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## Writers and Writing

Continued from page 22

periodicals and in reminding us of the extent of his critical interests and intelligence. —ROBERT HALSBAND.

**A PLEA FOR THE OBVIOUS:** "Literature is not a game of charades." This is fair warning to the school of New Criticism, whose influence has spread beyond the little magazines and penetrated the big citadels of academic scholarship. And when the warning is uttered with the erudition and subtlety of Harry Levin it is not a philistine bias but a persuasive guide to better criticism. Professor Levin's lecture is entitled "Symbolism And Fiction" (University of Virginia Press, \$2), and was delivered before a university seminar in contemporary literature. It is therefore pitched at a high level of allusiveness, yet its points emerge with force and wit. His opening example, Faulkner's powerful short story "The Bear," illustrates his main argument, and a wide range of other examples clarifies it further.

If ambiguity is the key to modern criticism, as he states, then critics must also observe that art oscillates between two poles, the symbolistic and the realistic. It may be true that things are seldom what they seem; but the critic can find more meaningful and substantial symbolisms if he first discovers the literal, obvious level of meaning in a story or poem. —R.H.

### FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 716

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 716 will be found in the next issue.*

NW ZCX GNAE MC QTRARTOR

ZCXT ARYTRM, GTFQ NM

XQ ND WTFDHDRAA.

FVRSFDBRT APNME

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 715

Love your neighbor, yet pull not down your hedge.

—ANONYMOUS.

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**PETER LEWINGTON** in The London Free Press (London, Ont., Canada):

There are many passages in this strange, and at times moving, novel when the experiment is eminently successful. The subtle use of blank verse does add poignancy.

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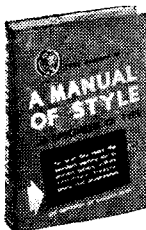
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## Fiction

Continued from page 19

major and sometimes most obvious implications. He in turn is surrounded by a seraglio of middle-aged women, among whom he wanders like a forlorn eunuch. Most of them are ex-wives and former or aspiring mistresses of his immensely wealthy old father, who wishes he were the man he once was. Francis adds two younger ones to the picture in the persons of a Miss Meekmildness from the land of innocence (Iowa) and a brash, flamboyant sculptress from the land of psychoanalysis (Central Europe). The lives of these people impinge on each other at various watering-holes of the rich, and each time there is a little wearing-away, a grinding down of the personality from being used without the lubricant of love or the buffer of moral self-commitment.

The novel fails for various reasons. Many of the characters, though they are patchily described in seemingly acute psychological aperçus, are seen at the core to be too-familiar types—types that we have come to associate

with fictional representation rather than with life. Francis, who is almost a nonparticipant in terms of crucial action, embodies not one, but several half-suggested mythic themes, at least one of which should have been worked out fully in action. Finally, the richness of Mr. Merrill's symbolic imagination (i.e., his ability to visualize scenes or acts as symbolic commentaries upon one or another phase of his story) is spread before us in such disordered profusion that it obscures, rather than illuminates the underlying substance of what he is trying to say. There are brilliant scenes: Francis's ugly attempt to destroy that very part of himself which his father, in a hospital a few blocks away, would spend a fortune to preserve in his own worn-out carcass; the christening party at which the adults, in an embarrassingly self-conscious orgy, devour the candy babies which decorate the cake; a grotesque night at the opera. Such individual episodes dazzle us with their suggestive symbolic reverberations, but they are not sufficient to bring the whole work into sharp focus. Mr. Merrill's failure is that of an artist, not a hack. It is certainly not without its rewards.

—JEROME STONE.



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

### FAMOUS CONFESSIONS

Etna M. Kelley of New York City offers capsule accounts of literary characters who made various admissions of guilt. She asks you to identify these characters, with the titles and authors of the works in which they appear. Answers on page 63.

1. Shortly before his death this churchman of high rank reflected that if he had served God with "half the zeal" he had shown his earthly ruler he would not be deserted at this critical time.
2. This feathered creature admitted having slain another with a man-made weapon.
3. A beautiful but selfish and spoiled woman, after a disappointing end to an extramarital love affair, wrote her husband that she had been a fool and a "bad child" and bade him bend his Olympian head and permit her to rejoice in him.
4. A youthful culprit claiming an incapacity to prevaricate admitted an act of vandalism on the family grounds.
5. Rendered mad with remorse for her crime this titled woman sought unsuccessfully to rid herself of her guilt by going through the motions of cleansing her hands.
6. A lovable giant with the mind of a child dimly realized that he had killed a young woman whom he meant only to caress, describing his actions with the words: "I done a bad thing."
7. Obeying a periodic compulsion, an old salt related the long and cruel retribution visited upon him for killing a bird of good omen.
8. A king heard with rising indignation a tale of wickedness and expressed the view that the transgressor should die, and then admitted his own guilt in having committed an equivalent crime.
9. At the altar and about to wed a young woman a proud and wealthy English gentleman is confronted with evidence of his previous marriage to a woman still living but insane; admitting his guilt, he induces the young woman to hear his story.
10. After noting her father's sorrowful reaction to a rebellious letter she wrote him this teenager characterized the letter as the worst thing she had ever done in her life.