

## Hillbilly D. P.'s

**"The Dollmaker," by Harriette Arnow** (Macmillan. 549 pp. \$5), a story of a family of "displaced persons" from Kentucky lost in wartime Detroit, tied for first place in fiction in SR's Spring Critics' Poll (April 10).

By Walter Havighurst

ONE of the grim, laconic phrases given to the language by World War II was "displaced person." At a touching point in Harriette Arnow's novel, "The Dollmaker," among the Mexican and Polish children in a schoolroom in the alien world of wartime Detroit, little Cassie Nevells announces, "My country is Kentucky." She speaks for all the "hillbillies" who were uprooted like tumbleweeds by the winds of war. "The Dollmaker" is a story of displaced persons in the war years in America.

The novel begins with strong and primitive people in back-country Kentucky, the people and the country of Mrs. Arnow's memorable "Hunter's Horn." Gertie Nevells, homely, rawboned, indestructible, is an embodiment of the mountain folk. As first pictured, she is riding a mule through pouring rain, carrying a sick child to the doctor. Behind her she has left a bed-ridden mother and a sodden cornfield trampled by the hogs; she has just learned that her brother was killed on a distant battlefield, and now her youngest child is choking with diphtheria. But Gertie Nevells, poor in all but courage and endurance, has armor against troubles like these. Later, in a sordid housing project on the edge of the vast industries of Willow Run, she encounters hostilities too subtle and impersonal for her powers.

This long, somber, and moving novel shows Gertie Nevells struggling to save her family from a sordid and grasping world. By steady accumulation of detail, with a dogged narration that traces every step of the struggle,

Mrs. Arnow builds up a growing weight and shows it pressing upon the spirit of a strong-willed woman. The novel might have been more selective, and more readable; as it is, it moves like a steam-roller, ponderous and ineluctable.

From their remote Kentucky valley Gertie Nevells pictured Detroit as a land of promise. There would be "a nice house with the electric and running water, both hot and cold maybe"; there would be schools and playgrounds for the children. But before she got through the crowded Detroit station she heard the scornful word "hillbilly," and at Merry Hill she found endless rows of cramped and airless flats lining bleak alleys. Her husband, making \$100 a week, had discovered the paradise of instalment buying. Soon the children were crying, "Buy um, Mom. Buy um. . . . What's a nickel? What's a dime?" In the midst of down payments, flashy gadgets, and the endless avid desire for more, Gertie Nevells remembered the warm feel of a cow's teats and the hardness of a churn handle. She began to whittle blocks of scrap wood.

THE act of wood-carving runs through this novel with growing meaning and emotion. Around Gertie Nevells other aliens were losing their identity, and her children were lost in the luring, leering world of radio, juke box, comic books, magazine advertisements. Her husband, a shadowy figure beside the rough-hewn Gertie, is idled by a strike which he does not understand. While he is on picket duty, Gertie sells wooden dolls to keep food on the table. At this point a wounded soldier comes home to Detroit, to labor violence and to a bitter realization: "Now I'm home—peace. And it's allasame."

Gertie Nevells carved dolls, birds, animals, and throughout her losing struggle she dreamed of carving a Christ. But with all the faces around her she could not find a face for the half-shaped figure with bent shoulders and bowed head. Still she went on carving, as though the meaning of life were in that block of cherry wood. At the end she realized that she could find a face for the unfinished figure. This final symbolism is cloudy and inconclusive, but "The Dollmaker" remains an unflinching and compassionate novel of contemporary America.

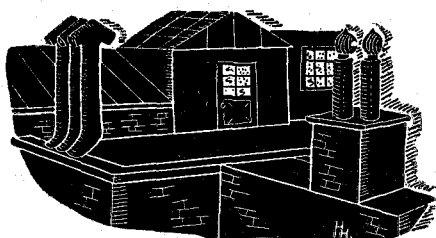


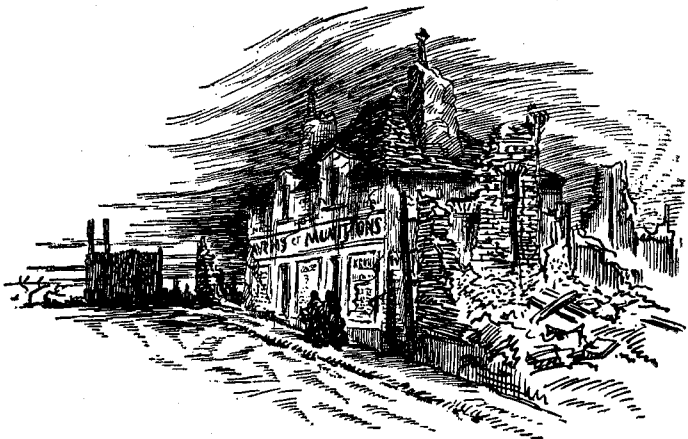
**THE AUTHOR:** Gertie Nevells—"big, ugly, strong-willed, and self-reliant," the description of her on the dust-jacket of "The Dollmaker," Harriette Arnow's new book—is a splendid example of a character doggedly in search of a novel. Gertie first turned up about a decade ago, and nothing Mrs. Arnow did during all those years to make her feel unwelcome had any effect.

Mrs. Arnow did some things that weren't exactly ladylike, either. She wrote a novel about Nunn Ballew—"Hunter's Horn"—even though Gertie had been around long before Nunn. That was in 1949. Next she signed to do a non-fiction book on the Cumberland River country. For any character of sensitivity, that would have been the *coup de grâce*; Gertie, however, like any self-respecting heroine of fiction, was undaunted. "I tried to shake her off," Mrs. Arnow candidly reminisced the other day at the family farm near Ann Arbor, Michigan, "for with this country living, two children, etc., there isn't much time for writing. But day in and day out Gertie awakened me at four in the morning—sometimes at three—and we worked until I had to wake my husband and children around seven. Fiction, once you start it, has such a horrible pull."

Mrs. Arnow, who was born in Kentucky in 1908, has always been a chronic but cheerful victim of horrible pull. "Always I was writing, submitting stuff, though I was thirteen before I had a type-writer," she confessed. She then added some autobiographical bits and pieces: She taught during part of the Thirties, quit. Went to Cincinnati, married. Wrote a great deal, sold—first to the little magazines, later a short novel, "Mountain Path." Her husband, on the staff of the *Detroit Times*, helps her in her writing, discussing characters, typing manuscript, and finding misspellings. Nowadays, with Gertie between covers at last, Mrs. Arnow has time to garden, chauffeur the kids to school, and sleep uninterruptedly.

—BERNARD KALB.





—From "All Men Have Loved Thee."

## Profit and the Debacle

**"Cry Out of the Depths,"** by **Georges Duhamel** (Little, Brown, 213 pp. \$3.50), records the moral disintegration of an opportunist during the German Occupation of France.

By Ann F. Wolfe

IN AUGUST 1945 a member of the reviewer's family entered Nazi-occupied Paris with the Allied armies of liberation. Among the first Parisians he spoke with was Georges Duhamel, who, like all his fellow citizens, was overjoyed to emerge from the long isolation of the blackout. Judging from his new novel, "Cry Out of the Depths," Mr. Duhamel must have kept an eye on the insidious mechanics of the Occupation. He seems, in particular, to have missed none of the collaborationist tricks by which the success of the Occupation was insured.

In Felix, ambitious manager of a Paris pharmaceutical concern, Mr. Duhamel has bodied forth the most contemptible aspects of collaboration. It would have been bad enough if the renegade Frenchman had served the Germans in order to save his own skin. But Felix exploited his country's defeat as a shortcut to power. Under cover of altruism he took greedy advantage of the wartime misfortunes of his firm's partners and of the tragedy in the life of his only child. An arch-opportunist, he made a science of his strategy for aggrandizement.

To switch to the production of medicaments for the Wehrmacht cost Felix no pangs of conscience. Instead of a conscience he had a built-in design for success that included suppression of emotion, denial of love and friendship, and the unvarying ap-

pearance of rectitude. The design, to be sure, was slightly flawed by his love for his daughter Monica. Yet, to further his selfish ends, he kept Monica from marrying the young man of her choice and after the youth died in an enemy prison prevented her from entering a convent. He forced the bereaved girl to lend him her dowry in order that he might buy Winterberg's third of the firm's shares. Though the hypocrite pretended otherwise, Felix well knew that Winterberg, broken victim of Nazi anti-Semitism, would never be in a position to buy the stock back. Later, through murderous casuistry, Felix was to acquire his brother's third of the shares. By that time, thanks to a master stroke of opportunism, the great industrialist had won acclaim as a Resistance hero.

IT PUTS a strain on the novelist's art—and the reader's credulity—to reconcile the evil Felix with the De Profundis of the title. The structure of the novel may possibly be at fault. Felix tells his own story, committing important passages to brief entries in a notebook. The essence of his conversion, if that is what it was, is too spiritual a matter for a businessman's log.

The trouble is that, in this masterpiece of greed for power, Mr. Duhamel has succeeded all too well with his ironic Frankenstein. He has seemingly carried the man's iniquity past the point of no return. Yet Felix suddenly takes refuge in the psalmist's prayer, begging forgiveness of all whom he has injured. With his daughter's forgiveness, it is true, grace may have had its inexplicable way with him. He makes amends of a sort, but repentance appears to have passed him by. Could that, after all, be the price he pays?

## Liszt Was Last

**"The Last Love of Camille,"** by **Frances Winwar** (Harper, 272 pp. \$3), is a fictional re-creation of the romance of the fashionable Parisian courtesan Alphonsine Plessis and the composer Franz von Liszt.

By Harrison Smith

TO PRODUCE in this first decade of the atomic age a contemporary novel of deathless love and passion would be a thankless task. Romance in the grand manner, since it requires the gaudy trappings and the amorous yearnings of lovers for the unattainable which gave color to life a century ago, is as dead, outside of the covers of a book, as Byron or Dumas. That still vital department of fiction has been taken over by romantic biographers and the writers of historical romance.

Frances Winwar is one of the few who have been able to capture inviolate the spirit of an age in which love was an inspiration and not a series of vulgar consummations. For her admirable series of literary biographies she has chosen George Sand, Joan of Arc, and English nineteenth-century poets who were not alien to the grand passion. In her Napoleonic novel, "The Eagle and the Rock," she accomplished the remarkable feat of making Josephine a comprehensible and sympathetic character and Napoleon an honest and ardent lover as well as a conqueror.

Her new novel, "The Last Love of Camille," is in one sense the most daring of all her works, for it is the story of the woman known as Margaret Gautier, "La Dame aux Camélias," of young Alexander Dumas' immortal romance, and the heroine of Verdi's opera "La Traviata." Marguerite is the quintessence of all of the heroines of fiction whose heart was pure gold, and who died of consumption, aggravated by an illness unknown to modern science, unrequited love. In fact, her name was neither Camille nor Gautier. She was born Alphonsine Plessis in the Paris slums and her childhood was sordid. Her last lover was Franz von Liszt, the most popular composer and pianist of his time, the *beau idéal* of all that was romantic, exquisite, and passionate in the males of his day. "There were," writes Miss Winwar in her epilogue, "three components of this human triangle: the love of a man for a woman for art's sake; the love of a woman for the man who has awakened her to spiritual as well as sensual