

Fiction. *The summer drought is indeed over when we can review in one issue the latest work of Charles Morgan, William Sansom, Eudora Welty, Taylor Caldwell, and John Moore, in addition to two other novels of real distinction. In her volume of related stories Miss Welty casts a legendary magic around the people of a Mississippi town; Mr. Morgan inquires into personal responsibility for the violence of our time; William Sansom writes a wonderfully human document of the manner in which the poison of unfounded jealousy enters a British family. Another English writer, John Moore, describes country people obdurately defending their ancient freedoms against Socialist encroachment, and Taylor Caldwell adds one more book to her deservedly popular studies of nineteenth-century American tycoons, their wives, and children. In John Brooks's "The Big Wheel" a young American makes his bow to the public. His novel is concerned with the quandary of the young men on a great weekly faced with reconciling their ideals with its editorial policy.*

Dragons in Mississippi

THE GOLDEN APPLES. By Eudora Welty. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 244 pp. \$3.

By HERSCHEL BRICKELL

THIS is the fifth book by a master-hand in the medium of short fiction, who has earned a secure place at the top of the list of living story-writers. As a poetical chronicle of an imaginary Mississippi town called Morgana, the name itself significant of Miss Welty's legendary approach to her subject, it comes close to being a novel in the completeness of its picture of a linked group of people, although its component parts range from the conventional short story length to the long short story, each a separate and complete work.

Indeed, a number of the stories have appeared separately in magazines, and one, at least, "The Whole World Knows," in an anthology, where it won recognition as one of Miss Welty's best efforts. It is a singularly moving tale of a man betrayed by his wife, whom he loved, and his pathetic efforts to cope with his tragedy. Another, "Music from Spain," has been published separately in a limited edition by the Levee Press.

As good as these separate parts proved to be, the full impact of a highly original piece of writing can only be had by reading the whole book, which has a definite pattern. In the first story, "Shower of Gold," which leaves no doubt that Miss Welty is writing at two levels, of things as they are, and of their relationship to classical and medieval mythology, the narrator is Mrs. Fate Rainey—Miss Katie—whereas the last story is con-

cerned with Miss Katie's death and burial, rounding out a strange cycle of human conflicts, of many people in many situations.

The dominant figure is an earth-god called King McClain, who vanishes after begetting twins by Miss Snowdie Hudson, an albino, only to reappear at intervals, always eager and able to replenish the earth. King

is marked for death as the book closes, but not until his imprint has been left on the reader's mind, as well as on the community.

From her earliest stories, Miss Welty's writing has had a high degree of individuality. Her memory for colloquial speech is unbelievably accurate, and her antic imagination, coupled with her profound compassion and understanding, gives us people much realer than real, stranger, yet more believable than the living.

Here is Mississippi observed and remembered, but it is a Mississippi where "they heard through falling rain the running of the horse and bear, the stroke of the leopard, the dragon's crusty slither, and the glimmer and the trumpet of the swan." Dragons in Mississippi? Yes, says Miss Welty, as everywhere else, and makes the reader believe it.

Anyone in search of writing of consistent beauty, of an individual outlook on life, of an impressive knowledge of Southern small towns, and of the play of a rare imagination, will find delight in more than one reading of "The Golden Apples," apples not to be squeezed of all their poetic juice in a single run. This is not a book for all readers, but followers of Miss Welty's work will find it one of her finest achievements to date, a work of literature that will richly reward the discriminating.

THE AUTHOR: By her own testimony, Eudora Welty has never written a story that is biographical or autobiographical. She recognizes no direct model for her own work and, through telegraphic message cut to the cryptic, confesses, "I suspect my influences come from places, outside world." No matter. She won O. Henry prizes in 1941, '42, and '43, held a Guggenheim Fellowship concurrently with the last two, and was awarded \$1,000 by the American Academy of Arts in 1944. Besides "The Golden Apples," she is author of "A Curtain of Green," "The Robber Bridegroom," "The Wide Net," and "Delta Wedding." She has had at least three discoverers, among them the late Ford Madox Ford, who, dispaired of finding her a market, once called her a "typical martyred promising writer." Thirteen years ago *Manuscript*, an extinct little magazine, proudly offered her first story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman." In it a drummer gasping his last is stung with regret for having missed a creative domestic life. Her next show case was *Southern Review*, whose editor, Albert Erskine, also claimed her as protégé. Since then she has been appearing in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*. "My great wish," Miss Welty confides, "is to help get out a magazine for the short story some day." She was a founder of the first literary paper at the Mississippi State College for Women (1925-27), afterwards went to Wisconsin for her B.A. and Columbia for an advertising course. She did radio scripts, society news, and publicity. However, having no need to worry about making a living, she decided not to, and has been writing happily ever since at home in Mississippi, where she was born, and the state she loves. She is a "playtime painter," raises camellias, likes Mozart, picnics, oils, and "traveling, low-speed," at which tempo, presumably, she'll see France, Italy, and England this fall. "I have no idea for my next book," she says. "I may write it in a new place. I hope it turns out new for me."

—R. G.



In Tragic Shadow

THE RIVER LINE. By Charles Morgan. New York: The Macmillan Co. 195 pp. \$2.75.

By WALTER HAVIGHURST

IN THE space of a short novel Mr. Morgan here explores the characters of a group of postwar people—one American, one French, and several British—and penetrates the aching question of personal responsibility in the violence of modern times. Not a word in the novel is wasted, not a scene could be spared. It builds up to a tense and dramatic revelation of human relationships in the shadow of a tragic past event.

The "River Line" was an underground route through which war casualties escaped from Occupied France, and the people in this story were associated in that peril and necessity. The novel shows us the American Philip Sturgess returning to England in a postwar summer to visit his friends of the River Line. A reflective man, with "the streak of earnest precision in him which wanted to understand everything," Sturgess cannot free himself from his wartime memories. Over the quiet English countryside hover events of the violent past, and the survivors feel the presence of the man who did not survive their period of hiding in the old granary at Blaise on the River Line. How he was killed, how the others were involved in his death, what his death has meant subsequently to each of them, are the deliberate, startling revelations of the story.

As with Mr. Morgan's other novels, "The River Line" enters promptly into a realm of ideas. What other novelist today can by page 20 have his people discussing the riddle of human personality?—"If it isn't a fragment of Class and it isn't a fragment of Nation—You see, what is now called 'frustration' looks to me very like what used to be called 'tragedy' about twenty-three centuries ago." It is Mr. Morgan's achievement that the realm of ideas is charged with import and that the ideas are a part of a growing intensity of personal relationships. As the novel moves on it develops drama both in the present and the past, and the two come together in its final problem. To that problem Mr. Morgan brings wisdom of a kind that few novelists now possess; it is an understanding of the human dilemma and an awareness of "this enduring light, seen through men and things and yet not part of them, as light is not part of a lamp."

Beside almost any other novel of the Second World War, this novel will



—Harcourt.

Charles Morgan—"wisdom of a kind few novelists now possess."



—Melvin.

William Sansom—"sensitivity and sensibility, with artlessness and grace."

seem fastidious. At first the violence of war seems out of place in so well-mannered a book. But you come to see that the novel is fastidious in a way that Mr. Morgan's mind is fastidious and that it does not turn aside from the ultimate and inevitable violence. Mr. Morgan shows us in his war-caught people some surprising qualities; he shows us loyalty, compassion, responsibility, and a sense of destiny rather than of chance. He does not shrink from violence or from honor.

While reading this novel I found myself recalling a sentence that Henry James once addressed to a young writer: "Try to be one of the persons on whom nothing is lost." Mr. Morgan does not belabor the obvious. But the vibrations, the impressions, the overtones and undertones—he makes them all count. He builds a situation deliberately, and though it is simple it is also complex, with intricate relationships and the inevitable intruding into the present of the past. Alert to small stresses between persons and within them, he is equal to the profound stress toward which this distinguished novel moves.

A British Othello

THE BODY. By William Sansom. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 215 pp. \$2.75.

By JOHN WOODBURN

WILLIAM SANSOM is a young Englishman who has published five volumes of short stories in his own country, where he is not without honor. Two of these—"Fireman Flower" and "Three"—were brought out a few years ago by an American publisher who, shall we say, had no difficulty in keeping them in stock. They were excellent stories, spontaneous, strongly individual, and remarkable for their fresh use of the language. There doubtless were good reasons why they did not become widely known here, but none occur to me immediately, beyond the fact that they were short stories in a country which is deeply concerned with double features, 183-inch wheel-bases, perpetual radio serials, and king-size historical novels, and that they had to compete with some of our contemporary American literature which, while it was neither spontaneous, individual, nor particularly distinguished as to style, had the advantage of being accompanied by a brass band.

I am now endeavoring to organize a modest percussion section for the purpose of calling attention to Mr. Sansom's first novel, a notable piece of work in which the brilliance and insight of his short stories have been richly extended. "The Body" is a fine study of delusional jealousy, taut with anxiety and chagrin, and done in a lively, flesh-colored style that makes his characters fairly glisten with life. It begins with a sharply arresting paragraph:

To hold the syringe gently, firmly but delicately—not to squirt, but to prod the sleeper into wakefulness with the nozzle, taking care to start no abrupt flight of fear. Only to stir a movement, to initiate a presence from such a deep lead sleep. Gently, gently—lean thus into the ivy, face close in to the leaves, bowed in yet hardly daring to breathe, not to shake a single leaf, hand held far away up the wall, but face now close, secret, smelling the earth underneath the ivy like a smell close to earlier days, intimate the eyes and closed the world . . . then carefully prod, no, tickle—tickle the long dead leg on the leaf.

This, with all its delicate, evocative ominousness, is in one sense no more than Henry Bishop, a middle-aged, happily-married hairdresser in a dowdy London suburb, about to kill a large bug on a leaf of garden ivy. In another, symbolic sense it suggests