

farm her husband and Johnny loved. Johnny tried unceasingly to please her and was as often as not misunderstood or unnoticed. His teacher bullied him at school because it was easy to hurt a sensitive little boy. As a consequence his grades were poor. His father, hurt at his wife's lack of affection for his home-place and deeply in love with her, took out his hurt on Johnny, driving him further away, further within himself. The little sister, whom Johnny adored, took his parents' attention and time away from him and added to his sense of insecurity. The principal of his school—who must have been drawn straight from life—was a slave to "the record" with absolutely no understanding of the boys and girls who composed the school itself.

When, through trying to help someone, Johnny broke one of the school rules, the combined weight of his fears and miseries proved too much for him. A lonely, loving, unhappy little boy—he ran away from home.

Happily for Johnny and the reader, things are straightened out in time for Christmas and his parents and teachers learn that the spirit of a little boy is a fragile thing and not to be pushed around beyond endurance. Let us hope that thousands of the same sort of people reading this book learn it too.

Impaled by Death

THE TROUBLE OF ONE HOUSE. By Brendan Gill. New York: Doubleday & Co. 314 pp. \$3.

By J. C. LONG

TOWARD the end of a sultry and stifling June Elizabeth Rowan lay dying. How her illness and ultimate death impaled her family and others in her orbit is the theme of "The Trouble of One House," Brendan Gill's first novel.

"The older men, who had every reason to think often about death, paid little or no attention to it," one of the characters observes, "while young men . . . found it the most interesting subject in the world."

While the story is built around a central preoccupation with death, the treatment is not philosophic and general, but local and particular. Death in the Rowan home is the topic. It was a substantial house in an unnamed Eastern city. Perhaps Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was an Irish-American, Roman Catholic home, though religion is not a major emphasis in the story. There are no topical allusions or frames of reference to distract the reader. Death in that one home is the sharply focused subject. "I'm sorry for your trouble" is the proper remark

to make to the bereaved, the author advises us. Hence the title.

Mr. Gill has a fine gift for descriptive detail: "The electric fan on the floor beside the bed swung about tirelessly in a half circle, like an angry yellow cat in a cage; twice a minute its breath fluttered the edge of Miss



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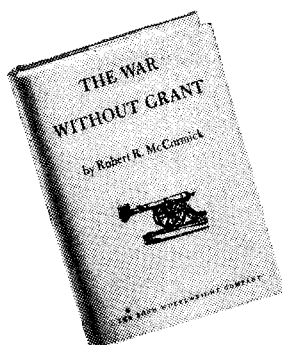
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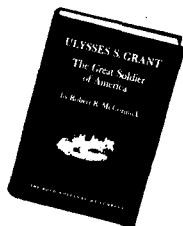
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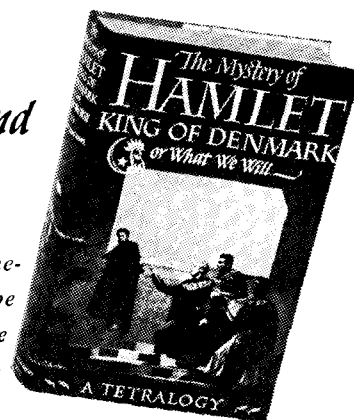
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Gately's skirt." A host of other examples could be cited.

The author also has an excellent feeling for suspense. He manages shifts in time and place with the agility of Ford Maddox Ford. He creates a mood of expectation which keeps the reader going.

With all of those talents, Gill has assumed extraordinary liabilities in choosing a single death, as such, for the generic line of this novel. The scale is so limited.

Elizabeth Rowan had been beautiful. Her husband, a doctor, had been devoted to her but was also unfaithful, in gloomy unsatisfying adventures. Dr. Maher, a friend of Elizabeth and her husband, had been in love with her, unavailingly. Miss Gately, the nurse, had been a "convenience" for various men, to use her own phrase, and claimed to be indifferent to all. Elizabeth's sister had loved Rowan. Embittered in her failure to win him, she had married Delaney, the undertaker. But both she and Miss Gately drew strength from Elizabeth. Even the priest and the Monsignor had a special devotion to Elizabeth. When she died, a microcosm was ended. The separate elements quivered for new groupings. But did any of it matter?

Remember Elizabeth's and Rowan's three children. They, though presented briefly, are alive, differentiated, charming. The reader stirs, would like to adopt the young ones, let the rest of the kaboodle go.

An author is entitled to choose his own theme, persons, scene, is he not? Even so, I hope that Mr. Gill next time will be less self-circumscribed, that his humor and general perspective (almost shut out here by his own election of subject) will have fuller sway.

Fiction Notes

THE STORY OF ANDREA FIELDS, WOMAN AND DOCTOR, by Elizabeth Seifert. Dodd, Mead. \$3. Elizabeth Seifert once more looks at the doctor's love and life. While managing to create a certain anesthesia of her own, she still succeeds in sensationalizing the hospital zone. Sex simmers between the sutures. Shop talk prevails. Dinner with the medicos only drags out the day's work. After all, the splicing and grafting of an aorta can easily be demonstrated by the simple expedient of placing strands of spaghetti on the table. And at least one lady loves it.

Andrea Fields comes home as a resident in the progressive local clinic. She's all wool. She has wit, glitter, glamour, immense beauty, and, above



—Lotte Jacobi.

Brendan Gill—"self-circumscribed."

all, the deceptive detachment of the proper pediatrician. Is it any wonder that clinical Hawk Dolan, surgeon boss of the unit, should succumb to her? Or that the woman, responsively, should triumph over the doctor? Oath or no oath, you can't buck nature.

Hardly Blue Cross campaign material.

—CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN.

THE MARE'S NEST, by Paul Griffith. Macmillan. \$3.50. Mr. Griffith's first novel is a strange and wonderful creation, a salute to Sterne from the age of plastics. Like Sterne, who is much more famous but not nearly so imaginative as himself, the author unfolds a tale without a plot. The people in his book never get anywhere. Indeed, as the title suggests, they are not supposed to.

In any case, the story is made up of a series of anecdotes of frustration. The style is highly subjective, and the author gives free play to passing moods and whimsies. There are many flashbacks and asides which, exactly as in "Tristram Shandy," are introduced as the spirit moves. One word spawns another, with results sometimes laborious, sometimes truly beautiful. Every rhetorical device has a turn—the violent anticlimax, the sudden transition from the ugly to the sweetly cadenced, the juxtaposition of ideas usually thought to be mutually exclusive, and the like.

The general idea of the book, as this reviewer understands it, is to expose the pathos and cruelties lurking at every hand just under the surface of human existence. Life itself is Mr. Griffith's mare's nest, a glittering thing of promise which, on closer view, turns out to be a fraud. An imaginary desert town in Ari-