



—Henri Cartier-Bresson.

Albert Camus—"... confused ... at times shallow thinker."

Man's Hopelessness

"The Fall," by **Albert Camus** (translated by Justin O'Brien. Knopf. 147 pp. \$3), is a philosophical disquisition in the form of a novel by one of France's leading men of letters. Henri Peyre of Yale reviews it here.

By Henri Peyre

MANY will grudge their approval to the claim, made on the jacket of his new book, "The Fall," that Albert Camus is "Europe's greatest living writer." Half a dozen European authors, and in France certainly Mauriac, Malraux, Cocteau, and Sartre, tower, in this reader's opinion, high above the fine prose writer, but also the confused and, at times, the shallow thinker, that Camus is. What is worse, the gift of imaginative creation, through which Camus might have given life to convincing characters and saturated his audience in a teeming wealth of observed, visionary, and symbolic details, seems deficient in him.

"The Fall" is another *récit*, briefer, less dramatic, more strained than "The Stranger." Brevity and economy are virtues, but mostly when they imply a victory over a rebellious and over-abundant material. The *récit*, as Gide, who practised it with superb skill, well knew, tends to remain too close to a diary or to a confession and to preclude the portrayal of conflicts or even of dialogues. The umbilical cord is not severed. "The Fall,"

a long but seldom a dramatic monologue, is likely to occupy only a transitional place in Camus's evolution. It is received with some disappointment by those who had, since 1947, expected a major fictional attempt by the author of "The Plague." Will Camus, like Mauriac and Sartre, henceforth prefer ideology and the search for an ethical absolute to imaginative writing?

The narrative Camus uses for the basis of his *récit* is uncomplicated. A Parisian lawyer, who had enjoyed professional success in pleading for "widows and orphans" and had led a brilliant life, sprinkled with a number of erotic adventures, fully satisfying to his ego, suddenly became seized with remorse. One evening, while crossing the Seine, he failed to rescue a girl who plunged to her death into the river. The revelation that his own life and that of most men rested on lies, that the selfishness of a secure

and successful man is only equalled by his monstrous vanity, descended upon him. He left Paris, not for those Mediterranean climates which Camus, the Algerian, loves and conjures up with romantic vividness, but for the poorest harbor district of Amsterdam.

There he became "a penitent judge," confessing himself garrulously, in a low class bar of which he is the proprietor, to a silent listener who, like Coleridge's wedding-guest, cannot choose but hear. He multiplies masochistic questions to denounce his good conscience which had stifled his self-incriminating scruples; he lays bare his own ignominious complacency, cherishes his newly discovered guilt feelings. Meursault, the stranger who had murdered an Arab, was unaware of evil and innocent of introspective self-torture. The former lawyer, Clamence, whose peccadilloes hardly justify his exaggerated and overloquent sense of guilt, accuses himself endlessly and accuses all men thereby. His confession is, like so many confessions, tainted with hypocrisy. He merges his own guilt into the universal guilt of all men. "*Nous sommes tous des assassins*," as a well-known French film proclaims.

The long monologue of the repentant and penitent lawyer turned judge fails to carry conviction, in part because the style is too obviously Camus's pungent, epigrammatic prose. The most felicitous remarks, often incidental to the main course of the confession, are the reflections of Camus, the moralist. "Man is the only being who refuses to be what he is." "Man cannot love without loving himself." The tone is sarcastic, often reminiscent of Swift but unfortunately less ferociously bitter than Swift's. The message implied by "The Fall"—in spite of one allusion to Christ which might denote in Camus, a "Pascal without Christ," as a Jesuit review called him ten years ago, a more sympathetic attitude to Christianity and announce an ulterior quest for a redemption—is a desperate one. Sisyphus, condemned by the gods could live happily. The doctor in "The Plague" found his fellow men deserving of love far more than of scorn. Camus's illusions of the hopeful years which followed France's liberation in 1945 have been shattered. He still maintains that insecurity is needed to make man think and that intellectual comfort and the refusal to face oneself in one's full authenticity are the most insidious foes of man's inner progress. But he holds out little hope that through action, through spiritual or political reform, even through intellectual courage, man may change himself for the better.



Green Punk

"A Ticket for a Seamstitch," by Mark Harris (Knopf. 143 pp. \$3), is the newest instalment in the saga of the New York Mammoths, this one dealing with a young catcher and the scrapes his dreams get him into.

By Hubert Saal

MOST sports fiction relies for sustenance on competition. Will the Giants win the pennant? Will Joe emerge from his slump in time to hit the decisive home run? But not in Mark Harris.

Since Ring Lardner, only Harris has been able to use the stadium as a proper arena for the exercise of a major talent. Like Lardner, Harris derives the high comedy of his books from an atmosphere charged with the pressures of competition, brief careers, and overwhelming cupidity. But where Lardner's humor is acrimonious and rooted in scorn, Harris is indulgent, the laughter of affection. He gives baseball players the dignity Lardner withheld from them. If the humor stems from the exaggerated edges of a "madcap fringe," at the center the moral values are identical with the values of the world outside. "The Southpaw" was the odyssey of Henry Wiggins struggling against base impulses. In "Bang the Drum Slowly," Wiggen, less green, tougher, was still chief percussionist for the indomitable Bruce Pearson, who awoke to life as he lost it.

In his new book, "A Ticket for a Seamstitch," Harris doesn't come near the mark his first two set. It sure run

short, to use a Wiggensism. Not that I see any inherent virtue in length. But "A Ticket" fails to treat issues of any magnitude or complication. Its chief character, Piney Woods, new catcher and roommate of "Author" Wiggen, is a "green punk" whose swagger and numerous diversions distract him from the job of playing baseball. Piney is swollen with immaturity; he's even afraid to laugh out loud; he's afraid of nobody, he tells everybody. Wiggen wouldn't care if Piney never learned how to play baseball—or became a man either—except that Piney's newest preoccupation is a California seamstress (seamstitch) who Piney is shepherding East by mail without having seen her. All this diverts Piney from his appointed task and threatens to keep Wiggen from equalling Carl Hubbell's consecutive winning streak. The big double-header, the winning streak, and the seamstitch arrive at the Stadium together. In the course of things, Piney learns to laugh and begins "to put away childish things."

BUT Piney never really takes hold of his story; he never really develops until the very end. Nor does his seamstitch help out when she arrives. She was disappointing not only to Piney but to me. It is, after all, the gentle and forgiving Wiggen, surely one of the finest comic characters still on the active roster, who offers the most reading pleasure. But since it wasn't his book, he should have been allowed to accept a secondary role. When he's on, it's hilarious; the Harris ear for idiom is of the highest fidelity still; the game, the crowds, the strong young men in the hot sun all present or accounted for. It's all frosting on the cake. There just isn't enough cake.

Life in Venice

"The King of a Rainy Country," by Brigid Brophy (Knopf. 243 pp. Paperbound, \$1.25), tells of a trans-European bus tour and what befalls its members when they reach Venice.

By Walter Havighurst

"THE shutters of Paris give an impression you can see in, though in fact you can't." This observation defines romance for the restless young romantics whose pursuit Brigid Brophy follows in her quite modern novel "The King of a Rainy Country"—a pursuit which moves from present-day London to Rome and Venice. It takes her narrator from a girlhood attachment with an English schoolmate to a mature friendship with an American singer whose days are numbered, and it brings her close to her desire of living wholly, at least for one moment, in the fleeting present.

A bizarre set of circumstances send two oddly paired young people from their Bohemian life in London on the search which begins in a London Art School and ends at the International Film Festival in Venice. To get to Italy the penniless romantics become couriers to a busload of American travelers, escorting them from Nice to Pisa to Rome to Florence to Venice. Here the novel sags, in a routine caricature of American tourists with their cameras and complaints and their endless chatter "like a parrot house." The travelogue fills five chapters, and then, at Venice, the novel achieves a texture and vitality that make up for its former thinness.

The young romantics are less interesting in themselves than in the way they see things. They have curiosity, candor, and directness. Having cast off traditional distinctions of class, creed, and color, they make a sharp distinction between the quick and the dead. In Venice they find a quickening awareness and a heightening of relationships, relationships which change and deepen as the stones of Venice change under the fierce sunlight and the evening shadows.

In a brief space—just a few scenes and no more than fifty pages—Miss Brophy accomplishes a complete creation of Helena Buchan, the American singer. Here the novel has a power of suggestion which goes beyond what appears on the page. The American singer has both candor and reticence, she is the possessor of a full experience which still has left her wanting

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—Italian State Tourist Office.

Venice—"... relationships ... change and deepen."