

Fiction

Continued from page 16

announced in the title, of death. Of what use is life to men condemned to die? In the eyes of the immortal Fosca all their efforts are in vain, their errors and accomplishments too ephemeral to matter. In his presence they know with humiliation and despair that they are but blades of grass. Why do they struggle even when they realize that all is for naught? Several of the characters articulate responses that will stir even readers who couldn't care less about the ethical implications of Existentialism.

French critics did not praise Mme. Beauvoir's work without reservations. A work conceived artificially to illustrate a thesis, it never comes to life. Too many repetitious episodes, too much harping, and too, too long. But fussing about such literary matters is like complaining that a woman professor's lipstick is not on straight. It is much more interesting just to watch the brains work, the brains of an extraordinary woman who looks at life without flinching and, in spite of dismaying evidence, succeeds in establishing a standard of values in a universe without heaven or hell and wherein all men are mortal.

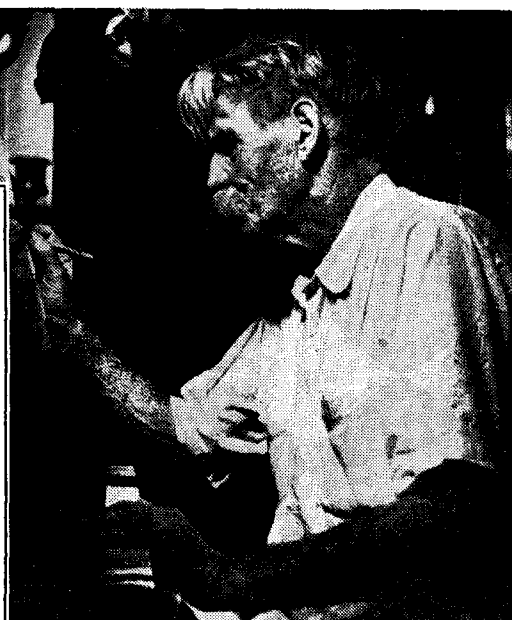
Murder à la Movies

INFLAMMABLE FLATFOOT: An insurance claims investigator with a low amatory threshold keeps things moving in Jay Dratler's "The Judas Kiss" (Holt, \$3)—a Hollywood style whodunnit blending sex, alcohol, murder, and sunshine. The insurance man is an inflammable chap named Perry Farmer, dedicated to his nasty job and his cozy family, but also prone to disturbing guilt feelings. Perry's leaky personality almost becomes unstuck when he gets mixed up in a case of suspected homicide involving a Norse temptress. Hela her name is, and the mere sight of her sets our hero's blood on fire. She is "curved... lush... maybe voluptuous," he burbles.

With this trend of thought, and his wife and kid away at Lake Arrowhead, Perry is obviously the wrong man to pursue an investigation involving Hela. But pursue it he does, and far, far beyond the call of duty. When Mr. Dratler's insurance Hawkshaw is following clues "The Judas Kiss" is moderately entertaining. When he indulges in cliché tough-talk and do-it-yourself psychiatry the reader's attention wanders.

—MARTIN LEVIN.

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genius, in
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photographs



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THE PAWNS OF FEAR

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N. Y. 17

Thoreau

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nouncements by a very successful citizen.

HENRY: And in what calling or profession was this optimist so highly successful?

ME: Advertising.

HENRY: Indeed. And what Gospel, what Good News, does he bring us? I can hardly imagine that he is a prophet of simplicity. Or is it some necessities of the soul that he is advertising just now?

ME: No— not exactly. Or perhaps I had better say not at all. In fact, I don't think he would agree with any of your premises or your proposals. He sees the future as bright chiefly because men in his profession have learned how to persuade people to want more and more things—even things they would never have dreamed of wanting before.

HENRY: And he thinks that will make them happier?

ME: I am afraid Henry that you do not understand the modern world. You see. . . .

HENRY: Are you so sure that it understands itself? But go on.

ME: Thank you. The truth of the matter is that in your day nobody understood the role played in a modern economy by Consumption as the underlying cause of Prosperity. As a matter of fact, in your world it did not play this role. At that time it was not yet possible to produce enough to meet the needs of your fellow citizens. Therefore, it was a virtue in the individual to use no more of anything than he needed and not to think that he needed anything he did not. But technology has changed all that. If everybody did not demand that Higher Standard of Living which advertising has taught us all to insist upon we should soon plunge into the deepest Depression our world has ever known. To supply it with only what you would call necessities would not keep one-tenth of the workers busy half the time. To use up what they are making in increasing quantities is a necessity which even the advertising man finds it difficult to persuade us to meet. The first duty of a Good Citizen in our republic is to be a Good Consumer. Sometimes we call a man who doesn't vote a bad citizen. But society can get along passably well even if a third of the people don't vote;

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but if a third of them stopped buying what you call superfluities catastrophe would be upon us. Simplify indeed! To a modern economist it is perfectly evident that unless we keep on complicating more and more exuberantly the whole of our world will come tumbling down.

HENRY: What I call Economy I understand well enough. It means the way in which men get a living, how they are fed and clothed and sheltered. But when you change Economy to Economics—another one of those modern words with a paralysis in its tail—it seems to be a very different matter. Somehow the right of men to food and clothing has got itself transformed into his duty to use up as much food and clothing as possible.

ME: That to begin with. But it is only a beginning. It is also his duty to buy hundreds of things never heard of in your day and then to buy new ones before the old have worn out. Only a society which operates on this principle can be healthy today.

HENRY: And does your very successful optimist say this in so many words? I should like very much to know what words he finds to say such things with.

ME (extracting from my pocket a report on some of the pronouncements made in Salt Lake City last June 27 at the Fifty-first Annual Convention of the Advertising Association of the West): Well, the most general statement was made by the director of advertising for a California public service corporation: "We of the advertising world are custodians of the indispensable key to the mass selling that must accompany production."

HENRY: The words are English but it doesn't sound like English to me. But please go on. There is nothing I ever valued more than getting new thoughts.

ME: I think a few sentences by the chairman of the board of a large New York advertising agency will make it all clearer. "Perhaps the most dynamic and unique contribution of American economy to the world is... that in a society which emphasizes psychological obsolescence rather than the physical wearing out of products, we have helped to achieve the most productive economy in human history."

HENRY: Give me a moment to translate that. I understand that we are going to be told what America's greatest contribution to the world really is. But I am not sure that I understand what that emphasis on "psychological obsolescence" rather



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than "physical wearing" really means. Can it really mean what I think it does? Does it really mean that our most valuable contribution to the world is our method of persuading men to throw things away while they are still just as good as they ever were? And is this "most productive economy in human history" something to boast about principally because it provides us with things to throw away and could not produce so much unless we did throw them away?

ME: Well, if you want to put it that way. It means, for instance, that the ordinary housewife must buy another vacuum cleaner just to keep the production of vacuum cleaners at a high level. It also means that the better class of citizen must buy a new automobile every year because the changed chromium ornaments make it obvious that last year's model is "psychologically obsolescent."

HENRY: And you say that all this wasting is necessary to our prosperity? I should think it would keep everybody's nose to the grindstone a good deal more constantly than is necessary.

ME: But when you work hard to buy things you don't need and thereby keep other people working hard to make them we don't call that "keeping noses to the grindstone." We call it "maintaining employment at a high level." Let me go on. As the gentleman I have just been quoting goes on to say, advertising has been "a constructive and facilitative force.... By creating a psychological desire to own—as opposed to that of necessity—advertising has increased the number of jobs available; raised the

standard of living by reducing selling costs; increased company profits as well as company security." By way of a gloss the editor of this report adds: "Of some 500 classified psychological wants only ninety-six are necessary.... New markets—newly-weds, the bumper crop of babies, etc.—are constantly developing. To tap these markets desires must be created. And advertising is the means." As you see, an annual bumper crop of babies is necessary because every newborn child is potentially a consumer—of what goods—what future God only knows.

HENRY: And this gentleman is convinced that desires ought to be created and that "the psychological desire to own" should be fostered. Mankind is not yet sufficiently devoted to material things! Upon such treasures it should be encouraged to set more irrevocably its heart. But tell me something else. When I was young and inexperienced I was tempted for a foolish moment to take some stock in the prophecies of a German immigrant named Etzler who dreamed of a machine-made Utopia in which all necessary work would be done by steam-engines and men would have unlimited leisure to cultivate their souls. Now, if I understand your modern optimist aright, he wants to increase "the psychological desire to own" so that everyone will be so busy satisfying these artificially-created wants that he will not need to bother at all with his soul. Has Etzler no disciples today?

ME: A few. You remember that Mr. Shaw you once told me you met just after he erupted into heaven? You two did not hit it off too well together, but he imparted to you his vision of tomorrow's world: "The only hope for any kind of artist is a society so thoroughly organized and regimented that he can always earn a living by three hours of brainless, robot labor like machine-tending and then have twice that long left over to write his books and paint his pictures."

HENRY: I see. And even now three hours of labor would be enough to "earn a living," though it is not enough to satisfy all the "psychological desire to own" that has been created, not enough if everybody insists upon throwing things away not when they have been used up but as soon as they become "psychologically obsolescent." Does not anyone rebel against the trick that has been played upon them?

ME: A few individuals rebel. But I am not sure I admire them. They may be artists or thinkers or what-not.

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