

ing in an unpleasant way—but nothing more.

The Pasquiers were most worth while when the older generation still held the center of the stage, before the children had gone their separate

ways. Then they gave a promise that has not been kept.

As to the quality of the English translation by Beatrice de Holthoir, the brief passages quoted are fair samples.

## Parade of Horribles

A TREE OF NIGHT And Other Stories. By Truman Capote. New York: Random House. 1949. 209 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by MILTON CRANE

CAPOTE'S first book of short stories bears certain resemblances to his "Other Voices, Other Rooms." Most of these stories, like the novel, are laid in a deep South that makes the Faulkner country seem as innocent as Penrod Schofield's home town. In the main, these are Gothic tales—Gothic not only in their author's unabashed desire to freeze his readers' blood but in the means he employs to achieve his end. One of the very special attractions of the Gothic novel, in the hands of Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe, is the unexplained apparition which pursues hero, heroine, and reader down an infinity of dim corridors, and whose identity is not revealed even in the tidy denouement of the last chapter. It is a pleasant device, when used with discretion; Mr. Capote, unfortunately, tends to make it the mainspring of the action in tale after tale.

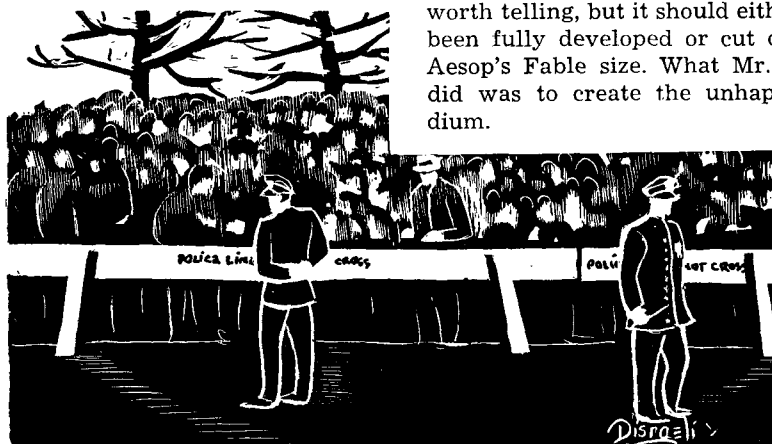
Consider the curious A. F. Revercomb of "Master Misery," who goes into the business of buying dreams and thereby entraps the innocent Sylvia. This unfortunate girl, in thrall to Mr. Revercomb, leaves the tiresome young couple with whom she lives, loses her job, and finally frees herself from the dream-merchant with the aid of the ambiguous drunk Oreilly. The reader must choose between a symbolism too obvious to be credible and another about which only surmises can be made.

Mr. Revercomb, the eater of dreams, who never appears in "Master Misery," is nevertheless a more explicit personification of Nemesis than are some of Mr. Capote's bogeymen; at least he has a name. The nameless horror of "Shut a Final Door" dogs the doomed hero from New York to New Orleans, telephoning from time to time to say: "Hello, Walter. Oh, you know me, Walter. You've known me a long time." An ingenious combination of the legendary Chinese water-torture and Frank Sullivan's Mr. Arbuthnot, the Cliché Expert.

Or take the hapless heroine of the

title story, "A Tree of Night." She is Kay, nineteen years old, a sophomore at a college in Atlanta, to which she is returning by train from a funeral. She is obliged to sit with an odd couple: the man is described as deaf and dumb by the woman, a frowsy and vulgar harridan in her fifties. The woman forces bad gin on Kay and tries to induce her to buy a charm from the man. Kay makes an abortive effort to escape, but is charmed into returning to her seat: "A warm laziness relaxed her. She was dimly conscious of it when the woman took away her purse, and when she gently pulled the raincoat like a shroud about her head." Exit Kay.

These summaries do Mr. Capote's art something less than justice. Although there are few unfamiliar figures in his parade of horrors, he manipulates his puppets dexterously and occasionally produces a genuine frisson. In "Miriam," for example, the objectification of horror in the monstrous person of a twelve-year-old, white-haired girl is altogether successful in suggesting the disintegration of personality in a lonely old woman, who conjures up this destructive parasite bearing her own name. Most of Mr. Capote's creations, unfortunately, hobble rather than glide, possibly because they must carry an excessive weight of symbolic meaning. And the two stories which are in no sense Gothic, "Children on Their Birthdays" and "My Side of the Matter," are derivative and pretentious. Mr. Capote has reasonable prospects of success with his Grand Guignol as long as he resists the temptation to stray outside his genre.



## Old Order vs. the New

SCOTT-KING'S MODERN EUROPE.

By Evelyn Waugh. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1949. 89 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by NORMAN COUSINS

THIS is perhaps the shortest novel of the season—in itself a recommendation at a time of too many overweight but undernourished novels. And yet, in this case at least, Mr. Waugh's brevity produces something less than the soul of wit, for "Scott-King's Modern Europe," short as it is, is much too long for what it has to say. Except for a few happy flashes, its attempts at amusing satire are distinctly of the low-voltage variety. As a magazine piece, which it was originally, it perhaps pays its way, but between boards it does little to advance Mr. Waugh's reputation. Indeed, coming so soon after "The Loved One," which never quite came off, "Scott-King's Modern Europe" may disappoint and baffle many of Mr. Waugh's followers in this country who may be able to overlook his apparent passion for trivia but not the tossed-off impression created by these two latest works.

"Scott-King's Modern Europe" never seems to make up its mind as to whether it is satire or allegory or parable or fable or farce. It attempts to contrast the deliberative, unhurried life of a man of reason with the life of power, brashness, and ignorance of a traditionless totalitarianism. It attempts to dramatize the helplessness and ineptness of the old order when confronted or captured by the new, but says that over the longer range, the qualities inherent in classicism represent our only real hope and strength for the building of tomorrow. Before he arrives at the moral of his story, Mr. Waugh goes in for a good deal of literary horseplay, permits his cast to thrash around without stage directions, and invokes images and situations which may have clearer meaning for some of his friends than for a general audience. There is a story here worth telling, but it should either have been fully developed or cut down to Aesop's Fable size. What Mr. Waugh did was to create the unhappy medium.



"Catharine Whitcomb has tackled an ambitious task undeviatingly."



"Norah Lofts can keep plot and reader together no matter what."

## *From Misery to Madness*

*THE DOOR TO THE GARDEN.* By Catharine Whitcomb. New York: Doubleday & Co. 1949. 273 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by  
CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN

MISS WHITCOMB has tackled an ambitious task undeviatingly. She gets to the heart of the matter and through her unerring awareness leads us straight to that unearthly world existing in the mind of a child. Her book is divided into two parts, the little girl, then the grown-up. The subtlety of the writing, the shift in attitude and observation mark the ugly division in time, though the yearning remains unchanged.

This is the story of Kate and of her search for happiness. Child of divorce, early missing Mama's warmth and clean, sweet dresses, she soon learns fear and misunderstanding. For Kate was the bad one, the wilful, deceitful, violent one; at eternal enmity with her goading, stupidly brutal father, impatient with but loyal to her sniffling sister, and always and forever utterly alone, eager for love. The adults in her life except for beloved Aunt Lavinia and Uncle Zero are hopelessly cruel.

"Being a child was never so bad around Aunt Lavinia." She shelters Kate and her sister Bunny summer after sunny summer in the big house. Here the lost young soul finds wisdom and peace and at least a glimmer of hope. But winters come and Papa looms large and Aunt Lavinia dies and there is only sick Uncle Zero to be near.

Uncle Zero, submissive husband of

Papa's ignorant sister, Aunt Q., finally asserts himself by digging his own garden. Kate "felt that he was committing himself forever by this act of independence and she trembled for fear he would give it up and go back to his unobtrusive chair in the corner of his parlor and his life of spineless ease." But Zero stays firm, then withers away with his flowers.

Until she meets Jim, these two dear creatures alone have tried to help Kate. Papa tortures her, making scene after grating scene, taunting her without mercy because of her defiance, and punishing her endlessly because she wasn't born a boy. Mr. Dinsmore is soft in comparison. Aunt Q. is no less evil. Through incessant nagging, through always favoring Bunny, she contributes forcibly to Kate's mounting madness.

Finally the breakdown comes with maturity. Kate is on her own, has written a book, and has taken a lover of compassion. It is through him, after her crack-up, that the golden key is found; through him that the darkness lifts.

This almost unendurable childhood is brilliantly done. Etched in heart-break, family cleavage, and uncommunicability, Kate's youth is sadly twisted. The adroit blurring of adults into alphabets, the recording *The Things That Matter* in capital letters, and the dreamlike quality of groping make for vividness. Thinking as a child becomes overwhelmingly real. Much of imagination and flavor is lost as Kate puts away childish things. For the reader's pleasure, albeit to Kate's pain, she simply should never grow up.

## *Bordello Doll-Baby*

*A CALF FOR VENUS.* By Norah Lofts. New York: Doubleday & Co. 1949. 253 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by ANN F. WOLFE

NORAH LOFTS is one of those story-tellers who can't miss. She excels in historical realism, for one thing. And even when her plot involves unappetizing characters, as it did in "Jassy," the flow of action sweeps the reader along in its tide.

In "A Calf for Venus" Miss Lofts must have set out to prove that she can keep plot and reader together no matter what. And she does keep them together, mainly through murky suspense and the undercover adventure of contraband-running in early nineteenth-century England. But she tempts luck and strains the reader's patience when she hangs her plot on so wobbly a peg as the colorless medical apprentice named Humphrey Shadbolt. Dr. Shadbolt, to give him his courtesy title, is as trying a young fool as ever fell in love with the kind of blue-eyed doll whose upper and lower lashes interlace when they meet. It is hard to believe that even the jet-propelled action of such a Juliet's glance could dynamize so spineless and faceless a Romeo into becoming a part-time Al Capone, watered down and several times removed, among the cut-throats of the excise-dodging underworld.

Humphrey fell under the spell of the long-lashed eyes when he first saw Letty in the coach to Bury St. Edmunds. He was assistant to old Dr. Coppard in Bury. She was on her way to enter the service of her aunt there, the notorious Mrs. Rowan, who ran the town's most suspicious coffee house. Letty's moral health was now more important to Humphrey than the physical health of his patients. His main concern was to find out whether Mrs. Rowan and her popular establishment deserved their reputation. They did. Patrons entered the front door of the coffee house for the obvious purpose, the back door for a less obvious and less innocent one. Mrs. Rowan's daughters were, as Humphrey feared, no better than they should be. Letty was in, but not of, a bordello.

To get money for Letty's rescue, Humphrey devoted his nights and his energy to the clandestine business of getting rum, tobacco, and tea past the excise agents. Bloodshed and tragedy rode the furtive rounds with him. Letty took an understandable fancy to his after-dark boss and fellow gangster, a devil with the women and