

not hesitate. For if we in our desire to preserve the democratic ideals interpret them too literally, we will run the risk of losing most of our most precious values and finding ourselves holding an empty shell which will hardly be worth fighting for.

J. SCHONFELD.

New York, N. Y.

Rebukes from Irwin Edman

SIR: Mr. Warren H. Carroll [LETTERS, SRL Oct. 8] says he read my essay "The Elite Among Us" [SRL Sept. 10] "with a mixture of sadness and anger." I read his letter with a similar mixture of emotions. My sadness is due to the suspicion that either Mr. Carroll does not know how to read or I do not know how to write! Both alternatives are depressing.

It is particularly ironic to be accused of being in the camp of T. S. Eliot. What prompted my essay in the first place was my exasperation with T. S. Eliot's plea for an imposition of the elite given in his recent "Towards a Definition of Culture." Just a few months ago I wrote an attack on the notion of an hereditary or social elite as given by T. S. Eliot, when I reviewed his book for *The New York Times*. As a consequence, I was attacked in print as a philistine. Now Mr. Carroll accuses me of being anti-democrat. Life, to paraphrase a radio program, can be difficult. Mr. Carroll will perhaps forgive me for trying to spell out for him and for others who may have been similarly misled about what I was trying to say. The whole point and burden of my article was that there is no essential contradiction between democracy and distinction. I deliberately noted the failures and mediocrities of democracy, to avoid being accused of having a sentimental version of it. I ended up—I thought—by trying to suggest that democracy could generate standards of excellence and examples of it, generate, in other words, its own constantly renewed elite. I was trying to suggest that the common man had uncommon capacities for distinction. What on earth is undemocratic about that?

While I am complaining about being misunderstood, may I also file a demurrer against Mr. Sheldon Karlan [LETTERS, SRL Oct. 8], the grounds of whose praise makes me somewhat uneasy. "We are," says Mr. Karlan, "a nation of heathens, of men who have lost all belief." If Mr. Karlan means that lack of belief in the supernatural is "the core of this crisis in the world," I am afraid we are in different camps. There is perhaps a lack of faith in human possibility and a lack of generosity and hope. But if he means our trouble lies in a lack of what he calls "Christian sentiment"—based on theology, I am *not* in his camp either.

Writing is supposed to be an art of communication. I have apparently failed to communicate. Perhaps part of the difficulty lies in the fact that *The Saturday Review* blithely changed my title from "Democracy and Distinction" to "The Elite Among Us." Once years ago "The Admirable Crichton," by Barrie, appeared in the movies under the title "Male and Female."

IRWIN EDMAN.

New York, N. Y.

The Film Forum

MODERN ART

The Saturday Review's Weekly Guide to Selected 16mm. Sound Films.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Bertha Landers, guest reviewer for this week's FILM FORUM, is the new head of Audio-Visual Services for the Peoria (Ill.) Public Library. Formerly she directed the film department of the Dallas Public Library, which she started seven years ago. Her particular interest in art is evidenced by her studies at the Art Students League in New York and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. She has had several one-man shows, including an exhibition of prints in the National Gallery. In addition, she is represented in the forthcoming book "American Prize Prints of the 20th Century," by Albert Reese.

WHAT IS MODERN ART?

Produced by William Riethof. Distributed by The Princeton Film Center, Princeton, N. J. (20 min., color).

"Isn't it beautiful!" . . . "You can have it!" . . . "That's a masterpiece!" . . . "That's a laugh—it's abnormal!" . . . "Crazy, that's what it is, crazy!" All these comments are familiar as more or less average views on modern art. This film, photographed in beautiful color at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City, starts its discussion with this interesting interplay of comments.

In the film a photographer and a painter speak out in words of one syllable and express their own ideas about modern art and its many "isms." The role of the photographer is played by Neva Patterson, an attractive young actress, and the modern painter is Vladimir Sokoloff, veteran stage and screen actor. Both play their parts extraordinarily well. Their own facial expressions and genuine interest in the subject guide the audience to understand the seriousness of modern art. A fascinating galaxy of famous modern paintings becomes the focal point for their discussion.

The film opens with one of Picasso's most controversial paintings, "Girl with Peacock." Here is a portrait in which the face is seen simultaneously from different viewpoints, giving more than the usual complement of eyes and other features. The artist points out that the painting is not supposed to be a portrait in the traditional sense, but is a visual image of the spirit of a girl. "Some pictures are not supposed to delight you, but to haunt you," he tells the perplexed photographer.

The film points out that the concept of the artist divorced from

reality, isolated in his ivory tower, belongs to a century that is past. Today's painters are of a different type. Such painters as Stuart Davis and Peter Blume are pointed out as leaders among those who have become involved with the images of a more and more complex life, feeling the pulse of the age and reflecting its problems. The photographer says that she can understand this kind of painting. But abstract and other difficult painters like Miró, Klee, Chagall, and Dali bother her. The painter explains that these artists are painters of the subconscious mind, using all the poetic, haunting reminiscences of unearthly fantasy and dreams.

Some people may disagree with the comments on Picasso's famous black-and-white mural "Battle of Guernica," but few will deny his sympathetic expression of the horror of the Spanish War. Some may say that the distortion in the picture borders on caricature. That is a matter of opinion. All that the film attempts to show is that artists are forever inquisitive, and they use their creative powers to investigate, dissect, and analyze the things they feel as well as the things they see.

The American public today, as always, is avidly interested in the new and the different. Fashion designers are well aware of this, witness the constant change of styles each season. These styles, too, are sometimes beyond our understanding. This same lack of understanding of the modern painter has caused the layman to hesitate in expressing himself for fear of being called stupid, and has forced the artist to withdraw into seclusion. The public is willing to accept new ideas in the scientific world, in fact it expects new ideas to be developed. Surely the creative arts are as much influenced by our times as science and invention. Painters are merely trying to create an art in harmony with the spirit of the times, in tune with the modern way of life.

This film is a concrete step in the right direction to bring understanding about the art of our time, which should prove a pleasure to both artist and public. It is an important film. As the artist in the film says, art has one enemy—ignorance. But if we may look forward to more films to follow this splendid example, we shall be advancing toward the goal of better understanding and appreciation of our modern art. "In every age art is a new language—worth the trouble of learning."

—BERTHA LANDERS.

For information about the purchase or rental of any films, please write to Film Department, The Saturday Review, 25 West 45th St., New York 19, N. Y.

FICTION

(Continued from page 18)

some of the more convincing scenes are those that deal with the maneuvers and elbowing-on-the-turns by which financial interests are able to gain control of the Kessler-Edge company. The Depression plus the advent of sound brought a need for refinancing that reduced most of the original studios' founders to high-paid employees subservient to Eastern boards of directors. The inevitable tug-of-war between the new business interests and the veteran movie-men is well handled until, near the end, Mr. Robbins fudges on us.

About to get the heave-ho from the conniving majority stockholders of his own company, Johnny Edge turns to his old carnival pal, Al Santos, who has become a kind of—as well as a kind—Gianinni who banks a large part of the movie game. While we never have received anything but humane treatment at the hands of our bankers, we cannot help but feel that what Mr. Robbins began as an epic novel of the film industry collapses into bathos when this banker-fairy-godfather is put back into the game in the last minute of play to restore Johnny Edge to power with a flourish of his magic cigar.

As the son of a film pioneer, this reviewer has had to call upon his reserve supply of objectivity in appraising a plot that allows the Eastern investors to gain the upper hand over Kessler and Edge through the mutton-headed gullibility of old man Kessler's wastrel son who falls hook-line-and-sinker (his disastrous two-million-dollar flop) for Edge's ex-wife, an irresistible, nymphomaniacal, vengeful movie star who lures him into ruining the company. If the foregoing sentence is a lot to swallow, so is Mr. Robbins's climax.

At its best, though, in its earlier sections and when dealing with those aspects of Johnny Edge's career that ring particularly true, this is a readable period novel of an all-too-little-known phase of Americana.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 813)

DEEMS TAYLOR:
MUSIC TO MY EARS

Today, the young composer is under constant pressure not from the reactionaries but from the radicals. If he wants to avoid being jeered at by his contemporaries, he must be a revolutionary whether he feels like being one or not.

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Publishers of *The Yale Review*

Basement of a Soul

THE DARKNESS BELOW. By Fred-
eric Morton. New York: Crown
Publishers. 248 pp. \$3.

By NELSON ALGREN

FREDERIC MORTON'S first novel, "The Hound," was a profound report of a psychological conflict within a man trapped between the future and the past: one whose ultimate triumph it was to gain life, however briefly, by repudiating, within himself, a dead world's heritage.

"The Darkness Below" is also a record of psychological conflict: that of a refugee physician torn between two professions, two women, and two selves.

Anatole Braham's troubles begin when he starts working nights in the basement of Wist's Bakery. He is cramming for an American medical degree and needs the job to support his wife and daughter until he is licensed to open a New York office.

But the basement begins, slowly, to take on a meaning and to fill an old need. The outrageous, backbreaking, all-night drudgery, the very fury of his labors wakens a sleeper in the basement of his soul—some primitive there whom neither his mother nor his wife had ever quite succeeded in taming. Nightly the cellar rouses this darker self with the challenge of getting through one more night. Nightly Anatole meets that challenge. Until his fear of the dark and the dirt turns to troubled affection, and affection begins taking on the proportions of an obsession.

He made friends with the scarred old benches, which had known the growing and the kneading of a thousand doughs. The brutal simplicity of the cellar was in accord with the nature of its harvest; the dough . . . came to life when called upon to live; it died when duty was duty; it left behind the manna of fulfilled remains.

Anatole had always seemed to be what his women had wished him to seem—but the basement was his own, where lived his truest self, and he could not give it up for either the sake of his conventional self or for the ambitions of those dear to him.

From the heat or cold of his own body, from his own perspiration, he calculates how the dough will fare in tonight's weather: how much yeast it will need to grow, how much warmth in the proofbox to thrive. . .

For who had now become dearest was the dark-haired tart of the pas-

try-counter, the baggage named Elvira who slept with the cakebaker. Anatole should have felt nothing for her. Yet there it was. And he forces her into confessing that she shares his feeling.

We feel that our Viennese Hamlet is getting over his head. That something has to give.

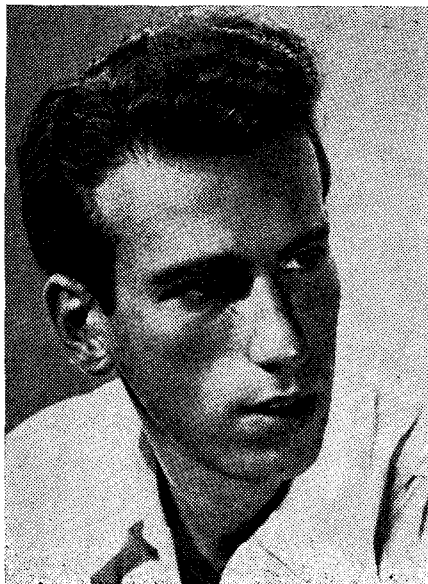
Something gives all right. In a drunken brawl between Anatole and the cakebaker. But the solution is telegraphed pages ahead and its presentation is overwrought, leaving us, as the final darkness closes over Anatole, without sense of loss. For we cannot be moved by the death of one in whom we have not sensed the breath of life.

When Mr. Morton's first hero, Lothar Zahn, went to his death, a part of the reader died with him. But here he has put more life into Anatole's onion rolls than into Anatole:

The rich, sour smell of leaven in full ferment, the star-rilled Wiener rolls blooming along the lard-greased bench: rows dipped in the dull silver of poppy alternate with others capped with the caraway's bright brown. The Big Rye bloats and broods in the fermenting trough.

To this reader's knowledge no one has written of the baking of bread more knowingly or more tenderly. Yet though he has actually forged a mystery of the spirit out of frozen eggs and pumpernickel, one is left at last feeling that this time the yeast failed to ferment.

Nelson Algren is author of "Never Come Morning" and the recent "The Man with the Golden Arm."



—Glidden.

Frederic Morton—"a mystery of the spirit out of frozen eggs and pumpernickel."

Vt. to Ky, 1783-88

MORNING TIME. By Charles O'Neill.
New York: Simon & Schuster. 392
pp. \$3.50.

By EDMUND FULLER

THE drama of history forming the background for Mr. O'Neill's first novel is the struggle of the American colonies, after the shock of victory over the mother country, to determine whether they would drift to inevitable disintegration under the loose Articles of Confederation or whether they would bind themselves into a permanent union through the much challenged and suspected document drawn up by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. A span of some five years, from 1783 to 1788, is involved in the telling of this story, and its movement ranges from Vermont through Pennsylvania and Virginia to Kentucky.

Little time is spent with the persons of high place in those deliberations and draftings. Instead, Mr. O'Neill gives us a sweeping picture of how the issue seemed to the men just out of the battle: those who had not received the pay and lands which they had been promised; those who, in bitterness, joined such protest risings as Shay's rebellion; those cynical ones who believed the state alliances would dissolve rapidly and were merely intent upon getting what they could for themselves out of the confusion; and those honest, hard-working, plain people intent upon carving out a sound and decent way of life in the rich lands of Kentucky and the other frontiers. Many of these latter wanted a unified nation, and many of them sincerely feared that the proposed Constitution might be a trap, leading to monarchist tyrannies as bad as the one they had sloughed off.

All this story we see through the fortunes of plainspoken, foursquare Theron Hawley, a Connecticut youth just mustered out of the Continental Army. He starts for the Wyoming territory of the Western Susquehanna, where he has a brother and some family land holdings. This is territory bitterly disputed by Pennsylvania and Connecticut and in a backwash of that dispute Theron loses his brother and what interest and hope he had had for the prospects of Union. Bent upon shaping his own life, the personal "Republic of Theron Hawley," he goes to Kentucky. Behind him he leaves the beautiful Virginia belle Althea Knowles. Ahead of him is the beautiful Irish colleen Nora Quaid, an indentured servant.

One of the cryptic and fascinating