



—Richard L. Simon.

Irwin Shaw—"clever prose, craftsmanship."

Domestic Deception

"Lucy Crown," by Irwin Shaw (Random House. 339 pp. \$3.95), describes the effects of the infidelities of a felinely beautiful matron on her estranged husband and young son.

By James Kelly

FOR SOME readers Irwin Shaw's new novel, "Lucy Crown," will be a remarkably apt comment on the modern, high-style marriage, complete with rudderless child and freedom for neuroses. For others it will be a loosely linked chain of domestic confrontations proving mostly that life is morose and doom-laden. Either way the infidelities of a felinely beautiful matron named Lucy Crown and their effect upon her estranged husband and bitter, lonely son give Mr. Shaw a mobile vehicle for somber comment on the ways of the world.

As a novel "Lucy Crown" samples more of the moral dilemmas of Graham Greene than the passionate social problems of Mr. Shaw's previous novels, "The Young Lions" and "Troubled Air." Shall an alert woman allow her husband to stifle her individuality? Shall a husband forgive an errant wife? Is adultery "the upper-middle class American woman's form of self-expression"? Should the child of such a marriage be expected to pay the biggest price? These are the worthy problems raised in this fictional game of truth and consequences. Yet one feels that the book has been written, not felt, that these human materials have been dealt with clinically.

It is as if complexly motivated and related characters from one of Mr.

Shaw's *New Yorker* stories were projected upon a bigger screen. They talk smartly and react credibly in the visual tableaux arranged for them. But they do not grow in size or significance. There's an intellectual aridity that locks them forever in coldly dramatic poses, unrescued by affectionate sympathy from their creator. And some readers will feel a certain queasiness when invited to peep at the victims in their helpless exposure.

"When we look back into the past we recognize a moment in time which was decisive, at which the pattern of our lives changed, a moment at which we moved irrevocably off in a new direction." For the Crown family it is the Vermont summer of 1937 when thirteen-year-old Tony catches his mother in transient lust with a worshipful college boy. From this point we watch the lives of Tony, Lucy, and Oliver Crown spin downward: Tony, to bewildered exile in smart boys' schools and sardonic expatriate adulthood; Lucy, to the search for fulfillment through uncritical sex; Oliver, to the collapse of refinement and the mock heroics of an overage officer in the 1941 war. They are real people, disturbing to contemplate as they repeatedly prove their incompatibility: mother and son, father and son, mother and father flashboxed to 1940 encounters. And finally Lucy, Tony, and Tony's wife at a climactic chance meeting in the Paris of 1955 as they spar their way to a glimmer of hope. When it's all over we wish them better luck and a kinder fate while rejecting their symbols.

"Lucy Crown" will not disappoint Shaw followers who expect clever prose and scene-by-scene craftsmanship. But it is likely to appeal most to those who like to swallow off-beat domestic problems, unsugarcoated.



—Sergis Alberts.

Viña Delmar—"well written, authentic."

Unjealous Husband

"Beloved," by Viña Delmar (Harcourt, Brace. 379 pp. \$3.95), is a romantic biography of Judah P. Benjamin, the Jew who served as Governor of Louisiana and Secretary of State of the Confederacy.

By Harrison Smith

WHEN Viña Delmar first appeared on the literary scene, in the Twenties, saccharine love stories were still the currency of the day. Her series of accurately realistic studies of the tribulations of young women in city life, bearing such flaming titles as "Bad Girl," "Loose Ladies," "Kept Women," and "The Marriage Racket," changed all that. Even those readers who have watched her work steadily mature since then will be surprised to discover that her tenth novel is based on the life of one of America's most distinguished lawyers, Judah Benjamin, who served as Governor of Louisiana, Secretary of War, and finally Secretary of State of the Confederate Government during the Civil War, with not even that the end of his astonishing career.

"Beloved" may seem to be an odd title for an historical and biographical novel of a statesman, but it has its appropriateness, for that was the name applied to him by the beautiful Creole girl of wealth and family he married, one of those unfortunate women now labeled nymphomaniacs.

Judah Benjamin was the son of a devout Jewish family living in Charleston, S. C. A brilliant student, he was sent to Yale by a kindly benefactor at the age of fourteen. He had to go home in disgrace when racially-prejudiced classmates accused him of stealing. With a few dollars in his pocket he headed for turbulent New Orleans, where he found a place for himself in a friendly lawyer's office. He was a handsome, ambitious youth, whose charm and brilliance could not be denied. While he was mastering New Orleans's complex legal system he decided to increase his income by tutoring lovely, amorous Natalie St. Martin. In a few months he had married her and was living with her in her parents' luxurious mansion. A biographer who was not a novelist might assume that he was deliberately feathering his own nest; but Viña Delmar never doubts the honesty of his passion and his complete lack of jealousy when Natalie returned from a visit to a lover with the explanation that she had been "shopping."

In a few years Benjamin was the

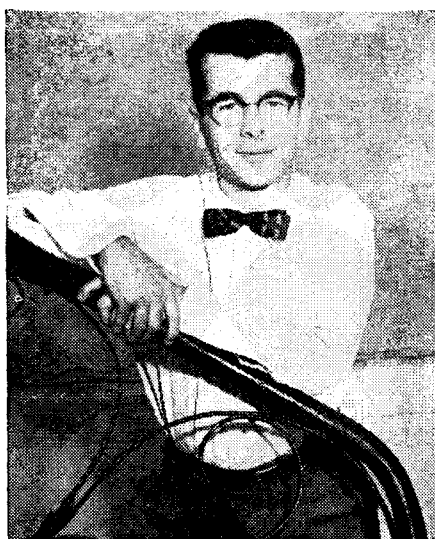
most renowned lawyer in the state, with a palatial home and estate down the river, where there were no lovers for Natalie. Then came the day he returned from a trip to New York, bringing a diamond necklace he had bought from August Belmont, to find that she had fled to Paris. In the many letters she sent him over the years she always addressed him as "Beloved." For Benjamin life had to go on without Natalie. He was elected Governor of Louisiana, and when Jefferson Davis was forming his cabinet after Lincoln's election the President of the Confederacy sent for him.

Miss Delmar's chapters devoted to the war are well written and doubtless authentic. President Davis is portrayed as a contentious man who tried to dominate his cabinet. The retreat from Richmond after General Lee's surrender is dramatic, though it presents Davis as a terrified and witless fugitive. Secretary Benjamin escapes to Florida, his wealth and estates having vanished.

Eventually he made his way to London. In an astonishingly short time the Louisiana lawyer became a leader of the British bar. He died happily with Natalie and a Catholic priest hovering over him. Benjamin's conquest of London may have to be taken with a few grains of salt, but after all "Beloved" is a romance, and one can forgive a good deal of prejudice in favor of a man who so deeply loved his erring wife.

DOOMED BALLPLAYER: Baseball fiction entered maturity with Ring Lardner's "You Know Me Al." It is now brilliantly composed by Eliot Asinof, by Charles Einstein—and by Mark Harris, the title of whose most recent novel, "**Bang the Drum Slowly**" (Knopf, \$3.50), comes from a cowboy song, "O bang the drum slowly and play the fife slowly./Play the dead march as they carry me on," and sets the mood of a novel which tells the story of a baseball player who knows that he is the victim of a fatal disease. "I am doomed," says Bruce Pearson when he learns he has Hodgkin's Disease.

There will be death in the indefinite but probably near future, but until it comes he can play ball. "I been handed a —— deal," he says. "But the world is all rosy. It never looked better." The emotions of all Mark Harris's characters are primitive and uncultivated, and there is no sentimentality in Pearson as he faces death or in his teammates when they learn that one of their number is playing his last season. They are unsophisticated, physically-centered men, and Mr. Harris has respected their emo-



—Mike Blass.

Mark Harris—"... primitive emotions."

tional and mental simplicity. In his treatment of his theme he is shallow beside Tolstoy's treatment of the same theme in "The Death of Ivan Ilych," but he is deep alongside Hemingway's treatment of the last days of Colonel Cantwell as recounted in "Across the River and Into the Trees."

—GORHAM MUNSON.

ROMANTIC SINGER: In "The Signorina" (Crown, \$3.95) Henry Myers has written a biographical novel about Maria Malibran, a nineteenth-century opera singer who managed to gather all the ingredients of an absorbing work of fiction into her short and widely celebrated career. She was the daughter of a brutish, tyrannical, but accomplished Spanish singer, Manuel Garcia, who was determined that Maria should become the outstanding operatic luminary of her generation—which she did. Her first big successes took place in New York City in 1825-1826 with the troupe organized by her father to introduce Italian opera to the United States; and in that city, one day before her eighteenth birthday, she married a supposedly wealthy merchant, Eugène Malibran, who was old enough to be her father and who promptly went bankrupt. In less than two years she had left him and returned to Europe to commence a dazzling decade in the leading opera houses and the salons of the aristocracy. A young violinist-composer, Charles de Bériot, became her lover, the father of her son, and eventually her legal husband. And then she died, quite suddenly, at the age of twenty-eight.

It is quite a story. A biographical novel about Maria Malibran need only stick to the facts for its plot, leaving the interpretation and filling out of those facts to the novelist's imagi-

nation and artistry. Mr. Myers's publishers assure us that this is what he has done. But he has not. "The Signorina" distorts history badly and ends by being neither a dependable biography nor a compelling piece of fiction. Mr. Myers, for example, puts Eugène Malibran's age at seventy and has Maria marry him in cold blood and without permission solely to escape her father's domination. In fact, Eugène was forty-four, Maria was obviously in love (her letters to him prove it), and her parents consented to the marriage. The relationship between Eugène and Maria could well be illuminated by a novelist, but Mr. Myers only beclouds the episode. Again "The Signorina" describes Maria's appearance "in 'The Devil's Bridge,' by Adrien Boieldieu." "It is our fashion in this moment of musical history," writes Henry Myers, "to know nothing of Boieldieu." Apparently so, since "The Devil's Bridge" was composed by two Englishmen named Charles Horn and John Braham.

Similar historical blemishes mar the entire novel. Maria Malibran deserves better than this. —ROLAND GELATT.

ATTACK ON USA: In Pat Frank's "Forbidden Area" (Lippincott, \$3.50) one Henry Hazen and his sweetheart, making love on an isolated Florida beach by night, witness, of all things, the landing of a Buick and three men from the dark shape of a submarine. The three men are Russians who have been trained to be Americans, and, happily, young Hazen reports them to the authorities. Mr. Frank then takes us to an interesting meeting of six men and a woman in a windowless recess of the Pentagon. These are known as the Intentions of the Enemy Group. Their job is to think unremittingly of what they would do if they were the enemy, the famous word THINK being their slogan—with the rider LIKE THE ENEMY. For good cause this group becomes unanimously convinced that Russia is about to launch an attack on the U.S., and it is precisely here that Mr. Frank's novel touches its main note of warning. No one will pay any attention to the Group's report, and, Mr. Frank seems to be saying, such complacency—of two kinds—is the deadliest danger the nation might face. First we must not believe in the impossibility of attack; and, second, we must not be lulled into security by the improbability of a given circumstance. One Naval officer in this story makes the vital decision on a long shot simply because he was at Pearl Harbor when the listeners decided that the radar indication of approaching raiders must

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