



—Jacket for "The Spanish Bride."

"... New Mexico in terms of a woman of genius."

Magnetic New World Mistress

"The Spanish Bride," by Walter O'Meara (G. P. Putnam, 370 pp. \$3.95), is the story of an eighteenth-century dancer with a penchant for trouble that carries her from Old Madrid to New Mexico.

By Lon Tinkle

THE SPANISH BRIDE," Walter O'Meara's new novel about early days in the European colonizing of the American Southwest, is both excellent fiction and an excellent historical novel.

There is no necessity to draw the line artistically between fiction and historical novels. But in a report to the public it sometimes does become necessary to reassure different strata of taste about what they are going to get. Lovers of derring-do as well as those plodding souls who take a puritanical delight in a thick brew of carefully detailed facts will find good measure in "The Spanish Bride." But those who like fiction to grow organically from sound intuitive perception will also find Mr. O'Meara's novel substantial. He has obviously fallen in love not merely with his subject, but also with his heroine. The "bride" of the title is a masterly portrait, with real psychological penetration.

The career of this Spanish girl, humbly reared in Avila at the turn of the eighteenth century, is shaped by two exceptional gifts with which she is endowed at birth. "La Sola," as the girl becomes known when she is a supreme dancer in Madrid, is born with magnetizing rhythm and dra-

matic verve; and she is born with an aloof but fiery heart. Mr. O'Meara has had the inspiration to write of Spanish settlement in New Mexico in terms, this time, of a woman of genius. The conquistador and the dedicated priest have had their innings. Mr. O'Meara makes persuasive the presence in the desert of human beauty.

One reason for this persuasiveness is the attention he pays to the part of the book laid in Spain, almost half the story.

Exploiting impressively the virtue of "sympathetic imagination"—which Balzac once observed was all the equipment a novelist needed if he had a few facts—this historical novelist re-creates the brilliant Spanish world of the theatre towards 1700 and almost lets an early-day prototype of Sarah Bernhardt, say, run away with the story. From fear of this actress who has taken her under her wing, the poor young Josefina manages to offend a pursuant and powerful grandee. His revenge is so great that the young Josefina is presently compelled to escape to the New World. That is why Don Antonio Valverde, temporarily back in the old country, is able to bring to New Mexico as his mistress one of the superlative beauties of Old Spain.

IT IS neither love nor adventure that dowers Spanish colonial America with this famous artist of the unstirred heart, the lonely "La Sola." But both love and adventure are born around her as naturally as dust rises in Santa Fe Plaza. The

Old World pattern of pursuit and revenge is repeated in the New—and this time La Sola is the active agent rather than the passive. The author never stresses this irony but allows his plot to grow in dramatic intensity as isolated aristocrats in the wilderness become as natural as Nature.

Josefina's is a beautiful destiny, albeit tragic. This almost classic figure of woman is sharply outlined against a host of details rendering the scene as vivid as the people in the story.

Notes

THE LONG SEARCH: According to the material on the dust-jacket of "The Searchers" (Harpers, \$3), after sixteen years of successful and prolific writing for the movies and the slicks, Alan Le May took a year and a half off to write the story he wanted to tell and do it the way he wanted it. The result is a superior Western, good lively reading, but it is hard to see more than a year's work in it.

The story deals with the ranchers who established themselves within the part of northern Texas that the Comanches and Kiowas had always claimed as their own, and who battled—and often enough failed—to stay alive and hold their ground against the Indians. The author knows his locale and period well. Both provide a story legitimately full of shooting and scalping, hostile and friendly Indians, Texas Rangers, and other agents and instruments of violence.

The heart of this particular tale is the amazing persistence of two men who search year after year to find and redeem a little girl—no longer little by the time the search ends—whom the Comanches had stolen. The theme is that stubborn persistence, and underlying it the totally unselfconscious, unmentioned courage that made it possible. The presence of this theme, which the writer does not expound within the story but allows to develop itself, comes as near as anything to lifting the book out of its class. Even so, one might miss it were it not stated briefly on the page before the story begins.

The appearance of this novel, laid in the period not long after the Civil War when the more warlike tribes were still on the loose, the time of the extinction of the buffalo, invites comparison with Milton Lott's recently published novel, "The Last Hunt," a first work by a man moved by authentic passion.

Mr. Le May is guilty of none of the irrationalities or naivetes that mark the beginner's novel. His is the work of the long-experienced craftsman—and not much more. His Indians and

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For Christmas

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formance features of each car, and including accurate information based on careful road tests of each car. The book is cleanly done and seems authoritative. If you have a horse-lover in the family there is *"Portraits of Horses,"* by the artist George Ford Morris (Fordacre Studios, \$35), a high-priced item but one which appears to live up to its jacket slogan of "The Horse Book of the Century," for Mr. Morris seems to have collected his whole life's work of horse paintings, drawings, and cartoons, many of them extremely handsome and, seemingly, absolutely accurate down to the last muscle.

For a somewhat special literary and/or Christmas audience there are three collections, none exceedingly handsome but still durable looking. One of these is *"A Churchill Reader,"* edited by Colin R. Coote (Houghton Mifflin, \$5), being a compendium of the wit and wisdom of Sir Winston, largely from his speeches, but many from his writings too. As a help in breaking down the Prime Minister's compleat personality, Mr. Coote has arranged his excerpts so that they fall under such headings as "On Himself," "On His Dislikes," "On Foreigners," "On Human Conduct," etc. Similarly Doubleday has come out with a collection of the writings of one of the best money-makers among their authors and called it *"Mr. Maugham Himself: A Collection of Writings by W. Somerset Maugham,"* selected by John Beecroft (\$5.95), and including in very fine but very scrupulous print some short stories, some essays, some excerpts from his *"A Writer's Notebook"* and the complete texts of both *"Of Human Bondage"* and *"The Summing Up,"* the latter of which is for the first time available outside a limited edition. Into this classification of collections—since it fits into no other and since it certainly belongs with the Christmas offerings—must also fall *"The Saturday Book,"* edited by John Hadfield (Macmillan, \$5). This one is Number 14 of this series of books, and, if you have never seen the preceding thirteen there is no possible way for you to understand what it is unless you hike yourself down to the nearest bookstore and take a look at it. For it is a veritable bucketful of British humor, including little essays on "The Natural History of the Chorus Girl" and "The Decline of the Detective" as well as a lavish display of female figures (draped and otherwise), chamber pots (decorated and undecorated), and dried-flower arrangements, if you

or anybody you know go or goes for that sort of thing.

There are every year two hardy perennials which appear on the Christmas shelves and which rarely change from year to year except, of course, for their pictorial contents. These are *"U. S. Camera 1955,"* edited by Tom Maloney (U. S. Camera Publishing Co., \$6.95), and *"Year: The Annual Picture History"* (Simon & Schuster, \$10). This year's "Year" bears a foreword by Chief Justice Earl Warren, who, unfortunately, does not seem to be able to make any more out of this year than was true of any other recent year, though his heart is in the right place. But the pictures, as always, seem well chosen and interesting and international in scope, and they live up to their claims, I would think, a little better than do those of *"U. S. Camera,"* which claims to contain the year's best pictures (and which does not) and which also is international (but for what reason it is hard to see).

ONE of the brightest little books to appear this Christmas bears down pleasantly on its subject: *"Christmas Lighting and Decorating,"* by Theodore Saros (Van Nostrand, \$1.95). It is an invaluable handbook for those who would like to know how to make the most of their domiciles during the holidays. There is probably nothing in the book which you have not seen in or on some house before; but if you have wondered how that cut-out of a reindeer was made Mr. Saros is the man to tell you, and he is an expert at showing you how to string lights all over the place without tripping up your children or the fuse box. Mrs. Patricia Easterbrook Roberts has not limited herself to any particular season in her *"Party Decorations for Christmas and Other Occasions"* (Studio Publications, \$5.95), but she is



partial to Christmas and that part of her book which isn't used up then may be valuable later in the year.

Among these special Christmas books there are also those which have not forgotten the original purpose of the day. *"A New Christmas Treasury,"* edited by Robert and Maria Lohan (Stephen Daye, \$3.75), is a collection of stories, both sacred and profane, designed especially for reading aloud around this season of the year. Maymie R. Krythe in *"All About Christmas"* (Harper, \$2.75), has accumulated a wealth of historical information about the origins and observances of the day, each chapter being named fortuitously after a Christmas carol. But it has remained for James H. Barnett in *"The American Christmas"* (Macmillan, \$2.95) to evaluate the whole holiday occasion with a rather jaundiced eye and to write a book which includes such chapters as "The Social Role of Santa Claus" ("Many parents are uneasy when faced with the necessity of admitting to their children that Santa Claus is an unreal figure") and "Exploiting a Festival"—some subject matter which may not get to the marrow of the matter but which at least tastes the meat.

—JOHN HAVERSTICK.

CARTOON BOOKS

ONE thing is certain, when you give a book of cartoons your present will never be forgotten, because the darn things are too big to store on the regular bookshelves. You wind up putting them with the record albums, and every six weeks or so you take them out and try to get them in with the books again.

This season the publishers have provided more than a dozen handsome volumes and, if you've your gift list handy, let us take them up gently.

The prize of the collection, in my eyes, is Saul Steinberg's *"The Passport,"* a Harper release with 224 pages. 350 drawings from a man I am coming to believe is one of the top black-and-white artists of our day, good enough to be bracketed with Dali and Picasso. At five dollars this breaks down to something like a penny and a half a drawing, and, since Steinberg works exclusively in pen-and-ink, they reproduce beautifully and are almost as good as originals.

Steinberg is marvelous in two areas, the overelaborate and the simple. The curleycue, elaboration, and grace note enchant him wherever they appear, on a juke box, in the signature on an official document, in a label on a wine bottle. At the same time he uses one bounding wavy line to draw three old ladeis in fur coats.

It might not be a bad idea to begin