

blance to the experiment begun in 1917. "Having killed the spirit of the revolution by murdering so many revolutionaries," he writes, "Stalin resurrected the dead heroes of the Czarist past and revived the once-reviled attributes of the buried monarchy. . . . This was an attempt to weave Communism like an invisible patch into Russia's national fabric." As for Communism, he maintains, it is "political cannibalism; it destroys the good intentions of its idealistic adherents and the effectiveness of its liberal fellow travelers." And the new "collective leadership," partners and henchmen of the departed Stalin, are not changing this in the least.

It is impossible in a review even to summarize the contents of so big and compact a book. But there are parts which carry particular impact or have a special meaning for the future. The author's relations with Gandhi, for instance, are tender and revealing. He obviously feels that this simple man of peace was the greatest leader not only of our time but of many centuries, that Gandhi's philosophy, pointing the way to a better life, will live long after us.

THERE is a fascinating account of Louis Fischer's constructive intervention in Philippine politics which, helping bring about an alliance of Laurel, Recto, and Magsaysay, prepared the way for the latter's election to the Presidency. Inasmuch as the Philippines is a key nation in the East-West struggle the inauguration of incorruptible, progressive Magsaysay was an event of prime importance.

Japan, on the frontier of the vast Soviet empire, is of paramount significance to the future of the world. Yet we Americans have not always used the maximum of statesmanship, or even good taste, in our relations with the people of Nippon. "In 1955," Mr. Fischer reminds us, "U.S. armed forces stationed in Japan engaged in artillery practice on the slopes of beautiful Mount Fuji, which the Japanese consider sacred. This is not the way to make friends."

Certainly the most dramatic pages of the volume deal with the East German uprising against the Russians three years ago. This was a spontaneous outbreak staged by workingmen and young people. When the Red army intervened "defiant Davids hurled stones at the giant tanks, pushed logs between their wheels, stuffed bricks, briefcases, and refuse into their cannon mouths, and even clambered up their steel sides and broke their radio antennae."

The unorganized, unarmed East
(Continued on page 36)

FICTION

An African's Dilemma

"A Wreath for Udomo," by Peter Abrahams (Alfred A. Knopf. 356 pp. \$3.95), is the story of a Negro African who leaves his London girl to work for his race through a terrorist movement.

By Harvey Curtis Webster

PROBABLY Peter Abrahams's "A Wreath for Udomo" is the most perceptive novel that has been written about the complex interplay between British imperialism and African nationalism and tribalism. The thesis, which is plausibly presented in a novel that makes the reader like running with it, is that there can be no natural human relationships between African Negroes and the best intentioned whites until Africa is free. This, the novel implies, will not be soon, for there are as many conflicts among Africans as there are among the often benign rulers. Although the novel is expertly particularized, it reminds one of Christine Weston's "Indigo," Forster's "Passage to India," Koestler's "Thieves in the Night," and many Irish novels in its fictional demonstration of why potential friendliness between subjects and subjectors is impossible or unlikely. Like these other better novels, it makes us feel what the history of America, Ireland, and India proves to our intellects.

Mr. Abrahams's novel has great virtues. For one thing it avoids propagandistic oversimplification. The chief character, Udomo, wants and works for the liberation of his continent. But what he desires most basically is his own and everyone's chance for happiness. When he is in London he loves Lois, an English girl, and is relatively free of white prejudice. But he cannot deny the compulsions to place above everything else his will to make Africa the peer of all continents. So he leaves Lois and England to work in Africa with the terrorist Mhendi, with the politic tribalist Endura, with the violent tribalist Selina. He fails because British colonialism is stronger and because he comes to believe that the wish for a tribalism that segregates and immures one in the past is even worse than the materialistic but progressive European ideals of the more benevolent among the colonialists. His intelligent efforts to achieve compromise

fail, though his defeat promises greater things than the victory that might have come had he descended to demagoguery.

Unlike most modern novelists who write about Africa and our own South, Mr. Abrahams refuses to misrepresent either conditions or people. He sympathetically presents the impractical idealism of Lanham, the terrorism of Mhendi, the tribalism of Selina, the English lord who finds it easy to be "reasonable," the white governors who wish a good-for-Africa that protocol and England's economic dependence on Africa makes impossible.

Though the emphasizes the fact that Africans cannot be fully men until Africa is free, he also shows that "the whites are not enemies because they are white, but because they deny . . . freedom": the reactionary tribalists emerge as worse enemies than the colonialists who condescend. "A Wreath for Udomo" makes one understand the complicated mixture of good-and-bad in Africa nearly as well as Forster's novel about India.

The defect of "A Wreath for Udomo" is that the characters, excepting Udomo, are more personifications of different points of view than people. Reading it one understands the conflicts and the complications without losing sight of the desirable ideal of one world where those who can, can become equals. But the men and women do not seem fully human as they do in the novels by Forster, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison that deal with approximately the same problems of misrelations and misunderstandings.



"... complicated mixture of good-and-bad."

Sin-Soaked in Storyville

"A Walk on the Wild Side," by Nelson Algren (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 346 pp. \$4.50), the new novel by the author of "The Man With the Golden Arm," traces the progress of country-boy Dove Linkhorn through the horror parlors of New Orleans.

By James Kelly

AS A JAILBIRD named Cross-Country Kline remarks late in "A Walk on the Wild Side": "There's no trick in not going down the drain if you don't live in the sink." From the raw poetry of its beginning in a depression-blighted Texas tank town (1931 A.D.) through the Storyville horror parlors of New Orleans and back again, Nelson Algren's new novel stays with the sink people. We watch them squirm, fight, pander, couple, get drunk, and embroider daydreams that are only slightly less grotesque than the serialized nightmare of their daily lives. As in "Never Come Morning" and "The Man With the Golden Arm," Mr. Algren gives us a bum's-eye view of a social echelon seldom mentioned in specific terms except by the cop on the beat. And in many ways it is a better-made book than any he has written before. The Chicago School of Realism has a new headmaster who frames his materials

in back-country balladry and earthy lyricism. Enveloping pornography, as bluntly couched as ever, has now become incidental to the journalist's desire to get the facts and the historian's need to relate them to human affairs. To complete the effect, one could only ask for Toulouse-Lautrec illustrations and Louis Armstrong music.

Not that everybody who reads books will enjoy this guided tour of depression degeneracy and degradation, complete with a full cast of submerged people whom the author regards tenderly and with full allowance for contributing circumstance. *Caveat lector* to the young, the militantly pure in heart, and the old lady from Dubuque. Yet Mr. Algren's way with words, handled with full respect for interior rhythms, and his rich comedic sense help to make "A Walk on the Wild Side" an impressive performance. Prostitutes, pimps, freaks, and half-people wander at will through an episodic plot; but one can't think of a dull one in the lot. And an old abortionist, now occupied with more devious obscenities, speaks for all: "Look out for love, look out for trust, look out for giving. Look out for wine, look out for daisies and people who laugh readily. Be especially wary of friendship, Son, it can only lead to trouble."

Dove Linkhorn, a ruttish country boy who believes in acts before words,

blazes quite a trail for the reader. Leaving Texas by the hobo route following a forcible encounter with a waitress twice his age, illiterate young Dove swaggers into Storyville society where anything is fine if a body enjoys it and can get away with it, from stealing on down. As a gawky stud-bum with yellow shoes, the boy joins a man's world which centers in the houses and hangouts of red-light row. In a way he becomes one of the prominent members of this little community, participating in all its games and divertissements with a zest too violent to be feigned. Some of his best friends are prostitutes, including a former schoolteacher who lives with him long enough to impart a sketchy reading familiarity with poetry. It is quite an idyll among the girls, business agents, sexual freaks, and rheumy-eyed expendables. But the fun falters when Dove is picked up in a raid and joins other oddballs in the local jail. And the fun grinds to a complete halt shortly after his release when Dove and the schoolmarm's amputee gentleman friend meet in a climactic saloon fight that stays terribly memorable in the mind. The worldly indoctrination of Dove Linkhorn, now finished, has nearly finished him. Only the spectre of a country boy remains to be counted, and it may be that Mr. Algren intended all along to arrive at this moral QED.

"A Walk on the Wild Side" will be too rough for frail sightseers, but a participant's backward look at a wild 1931 landscape with figures seems worth the effort. "It's awful when it's like this," Dove thought, "and it's like this now."



—Robert McCullough.

el to him (see next page); he is awaiting public reaction to his own new novel (see above); and he is embroiled in a law dispute concerning his 1949 National Book Award-winning novel, "The Man With the Golden Arm." About the dispute Rex Stout, vice-president of the Authors League of America, has this to say: "For a man [Nelson Algren] to write a novel called the 'Man With the Golden Arm,' to have that novel made into a motion picture, and to have the motion picture advertised as 'A

NELSON ALGREN is making news three ways this week: Simone de Beauvoir has dedicated her latest nov-

film by Otto Preminger,' is certainly not a pleasant experience and for most writers of novels would be intolerable." It has apparently proved intolerable to Algren, for he has filed a \$250,000 law suit in the New York State Supreme Court not only over credit-line difficulty with producer Preminger but also over profits on the film version of his novel.

The suit explains that the motion-picture rights to "The Man With the Golden Arm" originally were sold by Algren to Roberts Productions for \$15,000 and 5 per cent of net profits on the picture, with the proviso that if Roberts were to resell the movie rights 50 per cent of such a transaction would go to Algren. As it happened, Roberts resold the picture rights to Otto Preminger and Carlyle Productions, who are cur-

rently distributing the film version to the theatres. Algren claims that in this chain transaction no one has accounted to him for any of the profits of the Roberts resale or the film's distribution. Algren also charges that he has never transferred sheet and title music rights to the Barton Music Corporation, who have published a song "The Man With the Golden Arm," with lyrics ("There's no escape, and there's no friend/ How did it start and where will it end?") and music by Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn. Though based on the theme music of the film Algren scores it as a composition not up to the literary and artistic standards set by the novel.

Writers and film-trade people eagerly await the outcome of a law suit that might set important new precedents. —S. P. M.