

Fadiman's Feuilletons

"Party of One," by Clifton Fadiman (World Publishing Co. 473 pp. \$5), is a collection of short pieces about writing, reading, and sundry topics, from Schrafft's waitresses to fireworks, by one of our best-known emcees.

By Charles Lee

NO one in his bright mind will miss "Party of One." It introduces Clifton Fadiman, the Great Introducer himself, in his first full-length volume. To his long list of achievements—Book-of-the-Month Club judge, contributor to *Holiday* magazine, *New Yorker* critic, platform reader and lecturer, and radio and television master of ceremonies—must now be added another: first-rate essayist. His admirers have been saying this for a long time; they have now only to point to his sage and scintillant book, credentials to a shelf holding such modern worthies as Christopher Morley, E. B. White, Jacques Barzun, Cornelius Weygandt, Gilbert Highet, Lionel Trilling, and John Mason Brown.

Mr. Fadiman's capering candors range from the frivolous to the philosophical. He can tease a Schrafft's hostess or pay tribute to a Madame Curie with equal aplomb. His bafflement in the face of modern machinery is balanced by his assurance in investigating the symbolism of "Moby-Dick." He is no more afraid of contradictions than Whitman: he will doff his hat to "the ill-informed man" and emit a jeremiad over the decline of attention; he will salute the growth of the Great Books classes from one to 2,000 in the past twenty-five years and note elsewhere that "it seems fairly clear that in our time the attrition of one kind of attention—the ability to read prose and poetry of meaning and substance—is becoming more and more widespread." And it is one of Mr. Fadiman's disconcerting charms that he seems right on both sides of the argument!

His constituents (for his "Party of One" will win a large following) will find him in the mood of a Madison Avenue Montaigne in his opening reflections on being fifty. Now, he says, "I can afford to look my neighbor firmly in the eye and tell him that

baseball bores me; that I think intellectuals are often valuable and patriotic citizens; that I no longer find any use for more than two suits of clothes . . . that most expensive fountain pens aren't worth the ink they dribble . . . [and] that I think E. M. Forster, Joyce Cary, and Thornton Wilder more interesting novelists than William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway."

Fadiman's "admigrations" include Sinclair Lewis ("Mercutio from the prairies"); E. B. White, whom he defends as "a major writer"; Ogden Nash; Abner Dean, who provides him with "a welcome ration of disquietude"; G. K. Chesterton, who knew the art of conducting an argument without turning it into a quarrel; and the Curies. Among this reader's admirations are the brilliant introductions Mr. Fadiman has gathered under the heading "Lead-Ins": his penetrating statement of the case for and against Henry James; his enthusiasms for "Huckleberry Finn" and "Dodsworth"; his memorable assessment of "War and Peace" (here greatly abridged); and his stunning commentaries on "The Pickwick Papers" and the character of Charles

Dickens (in one of his happy sophistications Fadiman says of Dickens's first masterpiece: "It is not even a true picaresque; at best it is a pick-wickaresque").

ON THE attack Mr. Fadiman is a formidable assailant. He is master of the bodkin phrase. His parody of Thomas Wolfe demonstrates the art of turning Gulliver into a Lilliputian by a series of pinpricks. He dismisses Gertrude Stein as "the mama of dada." He bemoans the anticlimactic progress of John O'Hara. While allowing that Faulkner is "a writer of genuine idiosyncrasy," he performs a dazzling anatomy of the filibusterer from Yoknapatawpha County ("All of Mr. Faulkner's shuddery inventions pale in horrendousness before the mere notion of parsing him"). His witty summation: "Charles Addams trying to be Dostoevski."

"Party of One" covers many other subjects, too: children's literature, science fiction, conversation, book-reviewing, the art of toastmastering, fireworks, and the distinction between clowns and comics. It has both quotability and rereadableness. It quips, challenges, illuminates, sparkles, and connects with ideas. Mr. Fadiman's carbonations and clarity are more than the bubbling of a champagne style; they bespeak a mature and wily mind, a creative Communicator who enhances letters, stimulates thought, provokes laughter, articulates awareness, and enriches his own times.



Spring and Fall

By Dachine Rainer

O MY LOVE, the earth unfolding us,
Our tight fiddle heads, our clasped wonder
We are green and soft. We are caught.

O where have we been, my love? Bring us,
By effort, both of us, out of mud, thunder
Our coming here. We are set:

Hold the world at bay, my love, stop us
At spring, bore us with beginnings, blunder
Us through apples and serpents. We have met.

Under such subterfuge, my love, as this,
Our fern, unfolding us, will spear the air, render
The claspings, spurn the sun. We are spent.

O my love, unfolding is spending us,
Renewing the wind's provoking anger,
The raging of the sun. We are spent.

O, freeze us, at last, my love, return us
To earth, mock our former wonder:
We are harsh and brown. We are spent.



The Bitch Goddess



"The Dream of Success," by Kenneth S. Lynn (Little, Brown. 269 pp. \$4), is an attempt to discover how the rags-to-riches myth affected American culture around the turn of the century through an examination of the work of five leading novelists. Maxwell Geismar, literary critic and historian of the American novel, appraises it below.

By Maxwell Geismar

IN "The Dream of Success" Kenneth S. Lynn has a good thesis and works it into the ground. The purpose of his book is to show how the Horatio Alger myth of success influenced American culture around the turn of the century. He concentrates on five writers—Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Frank Norris, David Graham Phillips, and Robert Herrick—whose work, he claims, was corrupted by the psychology of rags-to-riches. But this view ignores other and perhaps more important intellectual influences of the period, such as the rise of social Darwinism, the pragmatism of William James, the populist revolt in the West, and the strong current of social protest which also marked the 1900s.

The period was actually one of conflict and tension; and what is fascinating in any authentic study of its novelists is to see how these different elements are combined in their work. Mr. Lynn follows up only one strand in this interwoven pattern, and reaches a triumphant conclusion at the cost of the whole truth. Sometimes these essays are almost deliberately perverse; there are intimations of a "Menckanism" of the 1950s, which aims to shock rather than to edify. It is hard to believe that Mr. Lynn really considers Dreiser as a "man of ice," concerned only with money and sex, and having a lifelong opposition to political and economic reform. To make his point here Mr. Lynn distorts the whole significance of Dreiser's career, the meaning of his work, as well as the facts of his life.

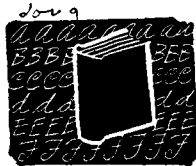
With Jack London there is, on the face of it, a better case. It was the split between London's personal values and his social idealism which in large part helped to destroy this gifted artist. Yet here, too, Mr. Lynn has no real interest in describing London's authentic talent, Poe-esque and derived from a dream-world not of

success but of personal and even racial anguish. The essay contends that it was the process of "making money out of socialism" which slowly killed London. The real fact is that London's socialism, however confused, drew upon him the same kind of abuse and popular censure which had been accorded to William Dean Howells before him, for the same reason. London's socialism interfered with his money-making.

Frank Norris, too, was an interesting cross of Nietzschean yearnings and the movement for social reform which marked his period. (By the time of the "second generation" the mythology of rags-to-riches had taken on the uglier trappings of racial prejudice, imperialism, and war; it is still with us.) But by stressing the strain of anti-Semitism in "The Octopus," for example, Mr. Lynn omits the real meaning of the book, which was after all a study of monopoly capitalism in the West. And in stressing the parental conflicts in Norris's life Mr. Lynn uses his Freudian insights, like his

cultural standards, not to illuminate his subject, but to ridicule it.

It is a relief to say that the essays on David Graham Phillips and Robert Herrick rise above this level of youthful sophistication; perhaps because Phillips was a popular journalist whose temperament can be encompassed by Mr. Lynn's formulas, and because Mr. Lynn himself is actually very close to Herrick's academic nihilism. But elsewhere Mr. Lynn has had to reject not only much valuable material in the books of his own authors, but most of the criticism which has been written about them. Thus we read with some astonishment about the "strategy" of Van Wyck Brooks, as though this generous critic were a political commissar. Similarly, because Alfred Kazin misspells the narrator's name in Phillip's "The Plum Tree" his opinion of the novel "cannot be considered reliable." What shall we say then when Mr. Lynn describes the Aileen Butler of "The Financier" and "The Titan" as—Aileen Burke?



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

TITULAR LITERATION

Authors are as adept as anybody at applying "apt alliteration's artful aid," particularly in the construction of titles. Here are twenty examples (mainly, but not exclusively, in the field of prose fiction) together with the names of twenty authors. Kindly match titles and authors. If you identify twelve or fewer, hide the head; if from thirteen through seventeen, lament less lugubriously; if from eighteen up, raise the roof. Answers on page 30.

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| 1. The Battle of the Books | () Sherwood Anderson |
| 2. Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush | () George Borrow |
| 3. The Conquest of Canaan | () Raymond Chandler |
| 4. The Delectable Duchy | () Douglas Southall Freeman |
| 5. Headlong Hall | () Thomas Hardy |
| 6. The Lady in the Lake | () Nathaniel Hawthorne |
| 7. The Lady of the Lake | () Lafcadio Hearn |
| 8. Lee's Lieutenants | () Henry James |
| 9. Liza of Lambeth | () Rudyard Kipling |
| 10. Many Marriages | () Sinclair Lewis |
| 11. Merton of the Movies | () Ian Maclaren |
| 12. Parson's Pleasure | () Somerset Maugham |
| 13. Portraits of Places | () Christopher Morley |
| 14. The Prodigal Parents | () Thomas Love Peacock |
| 15. The Romany Rye | () Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch |
| 16. The Rose and the Ring | () Sir Walter Scott |
| 17. Stray Leaves from Strange Literature | () Jonathan Swift |
| 18. Twice-Told Tales | () Booth Tarkington |
| 19. Two on a Tower | () W. M. Thackeray |
| 20. Wee Willie Winkie | () Harry Leon Wilson |