

## Fear, Lust, Greed

MOIRA. By Julian Green. Translated by Denise Folliot. New York: The Macmillan Co. 200 pp. \$3.

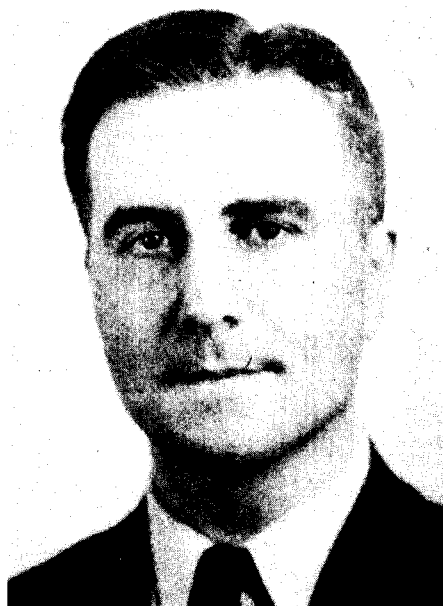
By HENRI PEYRE

IF "Moira" were a novel by a French writer who had never set foot on our shores everyone would laugh or feel indignant at the ludicrous caricature of America drawn by some scornful European. But Julian Green is an American who studied at the University of Virginia and served in the U.S. military and civilian organizations during World War II. His American characters are hardly more representative of the men of Virginia and Georgia than are the French creatures of his visionary imagination, obsessed by fear, lust, and greed. They are not lifelike. But, what is better, they are alive.

The scene is laid in Charlottesville in the early Twenties. Joseph Day, an uncouth young man from the hills, with flaming red hair, has registered in order to study Greek and read the New Testament in the original. He is intolerant of the laxity of his comrades, fiercely determined to save them from sin. He tears up his copy of "Romeo and Juliet" as a lewd book, fights with one of his classmates who divines the fate of the young Puritan with the big hands of a murderer. His friends are fascinated and frightened by him. He had rented a room in a student house where the adopted daughter of the landlady had slept before him. Her name is Moira, Fate. He left his room for another one when he heard of its former occupant. But the thought of the unseen Moira pursued him.

Moira is a girl of less than small virtue. Joseph's friends decide to lock her up in Joseph's new room. He is horrified by her presence, at first ready to beat her. When, tired by his fierce and hateful silence, she at last decides to leave, he throws himself upon her, sleeps with her, and on waking up the next morning, he strangles her, then buries her under a tree. The young man whom he had fought the first days offers to help him escape. He declines and surrenders to the police. The would-be saint is fallen and doomed. The marriage of heaven and hell is accomplished.

This story of violence which might remind one of American novels is told with splendid classical restraint. Green's art lies in the contrast between the haunting strangeness of the theme and the elaborate selection of details and the delicate and deceptive-



Julian Green—"classical restraint."

ly simple manner in which the narrative proceeds. The translation is faithful and effective. "Moira" was hailed by many French critics in 1950 as one of the few good novels of a lean year. It should rank among the powerful works of fiction appearing in translation in 1951. Not for fifteen years, since "The Visionary" and "Midnight," has Julian Green published a novel of such quality. Those who had feared that his long stay in America during World War II and his return to the Roman Catholic faith might have uprooted that adopted French writer or have harmed his talent by soothing his anguish have been happily reassured. Of the men of his age-group, Aragon, Malraux, Chamson, Montherlant, Julian Green alone has increased in stature as a novelist since 1938.



—Jerry Anderson.

Al Hine—"tour of the past."

## In a Social Forest

AN UNFOUND DOOR. By Al Hine. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 393 pp. \$3.50.

By ROBERT LOWRY

LEAFING through somebody else's family photograph album can have its own kind of kicks: a grin at the Locomobile the family drove thirty years ago, a slight shock as faces age and fashions change, a faint identification with the family's ups and downs as they reveal themselves in fading prints of childhood, weddings, funerals, wartime farewells, and peacetime parties. If whoever trapped you into taking this conducted photographic tour of the past is persuasive enough, he may even be able to stand at your elbow and urge a little life and emotion and continuity into the unfamiliar likenesses pasted there on the pages. But at best you will probably come away from the experience with a blurred impression of having viewed the important social moments of all these lives without ever getting very close to the people involved in them. "An Unfound Door," *Holiday* movie critic Al Hine's first novel, gives something of the same impression.

The family album that Hine drops unceremoniously into your lap belongs to an unhappy, thirty-four-year-old Pittsburgh society woman named Ginny McLaughlin. The breezy narrator he sets at your elbow to turn the pages of her story is a Manhattan press agent named Fred Boyce, who has known her all his life. When he starts out, Fred seems to be focusing on Ginny in order to explore a problem long begging for a heavyweight novelist's consideration: Why are American women, so fretful in the social and sexual freedom they worked so hard to win? But it soon becomes apparent that Fred can't see sapling Ginny for the forest of social detail surrounding her and to make up for his failure is turning her story into an expanded "Who's Who" entry.

From babyhood (surrounded by her socially snobbish mother's horde of cooing relatives) through a Jazz Age adolescence (among her petting, gin-drinking, upper middle-class Pittsburgh contemporaries) and into the Manhattan job in fashion publicity which she defied her family to take, Ginny remains a half-observed, undistinguished figure in a series of group pictures, each of them painstakingly annotated with names and details of relatives and friends. The Pittsburgh clubs and speaks and moonlight

"moony" drinking parties are all listed and sometimes created here, along with the streets, the bars, the apartments, and the liberal point of view that Ginny got to know when she came to Greenwich Village. But Ginny's defiant need to use her brains and assert her individuality as something more than a Pittsburgh hostess never becomes either very real or very important, perhaps because she herself seems more like a name on a tea-dance invitation than a live girl with a dream.

Fred says he wants us to view this endlessly documented family affair because somewhere in it all is the clue to why Ginny, just when she smelled success and freedom in the Manhattan world she loved, allowed her domineering mother to yank her back to Pittsburgh and corral her into a socially acceptable marriage. One divorce, one remarriage, and two children later, Ginny returns to New York and Fred (who has loved her all along), determined, thirteen years too late, to pick up the pieces of her career and the Bohemian freedom she used to know. Musing on her return, Fred starts leafing through her life. What he finds to point out will interest his audience about as much as the combined genealogical chart and lifetime social calendar of a complete stranger.

## Fiction Notes

**FAMILY OF JASPARD.** By D. A. Ponsoby. Crowell. \$3. Of all the many children of Robert Jaspard, wealthy and powerful merchant of eighteenth-century London, it is Barnabus and Fan who are most apt at arousing his anger, who find it easiest to challenge his authority. For they are the illegitimate children whom he has brought into his house to tame and chasten his wife, Melissa. In their own way, and quite without purpose, they are avenging her, not to mention their own unknown mother. Their mishaps are at the center of this tale. Both Barnabus and Fan break out of the confines of Jaspard's aristocratic London house to adventure in illicit love, intrigue, scandal. Added to this, his other children, too, come to grief in their several ways, Delia, Creswell, Kitty, Stephen, each involved in an unhappy love affair or an unhappier marriage, each incapable of applying to his or

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BOLT

**Humor.** *If the literary critic feels compelled "to Spot an Influence each day before sinking to conscience-troubled slumber on his pallet of straw," as Lee Rogow suggests on page 20, the literary editor feels constrained at least once a year to Spot a Trend. His task has been easier since Louis Untermeyer and Ralph E. Shikes started issuing annual compilations of "the year's best humor." For by assessing what these gentlemen come up with after a conscientious survey of the whole field of published humor reviewer Bernard Kalb is able to draw some knowing conclusions about the latest trends. Also reviewed this week are another posthumous collection of the work of the late, great Will Cuppy, another gag-book in the form of a novel by that perennial post-graduate student Max Shulman, and essays by the most promising and literate newcomer to the field in many years, Charles W. Morton.*

## A Year of Titillations

**THE BEST HUMOR ANNUAL.** Edited by Louis Untermeyer and Ralph E. Shikes. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 343 pp. \$3.50.

\* By BERNARD KALB

**T**O COLLECT "the richest as well as the most representative humor" published between May 1950 and May 1951 the editors of this book went everywhere. They roamed through the hinterlands of *Variety* as well as the arresting countryside of *Holiday*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New Yorker*, and also hundreds of other magazines, books, and newspapers. What they had when they completed their journey is the best index to the different types of humor in the current market.

Going through the book, you discover that a new comet seldom roars across the world of written humor. True, there are a number of funny pieces by some relatively new people, but their humor was never meant to be written. It is full of jokes, gags. It is a type of humor that is meant to be told, and writing it down won't make a writer out of a man, just the way the publication of Milton Berle's files wouldn't make a writer out of Berle. Radio, movies, and television have conditioned the public to listen to and look at humor, rather than read it.

Apparently only the established writers, such as S. J. Perelman, James Thurber, Will Cuppy, Ogden Nash, John Lardner, Russell Lynes, Charles Morton, and H. F. Ellis, the literary editor of *Punch*, can consistently be entertaining on paper. This is a conclusion that will startle no one, unless, of course, one hasn't ever read S. J. Perelman, James Thurber, Will Cuppy, Ogden Nash, John Lardner, Russell

Lynes, Charles Morton, and H. F. Ellis, the literary editor of *Punch*. Real satirists and essayists who appraise life with warm detachment, they are able to heighten the humor all around us. Their vision is incisive; they never have to fall back on handstands in order to be amusing.

Since the book is representative, the professional "funny" writers also are given an opportunity to titillate the public. Billed between Perelman and Thurber, they have a difficult time. Even well-known men like Parke Cummings and Dick Ashbaugh, who can turn out a "funny" piece of 800 words on almost any subject and almost always do, don't come off too well. Their brand of humor may be palatable in the national magazines, but here it is as limp, thin, and formulaized as it inherently is. Perhaps it is axiomatic that a "representative" book cannot guarantee the real stuff on every page.

Of all sources, *Collier's* has made the largest contribution—six stories and "funny" pieces. *The Atlantic* is runner-up, with four. According to my count, *The New Yorker* is in with only two pieces, one of which, by Nash, appeared 'way back in 1933. It was legitimately brought into the collection because of its inclusion in "Family Reunion," an anthology of Nash's work published last year. The other selection is by Peter De Vries. It certainly came as a surprise that this magazine, which had provided me with plenty of good reading during the twelve-month period prescribed by the editors, had only one story worthy of the "Annual." On this subject, I'd also like to note that one of the writers I missed was Stephen Potter. I thought he was pretty good in "Life-manship."