

Fiction

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in or out of the maelstrom by coincidence and the small details of their lives: Reese at the bank door, Emily at the teller's window, Shelley bound hand and foot in a barn, and Boyd in a poolroom lavatory drinking beer. When it's all over the whole town's talking about the robbery except Shelley and Boyd, who have been forced to consider how hard it is to live, how easy to die. An epilogue of high drama and sober insight.

For anybody in search of suspenseful entertainment this is a pretty safe bet. More, as a first novel by a young author "Violent Saturday" is an encouraging event for what it is and what should follow. Would the book make a good movie? A Mr. Darryl Zanuck thought so.

Notes

DIVORCEE ON THE LAND: There have been few stories of the unglamorous business of making a livelihood from a piece of Western land. Thus it would seem that in Mildred Walker's tenth novel, "The Curlew's Cry" (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.95), a neglected literary mine is being discovered. The reader follows the heroine, Pamela Lacey, descendant of early Western pioneers, through more than thirty-five years of her not uneventful life. Disappointed in love, unable to reconcile herself to marriage with an Easterner who can give nothing more

than economic security, Pamela returns to Brandon Rapids, a small, alternately sunbaked and blizzard-bitten Montana town with a Bon Ton, Social Circles, Gossips, Women's Clubs, and Community Spirit. Unhappily, the town's Social Life is somewhat limited for a divorcee and, worse, there is the proximity of Rose Guinard Morley, once an outsider and child of the town's French milliner but in later years a respected matron forgiven by the town for her unexpected elopement with Wrenn Morley, whom all of Brandon Rapids, including Pamela Lacey, had expected Pamela Lacey to marry. Pamela's one comfort is her father's economically unsuccessful ranch. She converts it into a dude ranch, pays off the mortgage, and becomes reconciled to the prospect of spending her life with the widowed Rose, who stole her childhood sweetheart. All of this is not for those in search of esoteric literature which is heavily wrapped in gingerbread style; nor does it offer much to lovers of conventional Westerns. But it should appeal to that segment of the reading public which enjoys a quietly told, honestly plotted story filled with careful details and with good descriptions of various aspects of life in the West.

—HARRIETTE ARNOW.

AMERICANS IN ROME: There is something of the nihilistic mood of "The Sun Also Rises" in William Murray's examination of Americans doing as the Romans do. Collected in "The Fugitive Romans" (Vanguard, \$3.50) is the usual crowd of postwar drifters and cafe philosophers, who feel that

limbo is "a good place to be." But even nihilists occasionally need cash—so the advent of a Hollywood film company, with its thousands of temporary jobs, excites the members of the latest generation to be lost . . . or only temporarily mislaid.

Mr. Murray is an excellent reporter, and his version of the making of "Ave, Caesar" (a super-colossal epic complete with a brand-new Roman coliseum) explores some sidelights that normally elude the publicity releases. "The Fugitive Romans" is at its best when its author is taking a hard look at the public and private lives of the film colony, or when he is explicating such mysteries as the European attitude toward venture capital (" . . . everyone knows that money is something one puts away in vaults or in holes underground"). But the main thread of the story, which concerns an amatory interlude between an American publicity man and a pallid English lady, is really very tiresome. It seems, as a matter of fact, to bore Mr. Murray, too, because his otherwise keen sense of dialogue deserts him in the exchanges between the Yank and his Pamela. At any rate, his aimless romance helps to disillusion the press agent with disillusionment—and this is an interesting realignment to follow.

—MARTIN LEVIN.

ILL-STARRED IRISH: Walter Macken is the Irish producer-playwright-actor whose "Home Is the Hero" was produced on Broadway last year, with the author himself in the lead. Now in his fifth novel, "Sunset on the Window-Panes" (St. Martin's Press, \$3.50), he spins a story of the village of Boola in Galway. To it hot-blooded, reckless Bart O'Brien returns after being dropped from college. Still hurt and sullen, Bart takes a walk along the cliffs with a neighbor girl named Breeda. Trying to snatch a kiss, he accidentally pushes her into the boiling sea below, where Breeda is blinded for life on a jutting rock. This only makes the witches' brew of emotions inside Bart bubble more. He seduces Sheila, the town beauty, then lights out on learning she is pregnant. But the evil Bart has done stays after him. Breeda is blind, Sheila an unwed mother, his quiet brother Joseph a perpetual misfit because of Bart's overpowering personality. Quietly, realistically, with occasional flashes of flavorsome style, Mr. Macken works out his thwarted destinies until inevitably Bart returns, an itinerant peddler. Still callous, he uses brother Joseph's "vision" to drum up trade for the religious items he carries in his cart. Then he too feels the power of the vision and rushes madly from Boola. It all makes an intermittently



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

SET 'EM UP IN TYPE

Hand-setting printers don't pick type out of a case compartmented strictly by the alphabet, but if they did this is the way they would find the letters that spell the names of authors of recently published books. R. T. House of Norman, Oklahoma, asks you to de-anagram these twenty names (there are no front or middle initials to worry about). If you get ten, feel good; if eleven, feel better; if twelve or over, you're a glutton for punishment. Answers on page 43.

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|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. AACEEEILMNNNNOPRTV | 11. ABEGHILNNORTTY |
| 2. AADDEEHIMNPRRUU | 12. ABCEKLPRU |
| 3. ABEEENNNOPRRRTTW | 13. DEEEHNNPPRSST |
| 4. ACEHHLMOSS | 14. AADHLMNOSTY |
| 5. ADEIMNNRW | 15. AENNPRTY |
| 6. ACCEEIILMNOSU | 16. AACGILLLOPU |
| 7. AGILNNTUY | 17. AADEHLMNNNOORS |
| 8. ADDEHILLRT | 18. AEEGHIMNNRSTWY |
| 9. ADDEFHJMMNOOORRSUW | 19. AADEILMNRV |
| 10. AADEIMNORRSU | 20. AABEHNORRTT |

Americana

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moving Irish tale but, like most Irish writers today, Mr. Macken labors under an awful handicap. So many superb Irish playwrights and writers have already written of Ireland that anyone who is merely good seems pretty pale indeed.

—ALLEN CHURCHILL.

VICTORIAN ENGLAND REVISITED: A pleasant, voluminous little book, its 448 pages snugly compressed into a neat plump pocket-book format, is Francesca Marton's "*Mrs. Betsey, or, Widowed and Wed*" (Coward-McCann, \$3.75). As its name suggests, it is surely the literary offspring of Louisa M. Alcott and William M. Thackeray, with Charles Dickens a devoted godfather. In it we follow the fortunes of Mrs. Betsey Jordan, a young widow with four young children to support, whose virtue, kindliness, steadfast integrity, and good common sense bring her triumphant through a series of experiences and vicissitudes capable of daunting many a less stout-hearted heroine. A whole era and a vanished way of life are conjured up in Miss Marton's picture of Victorian England in the years from 1850 through 1861, as a background for Mrs. Betsey's vocations: as housekeeper in a great country house, whose decaying grandeur and whose decaying master she sets to rights and health; as a wife again, and mistress at her husband's side of a respectable and flourishing inn, "*The British Queen*"; an anxious mother of a pretty and flighty daughter going into service as a ladies maid; as co-founder of villains, and promoter of the good. There is a highly complicated and richly romantic plot, unashamedly bursting at the seams with

fortuitous coincidence and fearless melodrama. "*Mrs. Betsey*" is a captivating book, whose seeming artlessness has a firm base of wit and sensibility, and whose unobtrusively accurate and vivid evocation of an era makes it a period piece of genuine charm.

—SARAH HENDERSON HAY.

SELF-BETRAYAL ON THE VELDT: Revealing itself with the stark simplicity of a dumb-show, Dan Jacobson's very short novel "*The Trap*" (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.95) forcefully dramatizes some complex psychological relationships. It is the story of a Boer farmer, Van Schoor, who scrapes out a meager but satisfying living from a plot of veldt land in South Africa, aided by a few native workers whom he treats with kindness and to whom he even attributes qualities of human dignity.

But then he is led to believe in the moral impurity of his favorite, a man whom he had thought to be as true and inviolable as a fool, and he feels regretfully obliged to send him away in order to preserve the equilibrium of the farm. The banished one's refusal to protest his innocence leaves Van Schoor vaguely ill at ease.

Eventually Van Schoor, in a shocking, yet inevitable moment of irrationality, commits an act which contains the most destructive betrayal of all—a self-betrayal of his own finer qualities to the brutalizing pressures which inhere so often in colonial societies.

Tightly constructed, pruned of extraneous incident and comment, "*The Trap*," beneath its narrative statement, is the creation of a mind both subtle and sharply intuitive.

—JEROME STONE.

roughly into chapters about such personages as Jeremiah Wadsworth, Revolutionary Commissary General; Edmund Randolph, first Attorney General; Oliver Wolcott, Treasury Secretary; Lewis Littlepage, troublesome ward of John Jay; John Jay and Robert R. Livingston, who negotiated the Louisiana Purchase; William Duer, Knickerbocker capitalist and speculator; Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and his brother Thomas; Robert Morris, Horatio Gates, Aaron Burr; and a half-dozen others. Upon their scandalous conduct, often hectic careers, speculations, and "bitter personal calumnies," more than upon their hard-headed accomplishments, these items of information dwell. Although they may contribute further details to later biographies, they do not in themselves constitute sufficient new material for a full-length book. They are spun out here in a disorganized and rambling fashion when they might more appropriately have served as nutty contributions to historical journals.

Frontier Gleanings

PONY EXPRESS TOWN: In the days when there were giants in the American West there were also persons of lesser stature—and of equal interest. This apothegm is adapted to a Nevada silver town in "*The Town That Died Laughing*," by Oscar Lewis (Little, Brown, \$3.75), with remarkable success. Austin, on the Pony Express route between Virginia City and the East, enjoyed a brief boomlet in the early 1860s, the most enduring feature of which was the founding of *The Reese River Reveille*, a newspaper that still publishes. From the columns of *The Reveille* Mr. Lewis carefully and lovingly reconstructs the Austin of nearly a century ago. He revives the famous Sazerac Lying Club, Grocer Gridley and his sack of flour, and the career of Emma Nevada, the songstress, to mention but three of the ghosts reincarnated in this silvery footnote to history. The spice of Austin is best brought out through the sassy frontier journalism of *The Reveille*. While they were run up neither with literary flourish nor with the historian in mind, its news accounts pulse today with readability, drama, and liveliness—so much so that Mr. Lewis has no trouble at all in making a medium-size boom town seem very much like a giant-size one.

—ALDEN WHITMAN.

Easter Egg

By May Sarton

SMOOTH and impassive and to be surrounded
With air, with light, though still subtly bounded
By its own shape, so candid and so rounded,

The Easter egg is a small trinity:
Reserved without for all the world to see
Its upright stance, its perfect dignity.

But if you open it, there is another:
Within the shape of solitude, discover
The shape of joy, child of a lonely mother.

And opening the second, find a third.
Sealed doubly in, this one is very hard;
This one is secret and perhaps ill-starred.

Enclosed in joy, and yet still forsaken,
This smallest egg of all cannot be broken,
But only wholly given, wholly taken.