



## Postwar Flotsam and Jetsam

**Martha Gellhorn's "The Honeyed Peace"** (Doubleday. 253 pp. \$3.50) is a collection of short stories about persons "simply of no value," men and women indigenous to contemporary Europe with whom the author became acquainted as a correspondent.

By William Peden

THE characters of Martha Gellhorn's short stories, collected in a volume called "The Honeyed Peace," seek contentment in various ways. Uprooted by war and its aftermath, some of them pursue the honeyed peace of a reason-for-being as a professional hunter stalks his quarry. Others approach it circuitously. Still others flee from it. The end result, however, is the same. Discontent ebbs and floods like tidewater through the lives of these expatriates whose stories constitute no additional page to the literature of the decay of moral values in an increasingly materialistic society. Because Miss Gellhorn is an expert reporter (she has seen war, and its effects, in Spain, China, and Europe), and a better than tolerable storyteller, the reader is temporarily interested in her characters' cannibalistic efforts to obtain some sort of happiness. He is seldom, however, moved or edified. Most of Miss Gellhorn's people, to quote from one of her stories, are "simply of no value" whatever.

The protagonist of "Exile"—all of Miss Gellhorn's characters are exiles of one kind or another—is typical. Heinrich, a middle-aged intellectual who has studied aimlessly for years, leaves his native Germany because the Nazis have been "disgusting about Heine." He attaches himself like a barnacle to relatives in Kansas City.

After sapping what little energy this unlovable and unloving ménage possesses, he wanders back into the dark from which he had emerged. "I am an exile," he comments before making his final exit, "I am a man who belongs nowhere, and I have grown old without noticing it, but now it is too late." Heinrich, it is obvious, possesses some admirable qualities. But he is also a physical and moral weakling, and a refugee from duty as well as from tyranny. His plight would be tragic if Heinrich were not such a parasite; it would be comic if he were not also a man—or a half-man—of good will.

Such an individual is the protagonist of almost all of Miss Gellhorn's stories. He is the best-selling novelist, his life centered around his own worthless novels, whose collapse is depicted in "A Psychiatrist of One's Own." He is the charming woman of "The Honeyed Peace" who wore silks and furs while others struggled and endured, whose destiny is determined by that of her ignoble collaborationist of a husband. He is the leechlike heroine of the short novel "Venus Ascendant," whose pursuit of love in the form of a third-rate diplomat becomes a kind of sickening and fascinating peristalsis. All of these characters are moral cannibals. Yet they are at times admirable as well as revolting and detestable. With the exception of occasional minor characters like the magnificent Poles of "Week End at Grimsby" and "Le Voyage Forme la Jeunesse," Miss Gellhorn has peopled her moral no-man's land with individuals who are, to repeat, "simply of no value." It is difficult to remain concerned for any length of time with their melancholy wanderings between a past which was better, a now which is not good, and a future which is unthinkable.

## Sans Love, Conviction

**"The Colors of the Day,"** by Romain Gary (translated by Stephen Becker. Simon & Schuster. 310 pp. \$3.50), pictures a group of frustrated intellectuals jumbling through their destinies on the French Riviera.

By Laurent LeSage

SHALL we get into carnival costumes and jump over a cliff? Or cultivate cactuses and abstract art? Or tear ourselves away from simple joys and the woman we love to go get ourselves shot fighting for the rights of man? These are about the only courses open to us in the world today. Or so it would seem to the disillusioned intellectuals, the "lyrical clowns" of Romain Gary's latest novel, "The Colors of the Day," whose adventures can be reduced to hypothetical choices in the face of the contemporary dilemma. Two movie stars from Hollywood, a veteran flyer and soldier of fortune, his buddy who has never missed a mass meeting, an American professor who cultivates Communism and the exquisite life—these and a pair of highly conventionalized thugs play out, against the theatrical background of Nice in the spring, the courses suggested by the author's bitter fancy.

Love frustration shares responsibility with the world situation for having addled the wits of these people. The Surrealists prophesied that during this "cursed century a great lyrical cry of love would be heard, thereby inaugurating a cult of woman so profoundly carnal and mystic that it would dim forever the star of the troubadours." Romain Gary conducts a mighty chorus of voices in hymns to the one-and-only love and in laments of disappointment and despair. The professor has not reconciled himself to life since his wife ran off with a bullfighter; the flyer and the movie queen, who have found in each other the soul-mate they had sought all their lives, enjoy brief ecstasy and separate forever. Her husband commits suicide because of unrequited love, and similar frustration has turned the other characters into grotesques. Lives without love, lives without conviction in their dedication, a sorry lot given to endless musings on man's sad predicament, as befuddled as they are befuddling. One is tempted to say to Mr. Gary, war ace, popular novelist, and promising diplomat, "Come, come, life can't be that bad!"

The young French writers still

seem to try to outdo one another in gloom and violence. But the cry of the latest sacrificed generation has for some time been less heartrending. The roman noir has become a convention, and the Weltschmerz hero a poseur. The present book suffers from an excess of everything: over three hundred pages of paroxysm, hysteria, debauchery, and metaphysical wool-gathering.

Although we deplore the exaggerated effects and "bull-session" philosophizing of the new authors, we must admire the fearlessness with which they plunge right in the middle of the world's conflicts and eternal problems. Gary's three previous novels have been frescoes of the postwar world, depicting Polish partisans, orphans of the ghetto, black-market peddlers, and the like. He does not dodge the challenge such a world makes. All Gary's books tackle the fundamental questions that torment our young writers today. For his vigorous eloquence Romain Gary is one of the most interesting among them.

# FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 534

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 534 will be found in the next issue.*

TIHFI LICPGBAU RDMWDU

NDCETIAUW: — "TAGPFIFK

NFKEGW, TAGPFIFK, MHG

NFKEGDQFIERPF TILK!"

QFHCMPW, "ODLPU

HUBPKPO TPGGPFW AU

DUP WRDFG CPWWIQP."

WDFFK, TIHFI!

*Answer to Literary Crypt No. 533*

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

## In Love with Venice

*"The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole," by Frederick Rolfe, Baron Corvo (New Directions, 299 pp. \$4, is a new edition of a much talked about but long suppressed novel about a gifted eccentric in love in Venice.*

By Robert Halsband

THE republication early this year of "Hadrian the Seventh" showed the unusual gifts of Frederick Rolfe, the English eccentric who preferred to be known as Baron Corvo. His last novel, the product of his lurid twilight years in Venice, was so libelous it could not be published for some years after his death. Its title, "The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole," is supposed to mean love (from a quotation in Plato); but its desire and pursuit add up to something quite different.

It has a double theme. Like Hadrian, the hero is Rolfe disguised and idealized. He is named Nicholas Crabbe, a writer, living a clean, sturdy life on a boat. When we first meet him we are told that the world has completely denied him simplicity, friendship, and love. Thus the paranoiac lens is immediately put into the camera so that we view the incessant persecution he suffers. As Hadrian the hero ascended from a mean existence to soar into the empyrean of a grandiose daydream; as Crabbe he crawls down through a long, petty, niggling nightmare. His revenge is a stream of caricature, bombast, slapstick, sarcasm, malicious though often clever. Especially tiresome are the exchanges of letters giving both sides of his correspondence with all the agents, editors, solicitors, collaborators, enemy-friends who wrong him.

Along with this theme we have a rosy and cozy romantic love story. Hadrian had pursued only his pure ambition spanning the spiritual and temporal; Crabbe pursues the half who through love will make him whole. Invented for this purpose, a strange boy-girl appears out of an earthquake to be rescued by him. Zilda is seventeen, the daughter of a gondoliere descended from the doges; she is "a boy by intention but a girl by default." (Crabbe frankly confesses his misogyny in two scarifying passages.) Compared to the Albertine whom Proust created in a perversely consistent pattern, Crabbe's other half is an unbelievable compromise.

The resolution of these two major themes finds Rolfe at his weakest and strongest. The love story dissolves into the sheerest saccharinity, need-



Baron Corvo—"unusual gifts."

ing only tremolo on the sound track to complete the disillusion. But just before that happens, the proud, untamed Crabbe has reached the nadir of misery as he wanders through the streets and alleys and into the churches of Venice, delirious with starvation and cold. It is magnificently bitter and pathetic; and for the first, and only, time we feel some compassion for the lonely, tattered figure. It is a very moving episode.

THE novel has other aspects. As a roman à clef—however much its victims squirmed—its impact is today trivial. But as a topographical novel—its subtitle is "A Romance of Modern Venice"—it will appeal to those who know Venice by sight or reputation. Not only the canals, palazzos, and the churches (with their elaborate pageantry), but the back streets and their houses, and the Adriatic air and sky. For as a lover Rolfe had in truth succumbed to it. And since as a writer he was a consummate virtuoso he did that love full justice. He wielded (in his own phrase) the "pen of a clean keen angel." When he did not waste his angelic pen on monotonous invective he could do wonderful things with it, depict a boat interior with the glowing exactness of Vermeer or a sunset with the gorgeous palette of Turner.

In the introductions to this edition A. J. A. Symons gives the factual background; and W. H. Auden in his brief interpretation digs into the novel with startling perception and wit. The

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