

wholesale murder. As an extremely adept strangler he became the leader of a regiment of killers and their satellites. He learned to fear Kali and to obey her; soon he knew the sadistic pleasure of casting his weighted scarf around a victim's neck. He spoke the jargon of the cult, knew the ceremonial pickaxe as Siva's tooth, and witnessed the death and burial of scores of mutilated men, women, and children. When he had sufficient evidence to prove to his obdurate and conventional father-in-law the extent and power of Kali's followers, he came back to his bride and reassumed the role of an English ruler and a loving husband.

This transformation of William Savage into a murdering native and his ability to return to his normal and conventional life may concern many readers of "The Deceivers." Outwardly he is placid, the image of a slightly dull, conventional English middle-class gentleman. He has a passion for carpentry and is gentle and kind with his loving young wife. And yet this man could embrace the most evil of goddesses in the entire India pantheon. He could murder with his strangler's scarf, could watch while the joints of the victims were broken and a stake was plunged into chest and abdomen. The novel would have been more plausible, as far as his principal character is concerned, if Mr. Masters had conceived of him as a Jekyll and Hyde and had not attempted to make a hero of him. It is not in the domain of a critic to look beyond the boundaries drawn by a novelist, but William Savage had enjoyed his lust for blood and death too heartily and too often to escape from it for the remainder of his life. Would his wife, who knew that he had murdered, turn to him so happily when he returned? Would Kali assume her power over him later on? Any psychiatrist would assume that he was a dangerous citizen and that some day his own wife would be found strangled and mutilated in bed.

A Catholic View of Mayhem

THE WEAKLING AND THE ENEMY.
By François Mauriac. Translated by
Gerard Hopkins. New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy. 219 pp. \$3.

BY LAURENCE LESAGE

"IS there a choice that does not impoverish, a renunciation that enriches? That was the secret of the mystics." That is also the question that has always haunted François Mauriac, the foremost Catholic novelist in France, and that has driven him through a dozen or more novels in search of an answer. For Mauriac the novel is a branch of Christian apologetics. "Only one novel is proposed to the Christian," he wrote in his journal, "his own—the debate between himself and his Creator."

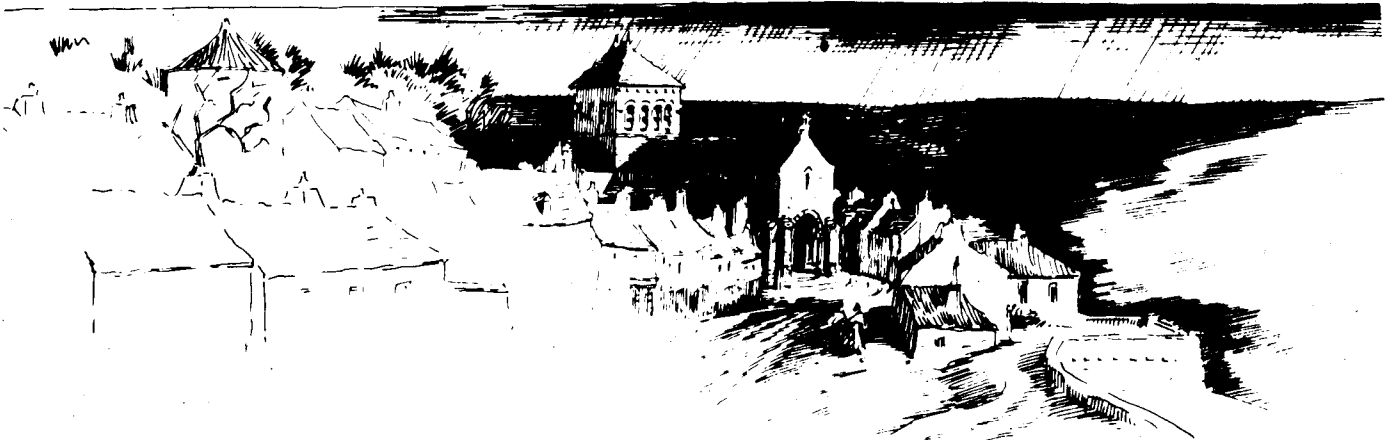
Mauriac's writing has always been for him a sort of self-exorcism. He defines his literary creations as his own monsters, the most impure part of himself. Hence the world he shows us is exclusively that of sin, his characters mortal wretches harassed by their consciences and their lusts. The freedom that Mauriac, as a Christian, is bound to give them is more apparent than real, for Christian free-will turns out in his novels to be simply a question of ambivalent feelings. Not one of his creatures is actually free, and, as one senses from the beginning, their destiny is unalterable. Even their crimes are passive crimes. Perhaps, as Jean-Paul Sartre has suggested, Mauriac's refusal to let his characters act as free agents is a basic flaw in his art as well as a metaphysical error.

Several years ago in reviewing two other translations from Mauriac, I questioned the appeal for the American public of these tales of innocent poisoners and unnatural mothers among the feudal gentry of Southwest France. Outside the framework of

Catholic dogma so much undeserved human suffering seemed likely to revolt the reader who expects to find both virtue and vice in a novel and rewards and punishments handed out in concluding chapters. Yet with the exception of the black plays of Jean Anouilh, the United States has been bafflingly receptive to recent literature from France based upon philosophies and attitudes quite foreign to us.

Mauriac translations keep appearing, and among French-reading Americans Mauriac has many enthusiastic followers. I suggest this explanation: If demonstrations of grace and predestination may be lost upon us, we can fully appreciate Mauriac's deft and sure hand as he probes the human heart to expose its deepest urges and conflicts. And the power and beauty of a style which is in the noblest of French prose traditions reaches us through Gerard Hopkins's capable translations.

The title of the new translation is misleading. "The Weakling and the Enemy" seems to indicate one novel. Actually the volume consists of two novelettes joined by this double title, good enough as a title but not at all accurate. The first, a very recent work running last year in the *Table Ronde* before appearing in a volume, takes its name from the nickname *Le sagouin* (monkey), of the snotty little scion of a degenerate family of country aristocrats. The second novelette, dating from 1935, is called in the original "*Le Mal*" (Evil). Today Mauriac is still writing, despite the elaborate funeral services recently conducted by an impatient young critic. The French may expect a new novel this year, "Galigai," about a woman who believed that the human will can conquer all. It will be interesting to see if here at last is a character of Mauriac who is really free.



—From "All Men Have Loved Thee."

Black & Bubbling

LAUGHING TO KEEP FROM CRYING. By Langston Hughes. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 206 pp. \$2.75.

By ARNA BONTEMPS

FEW people have enjoyed being Negro as much as Langston Hughes. Despite the bitterness with which he has occasionally indicted those who mistreat him because of his color (and in this collection of sketches and stories he certainly does not let up), there has never been any question in this reader's mind about his basic attitude. He would not have missed the experience of being what he is for the world.

The story "Why, You Reckon?," which appeared originally in *The New Yorker*, is really a veiled expression of his own feeling. Disguised as a young Park Avenue bachelor who comes with a group of wealthy friends for a night of colorful, if not primitive, entertainment in a Harlem night club, the Langston Hughes of a couple of decades ago can be clearly detected. He too had come exploring and looking for fun in the unfamiliar territory north of 125th Street. The kidnapping and robbing of the visitor in the story is of course contrived, but the young man's reluctance to rejoin his friends or to go back to the safety of his home downtown reflects the author's own commentary. "This is the first exciting thing that's ever happened to me," he has the white victim say to the amazement of his abductors as he stands in a coal bin stripped of his overcoat and shoes, his wallet and studs. "This was real."

Over this tale, as over most of the others in "Laughing to Keep from Crying," the depression of the Thirties hangs ominously, and it serves as more than just an indication of the dates of their writing. It provides a kind of continuity. After a while it begins to suggest the nameless dread which darkens human lives without reference to breadlines and relief agencies.

A sailor, for example, makes a fast pick-up on the West Coast in jive talk ("Well, all reet! That's down my street! Name it!" "White Horse. Send it trotting!") "Set her up, and gimme a gin. What's your name, Miss Fine Brown Frame?") only to learn that the hard times and the general hopelessness of their lives frustrate pleasure even on that level.

A dark mother, in another story, consoles herself by attributing the prohibition-time ruin of her good-look-



Langston Hughes—"Harlem's hungry hail."



Ira Morris—"Chicago's bloody riches."

ing mulatto son to his Spanish blood. In another a rounder laughs at his misfortunes: "The next thing I knew I was in the hospital, shot everywhere but in my big toe. He fired on me point-blank—and barefooted. I was nothing but a target." And elsewhere a pushcart man becomes a sort of tape-recorder for grim, depression-shaded, Saturday night talk on Eighth Avenue; a blossoming girl painter is denied through prejudice a prize she had won; and in the occasionally anthologized Christmas story "On the Road" an unemployed black man, given a quick brush-off by a high-toned preacher; breaks into a church and sees a vision of Christ before the police arrest him and start breaking his knuckles with their sticks.

Langston Hughes has practised the craft of the short story no more than he has practised the forms of poetry. His is a spontaneous art which stands or falls by the sureness of his intuition, his mother wit. His stories, like his poems, are for readers who will judge them with their hearts as well as their heads. By that standard he has always measured well. He still does.

An Old Butcher Dies

THE CHICAGO STORY. By Ira Morris. New York: Doubleday & Co. 347 pp. \$3.50.

By VAN ALLEN BRADLEY

THIS novel about Adolph Konrad, a giant of the Chicago meat packing industry, is curiously misnamed. I suspect it was picked by a publisher's assistant with an eye to its sales potential. It is all the more misnamed because the author has a character observe that the Konrad clan is "as unrepresentative of this city as its handful of gangsters."

The Chicago story, of course, is infinitely more than Ira Morris, a grandson of one of Chicago's pioneer meat packers, has encompassed in these pages. And a deliberately misleading title such as this seems worse than no title at all if the novel has any serious pretensions.

I think this novel has. For if Mr. Morris does not write at a level much higher than that achieved by a mine-run historical tale-spinner, he yet conveys in this colorful story a sense of shifting values in twentieth-century social and industrial relationships.

His Adolph Konrad, whose story begins in 1905, is the archetype of the unrestrained rugged individualist, a ruthless, iron-nerved giant of a man who came up from the blood and mire and manure of the Chicago Union Stock Yards to a position of power and wealth in his narrow little world. An immigrant from Germany, he came to Chicago with five dollars pinned to his underwear, became a stockyards laborer, next a small-time peddler of the meat of maimed animals, then a legitimate packer, and finally the czar of a \$12,000,000 empire.

As the story begins, so do Konrad's troubles. First there is Rupert, the son at Harvard, who wants to marry a professor's daughter instead of the Chicago heiress favored by Konrad and his farm-bred wife, Wilma. Rupert hates the stockyards and the odor of meat and blood, and most of all he hates Sans Souci, the ridiculously ornate Konrad home at the edge of the stockyards district. As if that were not enough, there are the unions and their crazy demands for better working conditions for their men. There were also the men

(Continued on page 33)

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