

reviewer it seems doubtful that so many ordinary Okinawans would spend so much time in obscure, mystical philosophizing. But whether this is true or not, "Fifth Daughter" remains vivid and competent writing. Not many first novelists do as well.

LOEB-LEOPOLD REVISITED: One must feel a certain sense of sympathy for James Yaffe's unhappy position as the writer of "Nothing But the Night" (Little, Brown, \$3.95), a novel which covers substantially the same material as that exploited by Meyer Levin in his best-selling "Compulsion." Both writers have chosen the tragic Loeb-Leopold case as the source-book for their works. Mr. Yaffe has updated the situation and denatured the material somewhat: i.e., although Mr. Yaffe has had some critical success with his pictures of middle-class American Jewish life, the milieu he describes in his book is oddly without national or religious background—the Morrisises and the Kings, families of the two murderers, are neither Jew nor Gentile—not fish nor fowl.

It is sometimes unfair to compare books on the same general theme but the comparison, in this case, is bound to be inescapable for both writers have drawn the elements of their works from the same historical bucket. What they have done with them constitutes the difference between the two books. This reviewer feels that the question of quality (always a difficult one to pin down) ought to be disposed of by saying this: that while Mr. Levin's book is not quite the towering literary achievement it is advertised to be, it is powerful enough and honest enough to throw a very deep shadow on "Nothing But the Night."

The Loeb-Leopold case is well-known enough not to need detailing here, and Mr. Yaffe has used much of it to tell the story of Barry Morris and Paul King, two brilliant high-school seniors who conspired to commit that mystical murder of a twelve-year-old boy. We have seen the tragic procession before—even to the smaller details—the planning, the fantasy of the master and the slave between the two adolescent boys, the clue of the dropped eyeglasses, the trial, the public fever, the defense. It is a hideous experience, even when it is poorly told and we bring to Mr. Yaffe's sketchy and superficial account the mass of our own emotions, our own unhappiness, our own cruel knowledge of what the final outcome must be.

We know the power of the material and we have a right to expect from the novelist that he will either render



—Elliott Erwitt.

Pamela H. Johnson—"unerring."



—Thomas Channing Woodbury.

James Yaffe—"tragic procession."

the experience more vividly or provide us with new insights of pity or hatred, of understanding or anger. Mr. Yaffe does neither. It is hard to determine just why he has failed but the evidence of his failure is very plain in the reading. This is a story which Mr. Yaffe has handled gingerly, uncertainly. It is a tragedy which demands a good deal of the reader, but even more of the writer. Mr. Yaffe either could not, or would not meet the great demands it made of him.

—DAVID KARP.

LOVE AND FRUSTRATION: Pamela Hansford Johnson is one of the few English novelists who have been able through a succession of books to write of love and marriage without sentimentality or any tinge of eroticism. Her first novel, written when she was twenty-two, was aptly titled "This Bed Thy Center" and, metaphorically at least, it remains the core of the fifteen books which have followed it.

The setting for "The Sea and the Wedding" (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.95) is a typical, expensive, seaside resort hotel, the Moray, not far from London, inhabited by the usual collection of wealthy old couples and elderly ladies. The narrator of this tale of love and frustration is Christine Hall, a novelist. When she meets a gruff old doctor, his contentious, possessive wife, and their daughter, Celia Baird, she is soon involved in a complex and fascinating romance.

To escape from her mother, Celia had bought a small secretarial agency in London, where she met and fell in love with Eric Aveling, a handsome and successful architect whose partner, Junius Evans, is a mildly homosexual designer of exotic inte-

riors. The Moray is a perfect setting for a love affair. After her parents have retired for the night Celia has only to run upstairs and rap on Eric's door. Marriage was impossible since Eric's wife was slowly dying of an incurable disease in a hospital a few miles from the hotel. A brilliant and beautiful woman, Lois was now a pitiful wreck whose malady unfortunately made her believe that she was on the verge of recovery.

The novel then turns to London, where Christine Hall discovers that Celia adores dingy night clubs inhabited by dubious young men and women seeking the profits of their nefarious trade. Another character, Nancy Sherriff, appears, a charming young woman whose relatives are wealthy, though her father is a frenetic man with just enough money to keep up appearances.

The gruesome visits to the bedside of poor Lois, her features reduced to the grim spectacle of a withered skull, are finally ended by her death. At this point in Pamela Johnson's novel chaos is twice confounded. Who is going to marry whom? The author offers a couple of surprises.

The heart of this extraordinary novel lies in the ability of Miss Johnson to comprehend the complexities of human relationships and the dilemma of modern woman torn between love and conscience. Moreover, her skill in portraying all the characters who surround the central theme of her story is unerring and brilliant.

—HARRISON SMITH.

HOME VS. WANDERLUST: The inexplicable vitality of Southern fiction is again startlingly demonstrated by a newcomer. South-Carolinian Vinnie Williams's first novel, "The Fruit Tramp"

(Harper, \$3.50), is a story of migratory fruit pickers, chiefly in Florida. As a work of art it is a distinguished failure that immediately places its author near the top of the Southern Conference ladies' handicap, one slot below Flannery O'Connor.

Although this novel is in several respects Steinbeck and branch water (an attractive and palatable mixture), in "The Fruit Tramp" the conflict is between the hobo talent, or the roving stimulus, in the male and the nesting instinct of women. It would have been enough in the first place to say that Mrs. Williams is a woman. She is interested in persons and their marriages, not in class distinctions or injustice or economic theories.

Her novel is in disrupted sonata form, starting out with a clear and interesting statement of a theme which she later decides the hell with. The book is so well written, so real in atmosphere and characterization, that it is exasperating to find a *Redbook* ending slung at one in the closing pages. The novel is ruined, as spoon bread superbly cooked would be if it were all goosed up with molasses.

Here, in short, is a major talent that may (like Mrs. Keyes's) find its public before it finds itself.

—JOHN COOK WYLLIE.

MIDDLE-CLASS MATRIMONY: Penelope Mortimer writes a spare, effective, often bitter prose tempered with intimate understanding and pointed up by occasional savage irony as she unfolds the eventless *via crucis* of middle-class married life. "The Bright Prison" (Harcourt, Brace, \$3.50) is, of course, marriage itself, that double yoke in which two people so often stand, sit, and lie down side by side for years without in the least sense living and growing together. Mark and Antonia Painton have not so much come to take each other for granted as mislaid each other's identity. Their roles as parents and as householders have pre-empted the place their early love wished each to reserve for the mate. Mark is the harried barrister, supporting a wife and four children, three of them girls. Antonia is the coping mother, the wife battling with a cumbersome and hideous house, impossible to heat, impossible to keep neat, clean. How many years since they have had a few days alone together? Antonia cannot at first remember, then dates it logically enough from the birth of their first child.

This story turns on a weekend when, by frightening coincidence, that long-lost solitude is thrust upon them. Antonia travels with her two younger children to leave them for a vacation with her parents; on her return to

London late the same day, her second child, Charlotte, has been taken to the hospital for an appendectomy and her eldest, Georgina, has packed herself off to stay with a school friend a few blocks away.

Antonia and Mark, fortified by good news from the hospital, could at last have caught their breath, looked each other in the face. But the reprieve has come too late: Mark has wandered in sullen despondency into a messy relationship with a little tough he has met at the hospital; Antonia, momentarily beguiled by the will-o'-the-wisp of being loved for herself, turns away disenchanted when she finds that once more she is to be taken as "the mother figure."

After a crescendo of incidents of stunning credibility and impact, the brief, agonized stabs at escape are over—Antonia and Mark stumble home in silence, in acquiescence. They are kept together not only by their children but by a series of inadvertencies which, Mrs. Mortimer seems to be saying, play the decisive role in the acceptance of the marriage pattern.

Commenting on Penelope Mortimer's earlier novel, "A Villa in Summer," one critic praised the author's sharp eye "for precisely how little love, marriage, and parenthood have to do with one another." This devastating insight marks every line of "The Bright Prison," yet the novel is not defeatist nor lacking in humor. It is realism reflecting adult relationships so closely that the very pulse beat of Antonia or Mark becomes to the reader as present, as inevitable as his own.

—FRANCES KEENE.

LITTLE WORLD REVISITED: If "A Distant Drum" (Houghton Mifflin, \$4.50) were Charles Bracelen Flood's first novel,

it certainly would be considered a promising piece of work, because there are many good things in it. However, it is his second, and seen in the light of his first ("Love Is a Bridge") it is, although pleasant reading, in the main a reshaping of characters he knows very well, but about whom he has found not very much new to say.

Patrick Kingsgrant, the hero, is a student at Harvard, and is presumed to be following in his lawyer-father's footsteps. Patrick begins to suspect that he wants to be a writer instead of a lawyer, and it is the growth in this character as he begins and then finally succeeds in breaking away from the established pattern that makes the story. Patrick clashes with his father and his girl, establishes his independence and emerges, considerably more mature, from a grueling training course in the United States Army.

Mr. Flood attempts, with the rather awkward use of the flashback, to tell two love stories, Patrick's father's as well as his own. However, the author knows his characters, and he pays faithful attention to the details of action and setting which establish these people in a real world, however limited.

This world revolves around Harvard, a Park Avenue address in New York, and a family island in Maine. It is almost with a feeling of nostalgia that the Maine scenes are written, and, indeed, there are so many events which seem to parallel the author's own life that one suspects much of the book of being autobiographical. Curiously enough, although the author is obviously at home in a setting and way of life that has not had many serious spokesmen, it is when he

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—R. H. Muir, Inc.



—John Sadovy, London.

Vinnie Williams—"Redbook ending." Penelope Mortimer—"devastating insight."