



The Ageless Promotion

A HOUSE OF HER OWN. By Robert F. Mirvish. New York: William Sloane Assoc. 312 pp. \$3.50.

By CHARLES LEE

HERE is a book that will win a certain amount of notoriety simply because its setting is a brothel and its heroine a prostitute. One may expect both the puritanical and the prurient to pounce upon it for their different reasons, but they are doomed to disappointment. "A House of Her Own" is obviously not a book for the delicate reader, but it is not pornographic, or even sensational; its subject may seem deplorable, but it is not without its human and sociological interest.

The Hotel Internacional, largest and best of its sort in Los Cielos, Venezuela, is distinguished for several reasons: its excellent bar, its powder blue walls with their Indian-style murals, its skilled and comely personnel, and especially, its efficient manager, Bonita. Had she been a man, Bonita might have operated one of the local oil refineries; she has the necessary acquisitiveness, cunning, and discipline. But she is content to preside over what might be called one of their subsidiary establishments, and this she does with a merciless sense of justice. At thirty-seven her two long braids are still black; her teeth are gold-edged; all is in order with her purse, her pocket-book, and the police chief. Her executive record extends over a period of twenty-three years.

It is in Margo, her best girl, that Bonita is mildly interested as the book opens, for Margo has ambitions to become an executive in her own right. A sensualist, well aware of the dangers and peculiar rewards of her profession, Margo believes that she is secure in herself, that she will succeed

in saving the necessary money, and eventually purify herself by attending mass at St. Peter's in Rome. Bonita's doubts of Margo's business stamina are answered by her own brand of hardness and determination, for the dream of "a house of her own" has been at the bottom of her exertions for seventeen dedicated years.

And then along comes Shane O'Brien, an American sailor, who rouses in her a non-commercial infatuation that threatens her every hope. In the grip of her overwhelming appetite, Margo hopes to win the security of love, banking on her voluptuous body and its obsessively roused needs to reduce him to a permanent dependency on herself. But Shane is already promised to the sea, and no more to be tamed than a hurricane. Their contest, inflamed, torturing, and erosive, provides the central action of the book.

While Bonita watches this conflict with a sardonic interest in its relationship to her own prosperity, and while Ricardo, an obese American drifter, watches it for special reasons of his own, the reader is initiated into the peculiar human and economic aspects of prostitution as a business. Mr. Mirvish makes no profound inquiry into the psychological and environmental forces that produce prostitution; what comments he makes are incidental to his swift characterizations and realistic storytelling, but they are true and telling. He rouses disgust but he also stirs the heart; he implies the need for social correctives and individual compassions.

In short, moral concern underlies the violence and spiritual degradation of this very physical and frequently ironical book, but it remains basically a story, and a commendable achievement for a first novel.

The Art of a Crew

FAR FROM THE CUSTOMARY SKIES. By Warren Eyster. New York: Random House. 372 pp. \$3.75.

By MERLE MILLER

WARREN EYSTER knows a lot about the U.S. Navy and about the war it fought in the Pacific against the Japanese. He can describe the feel of the relentless sun, the sudden coolness of rain, and the terror of an ocean storm. He knows the look of an enemy artillery shell in mid-air, the sound of a falling bomb, and the scream of a dying man. He realizes that comradeship can fester into hatred and that there is not really much difference between a coward and a hero.

He knows all that, and he remembers, and he has put a good deal both of his knowledge and his memory into his first novel, which concerns the lives of men on the imaginary USS *Dreher* from the time they boarded her until, two years later, she is sunk.

At times, Mr. Eyster's novel threatens to become great; on occasions, it is extremely good; unhappily, after 372 closely-printed pages with events enough for a book three times its size, "Far from the Customary Skies" turns out to be undeniably dull.

The reason is simple. Mr. Eyster is a fine reporter of technical detail and, for that matter, of feeling. For instance, in addition to understanding the sea he can picture the firing of a five-inch gun with the precision of a training manual. But he has not created a single believable or even very interesting human being. His book is populated by shadows, not people, and, while we are introduced to a sizable part of the crew of the *Dreher*, we never really get to know anybody. We are told a lot about the crew members, but we are not, as a fine editor has rightly insisted must be done in a good novel, *shown* anything about anybody.

Even now, five years after they first appeared, Hearn and Croft and Goldstein are remembered from "The Naked and the Dead," and no one who has read about them is likely to forget Prewitt or Sergeant Warden or Maggio of "From Here to Eternity." Although he was something of a fool, Willie Keith is memorable enough, as certainly is Captain Queeg in "The Caine Mutiny."

What's more, in addition to their

Merle Miller is the author of "That Winter" and "The Sure Thing."

being populated by believable people, the novels of Mailer, Jones, and Wouk have that other essential of good fiction, narrative power.

"Far from the Customary Skies" is easy to lay aside. It never seems to move forward; it only grinds. What's more, it is often extremely tiring to read, partly because Mr. Eyster has a fondness for sentences that are as backward and sometimes as pretentious as those that often sprinkle the pages of *Time* magazine. "Ahead," writes Mr. Eyster, "lay Guadalcanal and Tulagi." "This then," he continues, "was the Solomon Islands."

His novel has almost all of the characters we have come to expect in a novel concerned with the Second World War. There is the boy from Brooklyn; he dies. There is the frustrated college man who made an unfortunate marriage; he dies. There is the gentle, ambitious, small-town (and/or farm) boy; he dies. There is the wisecracking gambler, the good-guy lieutenant, the bad-guy, and others equally familiar, including Malone, the excessively competent and unbelievably brave Malone who is also a brute and a cad.

However, there are three completely brilliant passages, one about eleven men given the job of cutting loose from a Jap-held island the drums used for fixed artillery ranges, a second describing the change of morale on the *Dreher* when the men go stale, a third, much shorter, almost too-abrupt account of the sinking.

Mr. Eyster is a first-rate naval historian; he is not yet a good novelist.

Saga of the Daubneys

THE GREEN MAN. By Storm Jameson. New York: Harper & Bros. 762 pp. \$3.95.

By HARVEY CURTIS WEBSTER

IT is possible to call Storm Jameson's "The Green Man" a sensational novel. Matthew Daubney, one of the chief characters, cannot go to sleep at night unless he has used a woman as a sedative. His son, Mark, is a traitor who hates Jews and approves oligarchs. Matthew's illegitimate daughter, Liz, does a lot she shouldn't before she dies in an automobile accident. What may be called a scandalous interest is added by the inclusion of supporting characters that suggest Auden, Bevan, Orwell, and a good many notable Englishmen of our time.

It is impossible to call Storm Jameson's "The Green Man" a sensational novel accurately. Those who have read her admirable "Europe to Let" and "Cloudless May," to mention only two of her twenty-seven good books, know she writes both seriously and well. Though Miss Jameson is neither a fashionable nor a tremendously popular novelist, she has always preserved her integrity and constantly improved her craftsmanship. She writes to illuminate, not to accumulate.

"The Green Man" is a novel in the tradition of Galsworthy and Bennett. Mainly it is about the Daubneys—

Matthew, Richard, and Andrew—their descendants, and friends. It is a family chronicle and a history of the Thirties and Forties. It is also, and more significantly, a mature exploration of one of the central problems of our times: Can the tradition of materialism live compatibly with the tradition that claims right is not might?

The novel's most sympathetic and deeply probed character, Richard Daubney, is an anarchist-idealist. He believes in both people and the people, yet he wants to preserve the older way of living well in one place rather than the newer way of living conspicuously wherever wealth and virtue are equated. He is constantly in conflict with his brother, Matthew, who thinks nothing matters as much as the corporations that should control the nation and considers the people pawns to be manipulated without humane consideration. As one might expect in a realistic novel about the past two decades, Matthew rises and Richard falls. As one might not expect in a novel primarily driving for popularity, Richard, the failure, and those who are like him, seem admirable while Matthew and those who succeed with him seem despicable—though understandable.

Miss Jameson knows her period and her characters. She makes vivid the intellectuals who dramatized the hoping despair of the Marxist Thirties and the proud hopelessness of the Age of Anxiety. Without anger, softness, or sentimentality, she portrays the desperate, the crass, the naive. Mark Daubney, a promising boy made into a Nazi by his sense of guilt, Andrew Daubney, who preferred the simple life to the intellectual and material life his pathetic and brilliant wife preferred, and Troy, the servant of good will and inexorable bluntness, are as memorable as the Forsytes.

The publishers speak of the novel as though it belongs with the books of Howard Spring and Frank Swinnerton, as though it were mainly distinguished by an exciting crowd of incidents. This it is (though not mainly), and I hope the popular elements in "The Green Man" help it to a wide circulation. But Miss Jameson's novel probes deeply and compromises not at all. Strangest and most heartening of all, without being modishly deprecating about those who despaired

(Continued on page 32)



The Poet & the Robin

(Seen together on a garden lawn)

By Eric Wilson Barker

THEIR stance breeds silence like a sultry cloud
That all the rain-expectant leaves obey.
A listening attitude enhancing quiet
Like stilted herons in a shallow bay.

Nature provides them with such appetites
That worms will satisfy, or the bronzy sound
Of katydids a branch above the ground.

The cocked heads flow through shadows like a stream.
Oh, they are still as stones. In such a calm
Stood Jericho before the walls rushed down.
A sleeping king from such a garden dream
Was sent to haunt the nights of Elsinore.

The silk of silence straitens to extreme—

A stirring in the grass would set them free,
A red leaf falling from a burning tree.

REPRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harvey Curtis Webster, a member of the English department of the University of Louisville, has written widely on the modern English novel.