

## "Whar's My Colt?"

THE COMANCHEROS. By Paul I. Wellman. New York: Doubleday & Company. 286 pp. \$2.75.

By JOHN WILLIAM ROGERS

IN permissible fashion, Paul Wellman's "The Comancheros" would seem to be an extra dividend created out of the work he did preparing to write his recent "The Iron Mistress." The earlier novel told of the life of James Bowie in New Orleans and in Texas until he died with the heroes of the Alamo in March 1836. The background for such novelized history required wide reading, and after "The Iron Mistress," apparently, was between the covers of a book, the author found himself with so much interesting unused material about frontier Texas life that he was inspired to make it into the background for a second story. At any rate, the scenes of "The Comancheros" are briefly New Orleans and then Texas in the year of 1843. The later volume, however, belongs far more to the fancy of the derring-do story teller than to that of the fictional historian.

In his "historical note" foreword, Wellman explains the factual setting of his tale and invites the reader to "consider the book as a novel, all the major persons in it with the exception of Sam Houston the product of the author's imagination, save for background and historical actualities, all adventures described herein purely fictional—although they *might* have happened just this way."

Wellman's hero, Paul Regret—a



—From "The Comancheros."

Gregory Peck-Errol Flynn sort of young man—is a New Orleans gambler and a crack shot. In a duel over a beautiful young singer at the New Orleans opera, he seriously wounds the son of a powerful local judge and is forced to flee without ceremony. Rather by chance than design, he finds himself on the stage coach bound for Texas. On reaching Washington-on-the-Brazos, to his consternation he discovers that the New Orleans judge has learned where he has fled and has demanded of President Houston the young duelist's return to the United States.

But Houston, impressed with the proofs of the young man's ability to handle a gun, gives him a choice of being returned to where he came from or of joining the Texas Rangers. Regret takes service in Texas and the rest of the book is given over to Regret's experiences as an early day Ranger. These culminate in a dangerous excursion to the Comanche country as a spy to gain information for Houston about the headquarters and ways of the "Comancheros"—rengade Mexicans and white men.

Before the tale is told, history is pretty well left behind for the kind of excitement usually found in the more pretentious of the western films made on location not too far from the outskirts of Hollywood. The author expertly mixes adventure in the classical formula of lurid melodrama with romantic trimmings. (The beautiful opera singer turns up in the most unexpected places.) He trusts that the rapid pace of events will hold the reader and hypnotize him into accepting all the wild if colorful improbabilities.

John William Rogers has written "The Lusty Texans of Dallas" and several plays.

## A Long Decade Ago

THE RIVER GARDEN OF PURE REPOSE. By Grace M. Boynton. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 274 pp. \$3.50.

By ANN WOLFE

TAKE IT in any sense you will, the garden that is the real hero of this novel is out of this world. For three centuries a possession of the Szechuanese Wangs, its exquisitely landscaped acreage was now an oasis of peace in war-ravaged China. The surrounding countryside was thronged with undernourished, inflation-plagued refugees who had fled to Free China before the invading Japanese. The skies of Szechuan roared with B-29's from an American air base near the Snow Mountain foothills.

Even one night in the isolated serenity of the garden proved healing to the American refugee Jane Breasted. A Quaker who had long taught in Chinese mission schools, Jane had only a few months to live. Young Dr. Wang, her former pupil and now an officer in the Resistance Army, was sheltering the dying woman in his ancient family retreat. Except for her English nurse and two Wang servants, the only other resident of the vast garden was the venerable scholar-poet Master Yuan.

The English nurse was not the only one to receive the benediction of Jane's presence. To Jack Fernald, an American pilot on the verge of a breakdown, "the holy person," as the servants called Jane, restored the will to live. Stephen Purcell, wealthy Quaker and a conscientious objector, needed Jane's comfort and guidance in his problems. It was through Stephen that proud, wise Master Yuan was saved from starvation.

Stephen's main problem was the charmer Daisy Fairchild. This nuisance of a siren kept men by sixes and sevens, loving none of them. In the Garden of Pure Repose it was love at first sight for Jack Fernald and Daisy.

Among former students who sought Jane's help was Christianity-hating Willow, the Communist underground agent whose baby was born in the garden. Another was Benny. The young Eurasian's prosperity had the blessing of Japanese Intelligence, something Jane discovered when American Intelligence and Chinese police interrogated her. In the end, treacherous, tragic Benny demonstrated that Jane's blessing prevailed over that of the Japanese.

Around Jane—the modern mystic—love, death, birth, intrigue, and the

## Dark Bird

By Hannah Kahn

Once was the heart unfed,  
raw to the touch,  
out of that hunger I grew. . .  
loving too much.

Now are the days fulfilled  
and the night is still  
but a dark bird cries  
in the night  
against my will.

How shall I speak of love  
to whom love became  
ritual and routine and rote,  
and familiar name?

And even the bird has left  
to build her a nest. . .  
even the dark bird now  
is bound, possessed.

brutalities of war wove a pattern incongruous to the centuries-old harmony of the garden. Yet, spiritually and physically, the remote paradise that was neighbor to Tibetan mountains resisted change—even when its gates swung back to welcome the burned and broken plane—crash victims. With rare grace and understanding, the author, a connoisseur of Chinese gardens, has subordinated plot to place. The plot is a reedy air delicately heard beyond the Water Mirror Pavilion, in the T'ing-Tse for Awaiting the Moon, the Joy of Bamboos, the Library of Four Delights.

Like Master Yuan, Miss Boynton, responding to the spirituality of a vanishing art form in which man and nature ideally commune, has written a poem. Hers is a prose poem important to our feral day, an elegy on China's dynastic gardens which, like the civilization enshrined in them, represent a noble past.

## Fiction Notes

**CHRISTMAS LEGEND:** At this season of the year publishers like to bring out little fables which restate the principles of Christian faith and love in much the same way as Dickens did in "A Christmas Carol." Paul Horgan has written for this year "One Red Rose



for Christmas" (Longmans Green, \$1.75). It is the story of a miracle by which an orphan child brings comfort and deepened faith to the mother superior of an orphanage who had almost become one of too little faith. These are simple materials and in them, as always, there is the danger that truly felt sentiment will slip over the narrow line into sentimentality. Mr. Horgan hasn't quite avoided that danger. His prose occasionally acquires too artless an appearance and a number of the scenes—such as the closing one—take on the look of staged set pieces. The many who enjoyed "The Devil in the Desert" will however be able to overlook these flaws for the message Mr. Horgan has set down.

—EDWARD J. FITZGERALD.

**DESIGNING LADIES:** The world of Colette is a perennially fascinating one, populated exclusively by women and men intent on devouring each other in a battle of the sexes that has all the formal elegance of a court dance and all the ferocity of a jungle battle. You

may have another glimpse into that world in the latest volume of three newly translated stories, titled "Colette" (Farrar, Straus & Young, \$3.50). The first story, "Gigi," deals with the attempt to train Gigi in the ways of making out in the world of the demi-mondaine. Through the kind of twist for which Colette is famous, Gigi, of course, turns out to be much more capable than her worldly elders in finding herself a successful love. Julie de Carneilhan, the title figure in the second story, is less successful. Julie outwits herself through the very elaborateness of the intrigues with which she tries to keep her various lovers in line and to provide herself with some ready cash. Colette's third story is a slighter affair about the intrigues of a philandering husband. As always the style in all three is sprightly, full of sly malice, occasional flashes of brilliant insight, grace, and a decided aura of decadence. The translations ("Gigi" by Roger Senhouse, the others by Patrick Leigh Fermor) transmit the special flavor admirably though Mr. Fermor occasionally stumbles into awkwardness.

—E. J. F.

# The Criminal Record

## The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
THE NINE WRONG ANSWERS John Dickson Carr (Harper: \$3.00)	Penniless Briton, footloose in N.Y., accepts London impersonation job for big dough, almost turns toes up.	Trick yarn, with footnotes to deflect reader from phony solutions; tale much too long.	On the fantastic side
THE SUNBURNED CORPSE Adam Knight (Crown: \$2.50)	Skip Tracer Steve Conacher, Puerto Rico bound, encounters drips, cruds, hoods, throttled blonde.	Orthodox toughie, complete with heavy sex and bloody knuckles, plus fine arts, dope.	Not top-of-the-barrel
THE COURT OF LAST RESORT Erle Stanley Gardner (Cloane: \$3.50)	Fact account of miscarriages of justice (West Coast, Midwest) investigated for Argosy by board of experts.	Fine presentation of research disclosing gimmicks in evidence; narratives absorbing.	Tops
AMBUSH FOR ANATOL John Sherwood (Crime Club: \$2.50)	Nice British couple tangles with exchange racket; Blesington of Treasury wraps it up, with help.	Chase, lively all the way, takes in London, Paris, Riviera.	Wild and gay
SO RICH, SO LOVELY, AND SO DEAD Harold Q. Masur (S&S: \$2.50)	Big biz agitated as N.Y. heiress topples; Atty. Scott Jordan scans plethora of husbands.	Moves briskly, but trail is cluttered with multiplicity of personnel.	Plus mark

—SERGEANT CUFF.

**PERENNIAL TROUBLES:** Mazo de la Roche, who occasionally takes a vacation from her demanding family of White-oaks, has done so in her latest, a collection of nine short stories and a novelette which gives the title to her volume "A Boy in the House" (Atlantic-Little, Brown, \$3). They are mild-mannered pieces, centering gently around the theme that things are not always what they seem or, alternately, that things don't always work out the way you plan them. In the title piece, the most substantial and most nearly successful of the lot, a young author seeking quiet and seclusion to write in the home of two aged gentlewomen finds himself caught up in their bickering, under-the-surface animosity. He also gets his feelings engaged by a young boy who, brought from a home to aid the sisters, brings violence and death with him. Other of the stories deal with the troubles of the aged and lonely, the misunderstandings that keep people apart or bring them together, the little quirks of fate. The touch is mildly ironic, the writing cleanly effective. It is in the plotting that Miss de la Roche surprisingly breaks down. The stories are vague and inconclusive, petering off at the