

FICTION

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"tension" reaches all the way from Santa Fe to the boys' home town of Montclair, New Jersey. Jay feels "vague alarms" when he isn't twinging with "stabs of uneasiness." But what we get is a set of rude, stupid, and posturing characters in a series of implausible situations described in a monologue of tiresome tenuousities.

When he isn't writing psychoanalysis or descriptions of silences that can "throb," "burn," and "ring furiously," Mr. Tomkins commands a flexible and vivid style. His skiing passages are very fine, indeed.

—CHARLES LEE.

O, THE BRAVE MUSIC. By Dorothy Evelyn Smith. Dutton. \$3. Sylvia was the beautiful one, Ruan the sister who was brilliant and original and plain. It is Ruan who tells the story of their family, whose dissolution was written in the same stars which contrived her parents' unlikely marriage. The girls' mother, the dazzling, reckless daughter of a hunting county squire had a brief period of rapture after her marriage to the tormented nonconformist minister; then all the irreconcilable differences in their two natures reduced their life together to something to be endured. Sylvia, eighteen months older than Ruan and born when her parents were still madly in love, was her mother's darling, reaching out for the things she wanted—clothes, parties, attention—and achieving them because she was beautiful and selfish.

After their mother's desertion and their father's departure to Africa as a missionary, Sylvia and Ruan were sent to live with their uncle, a bookish, withdrawn man. He managed a suitably fashionable school for Sylvia, which she was quite capable of making a stepping-stone to the life she wanted. Ruan, devoted to the ancestral house, managed to make her uncle let her stay at home with him, even to tutor her himself. In time Ruan found herself increasingly attracted to David Shane of one of the neighboring houses. With him Ruan ran wild on the moor. With him, her friend as a little girl, her lover and friend as she grew older, Ruan learned to conquer what, of all the world, only David knew to be the vulnerable weakness in the unconventional and tough exterior she had created as a shield for herself. Safe in the comfort of David's love, Ruan could finally face reality and life.

This is an old-fashioned, romantic

novel, with all the suitable props and backdrops for a story which unfolds in an English country setting. Love, beautiful women, a dashing villain, warm hearts under rough exteriors, boys from the very best British public schools behaving in the traditional manner, wild moors and rural lanes are lavishly assembled by a hand which is deft and sure. Among the hard-bitten, disillusioned novels of this age, this romance has a touchingly nostalgic quality.

—PAMELA TAYLOR.

WOMAN IN AMBUSH. By Rex Beach. Putnam. \$3. Rex Beach, author of "The Spoilers," "The World in His Arms," and numerous romantic adventure tales, died in Florida in 1949. "Woman in Ambush" is his last novel. The publisher declares that it is "the one he believed to be his most important work of recent years." Taken on its individual merits it is certainly not an important novel nor one that is likely to remain alive on the reading lists of future generations. But admirers of the author's brand of escapist fiction will find it an entertaining, well-plotted, and intriguingly suspenseful story.

Here are the harrowing adventures of Dick Banning, alias Ronnie Le Grand, a sixteen-year-old lad who leaves home to seek fame and fortune in a world known to him only through books. Instructed by an old scoundrel named Jimmy the Lark in the finer points of card-dealing, Dick soon becomes the most famous gambler on the Mississippi. Life becomes a trifle less pleasant and more exciting when he incurs the wrath of Madame Rondo, cigar-smoking lioness of the New Orleans' underworld, after a night-

marish encounter in her bedroom. Dick is waylaid on a river boat by Rondo's friends and tossed overboard only to be rescued by the Rainey family of Tranquility Plantation. Tired of his gambling activities and a little ashamed of his shady reputation Dick becomes in turn a cowhand, circus owner, dam builder, politician, novelist and, finally, a successful playwright. His experience in Rondo's boudoir continues to plague him during his marriage to Lola Bruce, circus bare-back rider who inherits a fortune but dies soon after in an accident. Unwilling to marry Mavis Rainey until free of Rondo's curse, Dicks stalks the old she-devil in New York and arranges a final showdown from which he emerges a free and happy man.

—JOSEPH M. GRANT.

END OF THE LINE. By Stanley Baron. Knopf. \$3. Mr. Baron has mixed equal parts of neurosis, espionage, and Continental atmosphere to concoct a superior kind of spy story. In addition to filling in the customary (and indispensable) background of exotic informers, illicit border crossings, high-powered foreign cars, and political homicide, he gives his book greater plausibility than have most books of its genre by providing its people with some fairly complex motivation.

The wife of Peter Halliday has been on the loose in the capitals of Europe for eighteen months when the novel opens, accepting the bed and board of whoever suits her fancy. This is even gamier than it seems, since Halliday is an official of the American Embassy in Paris, and Emily Halliday's latest boy friend is a hatchet man for the local tentacle of the Communist Party. Besides their romance, Emily and her young man have in common a fairly urgent death-wish. Mrs. Halliday's potential as a femme fatale is ultimately realized, and she precipitates the downfall of those around her, as well as her own disintegration. Included in the general debacle are her husband, lover, and a couple of innocent bystanders.

In the resolution of his story, and in the development of psychological insights, Mr. Baron leads one to expect more than he actually delivers. But this is a defect that is really based on virtue. Mr. Baron has lent unusual substance to a novel of suspense, and it would be unfair to complain that it should be even more substantial.

—MARTIN LEVIN.

THE CONSUL AT SUNSET. By Gerald Hanley. Macmillan. \$3. The setting sun of empire inspires differing reactions among the British officers in the East African outpost that is the locale



Stanley Baron—"unusual substance."

of Mr. Hanley's novel. Colonel Casey believes in manfully continuing to uphold the white man's burden. Captain Sole sees the British Empire declining into "a huge slum on the edge of the West." Captain Turnbull tries to live strictly by Army regulations. And Captain Milton is what Aldous Huxley once described as a conscientious hedonist. An outbreak of native violence crystallizes these varying attitudes toward duty and forms the basis for a study that is at once taut and greatly perceptive.

El Ashang is a dismal village in the bleakest region of what was formerly Italian Somaliland. During World War II it is an unimportant segment of an inactive theatre, in which a company of infantry is stationed to keep the peace. But the two local tribes are not amenable to having the peace kept and seize the first chink of weakness in British rule to resume their ancient feud. The weak spot is the sybaritic Captain Milton, who has taken a native mistress to while away the long evenings and whose murder sets off the uprising. Before quiet is restored poor Turnbull has gone what the Colonel calls "starko" trying to follow orders that didn't make sense to him, and Sole has betrayed enough of his doubts to make himself eligible for court-martial.

Mr. Hanley succeeds in communicating the arid, sun-baked, violent spirit of the African desert and the mood of desperate boredom that permeates the men stationed there. Against this authentic background, the interplay of conflicting outlooks and temperaments is all the more impressive.

—MARTIN LEVIN.

DAWN OF THE EIGHTH DAY. By Olga Ilyin. Holt. \$3.75. In Olga Ilyin's autobiographical novel, "Dawn of the Eighth Day," there are faint echoes of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and other great Russians. Not that her style is consciously derivative; it is highly personal, at times over-sentimental and lush. But her description of the leisurely, cultivated life of a wealthy, landowning family in Czarist Russia recalls particularly the early scenes in "War and Peace," if a lesser novel can be compared with a masterpiece. There are the large estates surrounded by drowsy villages, rich farmlands, and forests, the devoted servants, sturdy peasants, serious family discussions around the samovar, the balls and musicales and amateur theatricals. And the upheaval produced by the Napoleonic invasion in Tolstoy's epic is paralleled by the Bolshevik Revolution in Madame Ilyin's "Dawn of the Eighth Day."

In the charming, somnolent, seemingly indestructible atmosphere of Im-

perial Russia Nita Ogarin grows up surrounded by adoring *babushkas*, parents, and brothers. She is a mercurial heroine, poetic and pleasure-



loving, assured and tremulous, eager to love and afraid of her emotions. Her marriage to a dashing young

huzzar is followed by the gradual dissolution of her secure world. "If only the Czar would strike the table with his fist, everything could still fall into place," people said during the early storm-warnings. But it was too late; Russia's malady was too far gone. Nita saw the Bolsheviks overrun the country, her friends and relatives dragged before the firing line, her husband and brothers fighting hopelessly with the 'White Army.

Olga Ilyin's narrative is rambling and verbose, though often exciting, and she tells it with deep emotion. But she presents a one-sided picture. Undoubtedly, there were enlightened, noble landowners like her father who suffered an undeserved fate, but we are told little about the deep-rooted abuses and oppression which inevitably produce revolutions. In her nostalgic recreation of a vanished era there are the outward manifestations but not the underlying causes of a historic social upheaval.

—RAY PIERRE.

The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
DARK DREAM Robert Martin (Dodd, Mead: \$2.50)	Jim Bennet, imported to Wheatville by important citizen to trace golf course pot-shots, is also saddled with dirty work in a beauty shop. Murder reveals web of evil behind prosperity.	Tight, poker-faced style too automatic—every female's figure given the old Zola, and beatings follow usual pattern—Bennet existing mainly to be kicked around.	A-keep-you-reading B minus
BLOW HOT, BLOW COLD Gerald Butler (Rinehart: \$2.75)	English adventurer Peter Lawson, in and out of easy Riviera money, gets torn between sacred and profane love. Peter needs money and is human—but—	Love affairs, tiresome because psychologically and stylistically inane, pad most of the pages except for one dose of exciting smuggling.	Mostly blow cold
HANGMAN'S HAT Paul Ernst (Mill-Morrow: \$2.50)	Bill Harper, advertising smartie, tells of vanishing Brooke Leighton, foué son of "Leighton Soup." The bender stays bent, a fancy lady is murdered; a general merry-go-round.	Ho-hum elements—drinking; whoring; girl and boy making things hard for cops and each other. But lively realism of detail and wise-cracking style add Snap-Crackle-Pop.	Sophistication via cliché
BY-LINE FOR MURDER Andrew Garve (Harper: \$2.50)	Murder stalks the staff of the London <i>Morning Call</i> ; suspects and cyanide abound until Scotland Yard and some of the suspects get together.	Newspaper details and characters top-notch. Plot purposely transparent, but carries suspense just the same.	Good job—read by all means
THE WAY SOME PEOPLE DIE John Ross Macdonald (Knopf: \$2.50)	Tracing disappearance of a "good girl" for her mother, Lew Archer runs into the big and little shots who push the vices in rosy California and starts a private crusade when he himself gets slugged.	The coastal scene and its underworld at last treated by someone who can write, whose carnage does not come out of Automaton, who can create suspension of disbelief for fine violent fantasy.	Subtle hard-boiled gem

—KATHLEEN SPROUL.