

Caribbean Caracoles

"Island in the Sun," by Alec Waugh (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 538 pp. \$3.95), is an entertaining, journalistic report on the romances and problems that keep a Caribbean island seething.

By James Kelly

WITH HIS thirteenth book, Alec Waugh verifies what followers of seven previous novels, four travel volumes, and a biography of Thomas Lipton knew long ago: a lively curiosity and a ready notebook can be turned into publishable entertainment. One won't find Evelyn Waughian wit or sardonicism in "Island in the Sun," a tale of the panoply and protocol which threaten to sink a tiny island in the British West Indies. That's a special sibling talent. But this book does offer a Margaret Meadian portrait of the social, political, and racial conflicts of island life in the sunny Caribbean. Plus a travel writer's digest of customs, occupations, and historical background. Plus a well handled psychological drama which sets up reverberations all the way back to Downing Street. Plus assorted romances which jump back and forth across the color line. Modestly ranked as it will be in the wide, wide novelistic world, Mr. Waugh's newest is bursting with arresting personalities and provocative themes.

Few books offer a more authentic sense of place than this journalistic report of a speck of land called Santa Marta and the seething cauldron of whites, coloreds, and mixed bloods presided over by His Majesty's colonial government. The author knows his people from the inside out and presents them purposefully as the actors in an antic pageant. They are appealing, well-motivated characters right down to the walk-ons. Deftly juggling many subjects (most of which are caught) and making free use of fate and coincidence, Mr. Waugh offers a pleasing 538-page conducted tour.

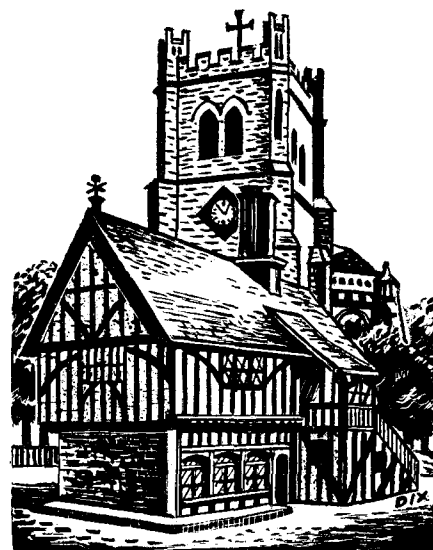
Yet "Island in the Sun," for reasons mostly having to do with style, is not as effective as it should be. For one thing, the author is in an expository, analytical vein most of the way. He unloads rather than uses his riches of special knowledge and insights. He asks too many rhetorical questions, uses too many easy short cuts, and

too often lets his dialogue turn into set speeches. The result of such overwriting, inevitably, is lack of incisiveness and form.

We visit Santa Marta first on the day of the Governor's reception to introduce his eligible bachelor son, Euan, to the island's nubile maidens and dignitaries. It is also the day when moody young Maxwell Fleury, scion of an honored family, begins his swift descent from niggling jealousy to frustration to murder and assisted demise. During the seven months that follow, we observe Fleury's twisted romance with his wife, Sylvia, and live with him through a suspenseful post-murder waiting game with the island's bland chief of police. A policeman, by the way, who uses "Crime and Punishment" as a formidable reference book and ranks well up with the best fictional lawmen. There is mounting animosity with the troublesome colored trade union leader, David Boyeur. There is a memorable side romance between Euan Templeton and Fleury's sister, Joselyn, which triumphs over the color barrier. And other heart involvements between the Governor's aide, Denis Archer, and his colored lady; between Grainger Morris, the noble Oxfordian native, and a popular white girl whom he decides to pass up for a career in politics.

Tying everything together is the short and stout figure of journalist Carl Bradshaw who observes, interpolates, and writes enough inflammatory exposés for his stateside newspaper to pull down the roof on a lot of Santa Martans, including the Governor himself. It's an extremely well handled profile of a ruthless working columnist who would much rather be rich than right.

"Island in the Sun" is not exactly a blow for Caribbean tourism, but it will convince most readers that they now understand what they are missing. Maybe even leave them musing about the important practical problems of racial integration wherever it may be.



English Shorts

"Winter's Tales I," compiled by the editors of Macmillan & Co., Ltd. (St. Martin's Press. 364 pp. \$3.75), is a collection of new short stories by English writers.

By Harvey Curtis Webster

SINCE "Best British Stories" was discontinued at the death of Edward O'Brien, there has been no practicable way for the American reader to keep up with the many young and old British writers who write good short fiction. Unless one subscribes to more British periodicals than he can afford time or money to read, it's likely he only knows the short story writers who write novels that have been selected for American publication. This is deplorable on at least two counts: there are a good many British writers, like H. E. Bates, who are good only when they write short fiction; it is a great loss to miss the work of writers who write nothing but short stories. "Winter's Tales I," a collection of unpublished and published stories by British writers who are and are not well-known, should help to fill the gap left by O'Brien's death.

All of these twelve are enjoyable and worth reading. In Kingsley Amis' "My Enemy's Enemy," you have a valid naturalistic story of *snafu* in the signal corps; in Bryan MacMahon's "The White Blackbird," you have a thoroughly delightful and unnatural story of what never happened to professor on his way to a lecture; Frank O'Connor's "The Genius," about a boy who was too brilliant to understand either his parents or sex, is hilarious. The very serious "Private Means," by Gerald Hanley, is the first piece of fiction I've seen since "Pas



Evan Hunter—"right resolution."

sage to India" and Christine Weston's "Indigo" that has anything new to say about India and the West (and in forty-one pages).

Apart from the stories by Hanley and O'Connor, the best are by Pamela Hansford Johnson, an excellent short story writer and a mediocre novelist, V. S. Pritchett, and Osbert Sitwell. Miss Johnson's "My Books Are My Children" is brilliant psychological fiction about a successful woman novelist married to a subtle writer the upper highbrows adulate. Mr. Pritchett's "The Satisfactory" is an ironic tale about a gourmet who had to descend to lust to abet his gluttony. Osbert Sitwell's "Follow M'Leader" is a fine unfettered piece of baroque prose about Owen Footmouse who creates and dissipates the reputation of two "eminent" writers of the Nineties.

What isn't altogether satisfactory about this collection is the slick (almost O'Henry-Maupassant-Poe) treatment some of the stories are forced into. L. P. Hartley's "Per Far d'Amore," though beautifully written, is both hurried and obviously contrived at the end. At least a scent of slickness hurts the good stories by Storm Jameson, Peter Towry, and Frank Tuohy. Nevertheless, I recommend both "Winter's Tales I" and the idea it represents. Perhaps it can become a yearly representation of the best in British short fiction—indeed, perhaps it is.



Douglass Wallop—"in instinct's interest."

The Drag of Drugs

"*Second Ending*," by Evan Hunter (Simon & Schuster, 359 pp. \$3.95), is a fictional study of the effects of drug addiction on four young people.

By Whitney Balliett

EVAN HUNTER'S second book—his first, "The Blackboard Jungle," was an effective parsing of juvenile delinquency—is, like its predecessor, an extremely busy tract-novel. This time the hero, or better evil heart, is drug addiction and its effects on four young New York people. Bud Donato, a college student, unwillingly takes into his apartment a former "best" friend, Andy Silvera, a twenty-year-old trumpet player who has been "hooked" for two years. Helen Cantor, a reformed addict, and Donato's ex-girl, also materializes, together with a pretty, ruffled cipher named Carol Ciardi, who is Silvera's girl, and who weeps appropriately. Within the week, Silvera is dead from complications brought on by drugs. Donato, ice cubes of fear melting in his pockets, abruptly glimpses the difference between his peach-fuzz vision of life and the sandbags of true responsibility—both to Silvera and to Helen, whom he had jilted the year before after getting her pregnant and seeing her up to an abortion. He becomes finally, on the last page, a man.

Like many of its ilk, "Second Ending" is badly written. (Someone has unfashionably but rightly said that style—style being the degree of loving skill with which words, not thoughts, are handled—makes a piece of writing live.) Mr. Hunter speaks, for example, of the "gentle lap of snowflakes against the windows" (how can the geometry of a snowflake "lap" anything?); of "eyebrows . . . like individual shaggy grinning mouths" (a disgusting, as well as very inexact, simile); and of pain-stabbed eyes, in which the "irises [are] crumbling" (whatever else eyes do, they simply do not crumble, like castles or sandhills). This sort of embellishment is catchy, certainly, but only because it is doodads and soda.

But Mr. Hunter is bent, above all, on the dirty, sad bones of drug addiction:

You will wake up wanting heroin and go to bed wanting it, if you go to bed. You will always and ever want it, and there will be no other thought in your mind but heroin. There will be a single purpose to your life, and your every waking minute is devoted to that

purpose, and that doesn't leave time for anything else, not even thinking about anything else, it does not leave time for anything but H, there aren't enough hours in a day, you are married to H, you are married to death . . .

In view of this, then, the book's resolution seems right. But there is a fatal technical flaw in it and the whole novel. We are never told enough about the roots of the four principals. (This is the same sort of mistake Henry James made in "Portrait of a Lady," where he tells us briefly and mystically at the outset that Isabel Archer, the flame of robust Puritanism brightly burning, comes from good connections in Albany—Albany, presumably, being a fount of impregnable idealism and courage.) The result is that the wretchedness of drug addiction becomes a kind of towering bear which has, for some reason, attacked two weak but otherwise normal people who exist, for all purposes, in a vacuum. This unexplained condition, one suddenly finds, wrenches the book irretrievably away from any creative pretenses it may have been moving toward and back to pamphleteering, where symbols shake their fingers at us and intone dark, shabby facts.

Notes

FREUDIAN FAUST: Douglass Wallop's "The Sunken Garden" (Norton, \$3.50), his third novel, is a far cry from the farce and fantasy of its predecessor, "The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant." The devil, however, is present again, this time a Freudian Faust corrupting ethics in the interests of instinct, subverting ideals for ids. His attack is launched against a stock figure of our time, a glib exurbanite huckster, here named Tom Forester, who successfully cons himself out of his little domestic Eden into the wasteland of disillusion and impulse.

Tom's switch from the authority of the commandments to the anarchy of his appetites begins in a casual conversation with a willowy beauty named Louise Gorman. These two tell each other about the good marriages they have and then proceed, cathexis by cathexis, from oblique flirtation to stolen kisses to "a life on a floor between floors" to the inevitable crisis: they discover, in the end, the long ache in the brief encounter.

The real trouble with Tom is that he arrives at middle age mixed-up instead of mature. He is long on words, short on awareness. His affections are less intense than his infatuations. He doesn't see the irony of hi-fidelity