

FICTION

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nocent, does not, of course, in any way detract from the admirable efficiency of the Party's cathartic performance. And Victor Serge's report of the performance is no less admirable. In the course of it he explores many strange recesses of old Bolshevik and Stalinist mentality. His knowledge of his subject is thorough. His characters are alive, interesting, strongly individual. He confirms, extends, and deepens our knowledge of a world that we have come to know through many other authors. It is a horrifying world, a strait-jacket world, in which the clamor of propaganda is incessant, the power of lies omnipotent, and fear a companion of every man. It is a world in which the venerated heroes of yesterday are the despised criminals of today; the world of a cannibalistic Party that feeds always on its own flesh and blood.

As he did in another novel, "The Long Dusk," the author has focused his own and his reader's attention on one character after another. As a result, it is impossible to read "The Tulayev Case" with the sense of emotional and intellectual participation that we feel while reading a novel like Koestler's "Darkness at Noon," wherein the light beats steadily upon a single character, permitting and encouraging the reader to identify himself with that character. The technique of "The Tulayev Case" makes us spectators rather than participants. But it is a fine piece of work of its kind. And never has it been more important than it is in this autumn of 1950 for us to understand what this novel has to tell us.

Mr. Trask's translation appears to be excellent.

Fiction Notes

NIGHT WITHOUT SLEEP, by Elick Moll. Little, Brown. \$2.75. It is rather difficult to find anything to recommend in this screenplay-into-novelle-into-novel story about Richard Bowen, "once a successful young playwright and Broadway composer" who succumbs to an alcoholic nightmare and doesn't know which of the three women in his life he's murdered. Perhaps the publisher could have explained why this twice-told, twice-sold tale was put between hard covers, but lacking an explanation the reader joins with Richard in wishing for "the simple-hearted days when nightmares first in the dooryard bloomed, no more mysterious than a green apple or a

coated tongue." Richard's nightmare is fraught with clichés used by every alcoholic and neurotic character in slick fiction. If you're curious to discover whom Richard Bowen murders you needn't fear spending a "Night Without Sleep" after solving the mystery.

—JOSEPH M. GRANT.

THE DARK STRANGER, by Julien Gracq. Translated from the French by W. J. Strachan. New Directions. \$2.50. The comparison of Julien Gracq with James and Proust, made on the jacket of this novel, is too absurd to be considered. Its matter is morbid, its prose overwrought, its range narrow; it is tedious. Written in the first person, somewhere in the middle of the book we have this statement: "As I read through what I have set down here, I smile bitterly as I see the mistakes into which an imagination that claims to be controlled can fall. How can I explain away that almost incredible and so unjustified weakness, that loss of all grip, in the face of a terror that was childish? At the memory of that ludicrous anguish, my face still breaks out in a cold sweat—my teeth clench involuntarily. Am I going mad?" The writer may feel all this as he watches the antics of the group of sophisticates gathered around the figure of super-Valentino in the person of Allan in the Brittany beach resort of Kerantec, but the sincere reader can feel nothing but disgust at the studied exhibitionism of the hero and the admiring gawkers who watch him as he prepares to carry out a suicide pact—why, we are not told—with Dolores. This is the sort of book that the Soviet critics constantly hold up before their readers as an example of the decadence of the bourgeoisie, and for once there is no answer. The author's ability to describe landscape and its moods, however brilliant, is not enough.

—JOHN COUNOS.

THE GIANT WAKES, by Rupert Hughes. Borden Publishing Co., Los Angeles. \$3. In the twenty-six years since the death of Samuel Gompers, founder of the A. F. of L. no one has attempted to put his dramatic and valuable life story into a form that would reach the great reading public of America. Rupert Hughes, popular novelist and biographer of George Washington, is the first to attempt this task. His novel is a labor of love; and Mr. Hughes's genuine love for Samuel Gompers emerges from every page.

The Gompers story is the epitome of the American success story: the immigrant boy who had to quit school at ten and go to work in the crowded cigar factory, ending as an honored



—Schreiber.

Rupert Hughes—"a labor of love."

associate of President Woodrow Wilson; but the real success story portrayed in "The Giant Wakes" is that of the American working man and woman who was pulled up out of incredible poverty to the economic position he enjoys today in which he is a partner in America's vast productive processes.

The manner in which the book is written will probably keep it from reaching the wide audience that the Gompers story deserves. Mr. Hughes frankly admits himself to be a sentimentalist; unfortunately the language he has employed is so maudlin that the reader at first suspects it is an effort to recapture the actual language of the period from 1870 to 1900. Another fault of the book is that it violates the first tenet of the biographical novel: that the author must stage his story as though it were happening right now, under the very eyes of the reader, and may not emerge at frequent intervals as a kind of outside narrator to inform the reader of what is going to happen twenty or thirty years later.

—IRVING STONE.

TUDOR UNDERGROUND, by Denis Meadows. Devin-Adair. \$3.50. The first thing you notice about "Tudor Underground" is evidence of sound, honest, thorough research. But this is a left-handed compliment, because in the best historical novels the author's background knowledge and notebook work are like the framework of a house. Without them the whole thing would blow down. But when the house is finished the stringers and the studing, the rafters and the sills are decently hidden inside and out by plaster and paint and decorating effects, and the noisy men in overalls with hammers and saws who put the thing together are as though they had

never been. In "Tudor Underground" Mr. Meadows's overalls are showing.

He has chosen a difficult corner of time to depict—an outward seeming lull between the exciting uncertainties of Elizabeth's early days on the throne and the mounting tension with Spain which came later. It is the story of the heroic climax of Edmund Campion's career which took place in 1581, when he suffered martyrdom at Tyburn—some years after the Norfolk Rebellion had been crushed, and with the Babington Plot and the Armada still to come. Mr. Meadows traces in detail the last two years of Campion's life and his death, as seen through the eyes of young Hugh Rampling, a lapsed Catholic who returns to the practice of his religion after acting as Walsingham's agent, and finally risks a martyr's death along with the priests he tries to protect. Walsingham himself—that always enthralling personality—comes alive with considerable authority, and there is an excellent account of the secret Jesuit press at Stonor Park outside London, where Campion's book was printed.

There is also some good suspense in the scenes of Hugh's narrow escapes, and good writing (after too much theological argument) in the pages where he makes the hard decision between his devotion to the Jesuit cause and his dawning love for Walsingham's daughter—that same Frances who grew up to marry in succession Sir Philip Sydney, the second Earl of Essex, and the fourth Earl of Clanricarde. But Frances was always a little beyond Hugh Rampling, even at thirteen.

—ELSWYTH THANE.

HE FEEDS THE BIRDS, by Terence Ford. Dial. \$3. Since "The Sun Also Rises" the temptation to memorialize one's lost youth has apparently become a difficult one to resist. In this latest entry in the Bohemian sweepstakes Terence Ford has chosen to set forth for us the sexual and drinking habits of a group of young artists, writers, and hangers-on in the Greenwich Village of 1939. The war, of course, was not then a present reality for America. There was a depression on, but it was not one which deprived Mr. Ford's characters of their ability to buy and consume endless quantities of liquor. Life was a ceaseless round of drinking, moving from bar to bar, mating, and mismating. No one—except one hapless character whom Mr. Ford permits to sell antiques in a Madison Avenue shop—ever worked. And everyone talked, interminably.

This book has a curious ambivalence. It contains not a single likable or interesting character, yet Mr. Ford was interested enough to write some three hundred pages about them. But

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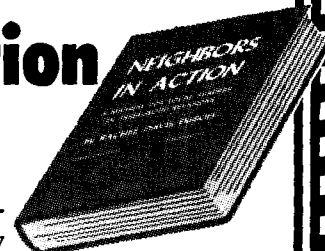


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