

'48's Nine

ROCHELLE GIRSON

APPARENTLY being a successful novelist does not pay—enough anyway. Of the authors interviewed below, all but one made best-seller lists. Like Merle Miller, who emphasizes the economic bogey behind most pens, they find they cannot live by books alone and must dilute their literary drive with at least some drudgery. Norman Mailer seems to be the one exception here. He expects to hold out for three years on proceeds from his novel.

NORMAN MAILER, Harvard degree or no, is not prone to primp in speech or dress. He made his bow to a cortege of silk-tied critics in a rumpled T-shirt. And talk about affirmative values just gives him a three-lettered pain. "It has no meaning. It's a criticism of the man and not the book. You write whatever you have to write, pretty much as an expression of your personality."

The twenty-six-year-old author is in Vermont now finishing a novel he worked on in Paris last year after a GI stretch at the Sorbonne. Since his return last summer he has written a couple of articles and, until the election, was prominent in the pulpit for Henry Wallace. "Yeah . . . uh-huh," he reflects, "if he were running tomorrow, I would still be for him. I think that in the cold-war setup the larger part of the blame has been on our side. In the UN the Russians were outmaneuvered. They always came out looking like dopes. I do think we achieved something: I don't feel that there is going to be a war tomorrow—as I did a year ago."

But he doesn't believe in message novels. "If a man has a message he is going to put it in in one way or another. Spelling it out is a mistake because I don't think any mountains are moved that way. 'The Naked and the Dead' was an anti-war novel. I didn't write it to move people but because I wanted to write it."

As an undergraduate he wrote for the *Crimson's Advocate*, and in 1941 won *Story's* college contest. "I would kinda like to write for the movies sometime," he says, recalling a film—surrealist because without props that was easier—he once made for \$50 at home in Brooklyn Heights. He thinks, obviously, that it's a very poor policy just to indicate obscenity. "If you do, every time it comes up it has a kind of phoney force—shock. My feeling was that after the first twenty or thirty pages the reader wouldn't notice it any more."

IRWIN SHAW asked himself in 1935, when he was twenty-three: "What would happen if dead soldiers should rise and protest the ceaseless carnage?" On that question he based his one-act drama "Bury the Dead," called "the most tormenting play of the year." He entered the Army in 1942 as a private. Later he said, "I never had the feeling that wars would stop. I only wanted to make sure we fought on the right side." Which, in a way, is the thesis of "The Young Lions," his first novel after thirteen years' writing for slick magazines, Hollywood, and the theatre.

"The Gentle People," produced by the Group Theatre, with which he was active in the Thirties, was also a hit, but others—"Salute," "Siege," "Retreat to Pleasure," and "The Assassin"—had rough going with the

critics. In retort to the mauling the last-named received, Mr. Shaw—normally an affable, high-spirited fellow—expressed himself volcanically in the preface to the play's published volume. Although he was regarded as an excellent critic during the year or so he covered Broadway for the *New Republic*, it is not thought that he was reckless with praise.

For ten years he has contributed regularly to *The New Yorker*, where he has an office and which originally published perhaps his most famous short story, "Act of Faith," title of a 1946 collection. He began writing in high school, and at Brooklyn College divided his extracurricular energies between football, tennis, plays, and radio dramatizations of "The Gumps" and "Dick Tracy."

Right now he is vacationing in Sun Valley, Idaho. He'll leave for Europe in April for six months on assignments from *Holiday* and *The New Yorker*. Meanwhile he has been working on another novel and a new play. He's not telling what they're about.

WILLIAM GARDNER SMITH, home on furlough, was brutally beaten in a night club in Philadelphia, America, by a group of sailors who objected to his being with a girl whom they mistook for white. "Kill him! Kill him!" was the cry. In Germany he and other Negro members of the Occupation were invited into "Aryan" homes. "Many Germans," he explains, "never followed the *Herrenvolk* line. With many others defeat brought the end of delusion. The only American Negroes the Germans knew were Robeson, Anderson, Owens, and so on. They respected them. There were many intermarriages."

He claims no bitterness, but the irony of it did inspire "The Last of the Conquerors," finished before he was twenty. Although the book has been a best seller and is under option for Broadway production, he works as a reporter Saturdays to help pay his way through Temple University, where he is a junior majoring in economics and philosophy. Before the war he refused scholarships to Howard and Lincoln, believing at age sixteen that he could learn more about writing by being a journalist. He got a newspaper job and wrote nights, a routine he still follows. He says he needs little sleep, and endless cups of black coffee and cigarettes keep him from changing his mind.

Another novel, not on the race theme, has been drafted for Farrar, Straus, and he has a third in mind—but that will wait until he has done "a lot more studying and reading."

To aspiring Negro authors he says,



—John Popper.

Norman Mailer

—John Engstead.

Irwin Shaw

—Erich Hartmann.

William Gardner Smith

"Don't preach. Colored writers, understandably, pour too much of themselves into the things they write; they seem to shout, and nothing is accomplished by shouting."

JOHN COBB, when asked when he was going to write another novel, said, "I don't know. I wrote about the only thing I knew." Unwilling to turn subjective and write about his own neuroses, if any, he is not deliberately looking for more material, and of late has been mostly interested in just seeing more of the country. He is apt to turn up in California, Oregon, Wyoming, or Florida, work for a while and push on. Right now he hopes to get a job in Jacksonville, where he lived until he was twelve, when his family moved to Princeton, N. J.

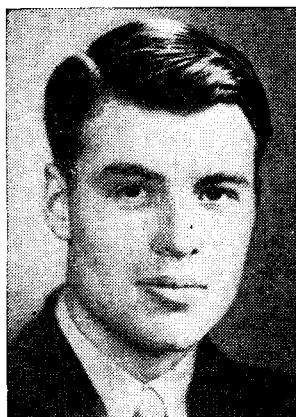
He was born in Atlantic City in 1921, attended Phillips Exeter Academy and Princeton University. In 1942 he joined the USAAF, was commissioned a second lieutenant, and served as navigator in the Eighth Air Force. After completing his tour he was assigned to Air Transport Command, flying to Africa, India, and Okinawa. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

While at Columbia on the GI Bill he wrote "The Gesture." He started a stage adaptation of the novel, then abandoned it because it made him want to re-do the entire book. He has written a number of other plays—and torn them up. To save confusion with his father, John C. Cooper, Jr., also an author, he uses Cobb as a pen name.

Yes, the boys in the Air Force talked like those in the South Pacific, but Mr. Cobb felt that a phonographic recording of smut would be extraneous, that it would distract from what he was trying to say. "I think that it's all right for a punch line, but if it comes in the middle of dialogue it detracts attention—causes an emotional block. Emphasis comes harder from the printed page than in conversation. It doesn't give an accurate impression of the person and in that sense isn't very realistic."

ROSS LOCKRIDGE, JR., on March 7, 1948, seemingly had everything a thirty-three-year-old writer could desire: He had won the MGM novel award of \$150,000 for "Raintree County," his first book, with a possibility of \$275,000 more. He had a beautiful wife and four small children. They had bought a new home in Bloomington, Indiana, where he was born, attended Indiana University, and taught. Six years' incessant labor was over.

He had wanted to be an author since childhood, when his father, onetime head of the Public Speaking Depart-



—Bachrach.
John Cobb



Ross Lockridge, Jr.



—Fred McIlton.
Truman Capote



Hollister Noble



Ruby Redinger



Merle Miller

ment at Indiana University, frequently arranged excursions to famous shrines so that the boy might declaim historic words where the events occurred.

In 1933-34 he attended the Sorbonne on a scholarship. While abroad he traveled in France, Switzerland, Italy, and England. "Graduating in the middle of the depression-ridden and proletarian Thirties," one account reads, "he somehow managed to remain almost entirely insulated from the ideologies and social convulsions of his time." After his M.A. at Indiana he continued to study languages—seven in all, ancient and modern. An epic poem he had been working on while at Harvard on a scholarship was turned down for publication. Disappointed, he left Cambridge in 1941 to teach at Simmons College, Boston, and write "Raintree County." He was deferred from war service and, the account continues, "devoted to family, novel, and teaching, these years passed in a curious tranquility."

On March 7, 1948, Ross Lockridge, Jr., died—a suicide.

TRUMAN CAPOTE, whose new collection of short stories, "A Tree of Night," will be published February 28, says, "All I want to do is tell the story, and sometimes it's best to choose a symbol. I wouldn't know a Freudian symbol as such if Harvard showed it to me."

He is largely self-educated, entirely self-possessed, and now twenty-four tells of having lived as a child with a posse of cousins and elder kin in "this terribly isolated place" near New Orleans, a locale not unlike that in "Other Voices, Other Rooms." It had a wonderful library and at ten he was madly in love with Willa Cather, Flaubert, and Proust.

He spent five months when fifteen tap dancing on a Mississippi pleasure boat and used to amuse himself painting imaginary flowers on glass, a hobby he later converted into considerable cash. As protege of a Southern fortune-teller he developed "a marvelous intuition—a kind of secret knowledge." Seven years ago he came to New York, got a job on *The New Yorker* as assistant accountant, confessed the next day he couldn't subtract, and was transferred to the art department, where he unwrapped cartoons. He offered ideas to the *Talk of the Town*, selected anecdotes for a digest magazine, read film scripts. *Story* magazine discovered him; his "Miriam" in *Mademoiselle* was included in the O. Henry Memorial Award volume; the critics (especially Cyril Connolly) became ecstatic. He now publishes very few stories, quite a few articles, and "places them well."

On February 25 he sails for Europe

to begin two years' concentration on a new novel. "I haven't any milieu," he says. "When people say Truman Capote is a Southern writer, I merely find it irritating." The Capote is Spanish, the Truman no relation to Harry.

HOLLISTER NOBLE found unraveling the Strange Case of Anna Ella Carroll, his "Woman with a Sword," one of the most exciting adventures of his life. "Like many young newspapermen, I had vague hankerings to tackle fiction," he says, "but there were too many contradictory interests": music criticism for the *New York Sun*, freelancing for *The New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The New Yorker*, managing editorship of *Musical America*, publicity for CBS, war service as captain in the Marine Corps, then feature editorship in the New York Overseas Bureau of OWI, and, between times, voyages with freighter and passenger-line crews all over the world.

A casual reference by Carl Sandburg to his Civil War heroine and an 1891 biography of her changed all that. He quit his job and drove 12,000 miles around the country digging into forgotten history. A rich cache was right in his home town, Auburn, N. Y.

"Much history needs to be completely rewritten," he says. "The modern researcher, armed with the knowledge now available to us, can find many similar cases and crucial periods and events almost totally ignored by prominent historians. Personally, I'd like to see the modern novel concern itself more with the forces and conflicts that confront individuals today, and I would like to see the historical novel occupy itself less with mere incidents and events than with the effect these happenings of the past had upon the protagonists of the story."

He is forty-eight, lives in Sherman Oaks, Calif., is crazy about dogs and

railroads, paints a little and, when moody, plays mournfully on an accordion. He won't say much about a new book he's started except that "it's another chapter of hidden history of a rather startling nature."

MERLE MILLER delivered his next novel to Sloane the day he talked for this sketch. It's about the loyalty probe in Washington, where he was correspondent for the *Philadelphia Record* after graduation from the London School of Economics. "I am trying to write about my generation," he says, "people born after the last war, brought up in depression, fighting a new war, and returning to find that people are talking about a third."

His first poem was published when he was eight. He was considered a bright boy in Marshalltown, Iowa, a big man at Iowa State University, which, albeit, refused him a sheepskin because he refused military training. "I got it later." During the war he founded and edited the Pacific edition of *Yank* and was the first editor of *Yank's* Continental Edition. Out of his experiences overseas he wrote "Island 49," "We Dropped the A-Bomb," and an unfinished play, on which he is again working.

He was with *Time* briefly, became managing editor of a stillborn magazine project, is now an assistant editor of *Harper's*, working part time. "A guy has to find some way of making a living that interferes as little as possible with his writing—preferably one that does not use his writing talents." "That Winter," which was a best seller for four months, netted about \$10,000, but it took two years to write. The new book took eighteen months. "How could you live three and a half years on \$10,000?"

Miller is average height with a sensitive, alert face, casual manner, and rich voice, none of which bar him from frequent television appearances. He is active with Americans for Democratic Action, United World Federalists, and the AVC, but "the worst thing I think I could do would be to try to be a reformist through fiction."

RUBY REDINGER agrees that thirty-four might be considered young to be chairman of the department of philosophy at Fenn College in Cleveland (where she has spent most of her life), but "they're used to me by now." She started teaching it as an emergency measure during the war while conducting literature courses and in 1946 turned over to it completely.

Personally, she's "quite eclectic," not leaning to one philosopher more than another. "I have a tremendous admiration for Plato, but I am not a

Platonist. I was definitely a negativist when younger, and I don't feel complacently optimistic about things in general today. One's own philosophy is a matter of personal expression. I'm trying to make philosophy as real as possible to the students. It's quite a challenge."

She got her Ph.D. at Western Reserve on Jonathan Swift, has published an article on him in *American Scholar* and another on the short story in the new edition of *Encyclopedia Americana*. While teaching admittedly saps her energy, she finds it more valuable to do creative work daily—"in the end it enriches writing." Sometimes she writes all night, sometimes week ends. "I think any book is inevitably autobiographical, but 'The Golden Net' is objective as far as characters and situations are concerned." She hopes to finish her second novel next summer. It will be quite different, dealing with non-intellectuals.

In her painting she sticks chiefly to still life ("I'm definitely an amateur"), in her writing principally to portraying people. "I expect to wait a good while before writing a philosophical novel," she says. "I think it's a mistake to aim too high. I'll just write as the ideas come. Good ones are rather rare."

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT: No. 294

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 294 will be found in the next issue.

Z L V Y F G V E H V X Z B D U K

I B C C F C U M A B Z R G B Y K U M E Y

O L R G L B X F T A V O A, F M I L F E R -

Y Z R G B U U K, B Y Z L F Y Z B Z F U K

L V E F Y V H F A Q U B A C. —

N R X Q R A R B O V V U H.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 293

Arrogance, pedantry, and dogmatism are the occupational diseases of those who spend their lives directing the intellects of the young.

—HENRY SEIDEL CANBY.

Morning in Ice

By Louis Ginsberg

NOW jacketed with burnished spells,

Flashes each wall and pole and fence,

As festivals of icicles

Dramatize the magnificence.

As if to fete each fence and bough,

What fable has escaped from Time?

What crystal myth has wandered now

Out of some immemorial rhyme?

And celebrating with the sleet

This beauty almost blinding sight,

With branches, blazing in the street,

Trees are archangels, thinking light.