience, shrewd intelligence, simple but clear-cut morals, and terrifying docility. How could anyone rebel in that sunlight?

Through Magistrate Ouyang, the author points to one of the cryptic differences between civilizations:

Self-finding form is life itself to your Western people. You cannot live unless you know yourself and find yourself. You have no one such as we Chinese have, in the Ancient Sages, to tell you.

But from there on, the melodramatic takes over. After revolutions, murders, and sickness, there is the November of Tarzon Ding, Carson's tough brother, followed by the sketchy interlude with the Japanese. This includes, among other things,

the "routine terror" of the Tiger House Hotel, the brutal Lieutenant Chiburinominato, and a broadcast job for the Imperial forces directed at Americans—a little thing called treason. "Of course, in an abstract way, she (Carola) still supposed that she hated Japan, but in her heart she knew that all the wars in the world did not matter as much to her as having good teeth, and smooth skin, and quiet nerves, and clean things to eat and live with." Not a particularly illuminating thought but by this time Carola is not a particularly illuminating person. Felix C. Forrest was led astray early in his book and never again found his way. A good novel on China was lost by becoming embroiled in a steaming chop suey of sensationalism.

Feuding and Fighting

THE HOUR OF SPRING. By Mary Deasy. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1948. 368 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ANN F. WOLFE

IN THIS corner, the battling Joyces. It was strictly a private fight. As individuals they scrapped with one another; as a clan they took on the world. "The Hour of Spring," for all its idyllic title, is the story of the clan as it made its way a-feudin' and a-fightin' through two generations of American life and well into the third.

The founding father was handsome young Timothy Joyce who came to the Middle West from County Kerry in 1870. He soon found a good job on the railroad and a good wife in Ellen Carroll. "There was something in the man that was always solitary, unkindly, poor at sharing what was in the hearts and minds of even the few that were closest to him in life. . . . He was like a man following a road on an old map that's been out of date for a hundred years." What with Timothy's blind intransigence, the black Joyce temper, and the wildness that was in the blood of Ellen Carroll, the five Joyce children had a heritage that would never keep them at peace. They were torn, besides, by the conflict between the tribal spirit and new loyalties.

Over the turn of the century and on through the First World War the Joyces worked hard, married, begot, buried, and quarreled. They voted the Democratic ticket and they went to mass on Sundays and holy days. Hughie alone, Timothy's youngest son and the most like him, got off to a slow start materially and romantically. Death on the battlefield spared him the routine of daily living that had come to be his greatest dread.

That routine was just another sparing partner to the rest of the family. They lustily took it on, neither asking nor giving quarter. And if the victories they won were lacking in spiritual content, the Joyce contribution to American progress was at least healthy and constructive. The most gallant Joyce of them all, red-haired will-o'-the-wisp Maggie, made a bad bargain with fate and stuck to it. It took high courage on her part to resist Christy Fogarty, lost soul and poet *manqué*. It is a pity that the theme of blood relationship beclouds their tragedy.

According to Miss Deasy, "The Hour of Spring" is an "Irish" book "in so far as it employs the rich speech and humor and the strongly marked character of the Celtic race, but it is above everything else a story of people." Had it been a purely "Irish" story, one might have wondered why a family like the Joyces produced neither nun nor priest nor reader of books. Miss Deasy's explanation helps account for bad tempers, selfishness and pettiness as the result of, say, chromosomes or human cussedness, rather than the mystical doom of Irish lineage. Bat Killian may turn out to be just an ugly customer and not a scion of the remote hero breed called Fianna.

"The Hour of Spring," Miss Deasy's first novel, is like one of the Joyce funeral conclaves, a rousing affair with never a dull moment, lively with racial wit, family gossip, and inter-cine repartee. Miss Deasy has charm of characterization and a warm touch in portraying the petite bourgeoisie of a Midwestern city during the transition from the Victorian to the modern era. The story of the Joyces is a good story. It lacks only the spiritual approach to make it a strong story.

Accumulated Psychoses

TIME MOVING WEST. By Lonnie Coleman. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1947. 248 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

THIS is a novel about experience in war, of which the main theme out of several deals with men breaking down under the accumulated psychological strains, not those of combat, but the enforced association, responsibility with insufficient authority, separation from anything resembling normal life, and above all, nervous fatigue. The scene is laid at a point where these factors develop to perhaps their fullest extent—in the wardroom and crew's quarters of a transport, where the thrill of striking back at the enemy is absent, the monotony and pain of hope deferred