

others, radicalism receded as status improved. The basic theme of his book is the successful struggle of the Irish community of Boston for political power and social acceptance. "The Lowells and Cabots speak to the Curleys," he writes comfortably about present-day Boston. Ralph Lowell said, "How do you do, Governor," the other day to him at the Harvard Club (big deal). "Leverett Saltonstall and James Curley are both members in good standing of the Charitable Irish Society," Curley writes. "And it is significant to note that Saltonstall joined that worthy organization before Curley did." These pleased paragraphs help explain why Curley's alleged love of the oppressed has been so largely verbal for the last twenty years—why, for example, for all his radical pretensions he liked the New Deal so little.

For the rest, "I'd Do It Again" is an entertaining account of local politics by an old rogue unduly charmed by his own knavery. He tells some excellent stories: how he spread reports than an opponent had joined a Masonic order and had been seen eating steak at the Copley on Fridays; how he hired people to light flaming crosses in the distance to give the proper setting to his attacks on the Klan; how in 1942 he implied that his Yankee opponent in the Democratic primary was a Communist and his Italian opponent was a Negro; how to gain sympathy from the judge for his health during his sentencing in 1947 he took the precaution of wearing a collar one size too long; and so on. This is all good clean fun, no doubt, and one should certainly not be priggish about it. Still, it becomes cumulatively a little depressing, especially when related with such sublime satisfaction. Nor is one impressed by the hints of history-making interventions with which Mr. Curley interlards his book—his role in reconciling Mussolini and the Pope, for example, or his success (later regretted) in bringing about Roosevelt's nomination in 1932. One even suspects a certain bitterness of spirit beneath the rollicking exterior—a bitterness which comes out most conspicuously in his treatment of Roosevelt.

One would wish that there were more documentation in the book; also that more care had been exercised to get facts straight and not, for example, make Anthony Drexel Biddle Roosevelt's Attorney General or place the Harvard Tercentenary in 1935 or put the Stevenson Boston rally in December, 1956, several weeks after the election. But I suppose these things are not important. For better or worse, Curley has outwitted O'Connor and reclaimed Skeffington for his own.

Fiction

Continued from page 16

in a Mandarin girl who happens to wander to his front door and who, since she plays her Chinese flower drum as an entertainer, thereby furnishes the title of the book. Unhappily, however, this is a story which is perhaps possible but really improbable. Some other minor characters, all likewise transplanted from China, serve to round out the picture with their various comments and actions, but at the end one has not found the depth of feeling or the power of conflict which are potential in the elements of the story.

—JADE SNOW WONG.

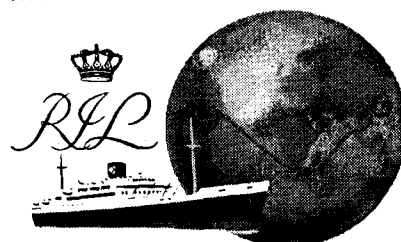
AN ADOLESCENT TRIANGLE: In Peter Sourian's "Miri" (Pantheon, \$3.50) we have the latest adolescent confessional-fiction by an author who is almost as young as the college crews he writes about. With a sharp ear for natural dialogue and believably self-centered chatter, Sourian allows a trio of New Yorkers named Miri, Lexy, and Josh to assess one another while the reader stands puzzled as to which version to accept. All go to Boston colleges and are thrown together quite a bit because Lexy and Josh are roommates and Miri is a Greek refugee girl who had been brought to the United States not long after the war by her uncle, Lexy's father. Lexy consciously works on being a "boy hero," picking up eccentricities that automatically daub him a character and taking advantage of his father's reputation as a wealthy shipowner. Even Miri is taken in by his worldly pose and voluntarily grants him intimacies that had saved her life in wartime Greece. Yet, she likes or loves (the words are used indiscriminately and interchangeably) the pure-hearted fall-guy Josh equally well. Josh is a caricature of adolescent bewilderment whose capacity for absorbing emotional punishment seems to be limitless as he becomes the necessary foil for Miri and Lexy. Altogether, they form a candid and complex trio. The Greek family background and Lexy's rebellion against a father to whom he secretly turns for basic discipline are subtly and carefully revealed in this first novel by an author who has made an auspicious debut.

—SIEGFRIED MANDEL.

LITERARY I.Q. ANSWERS

Column Two should read: 8, 5, 16, 18, 9, 2, 19, 14, 11, 20, 3, 1, 6, 7, 17, 15, 12, 13, 4, 10.

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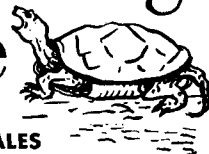
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AT HOME WITH COLETTE



—From the book.

technique, there are to be found in the book valuable passages about her habits of composition, her curiosity about words, her profound respect for the structure and cadence of the language, and an awareness which, first instinctive, was to become a conscious part of her art. The spare, taut prose, the unfailingly vital dialogue, the capacity to render a scene with an economy and force unexcelled by any contemporary French novelist—all had their roots in the way she matched her talents to the task in hand.

Personal details such as her preferences in music—a lack of appreciation for Mozart came to me as the most surprising revelation in the book—and her infinite patience with autograph hunters fill out the picture, already clear in her books, that here was a woman who, while not optimistic, was vital and gay. She was orderly, punctual, liked good food and drink and knew how to provide them. “She was both adventurous and home-loving, in the way that cats are, passionately attached to what she possessed and ready to risk or give it away at any moment.”

IF THE reader is looking, however, for “revelations” of Colette’s life before she met Goudek, he is doomed to disappointment. The author does not try to reconstruct situations which he can have known only at second-hand, and he seems to have been a paragon of a husband in that he accepted and welcomed Colette as she was with, implicit in this acceptance, a realization that the life which had made her so must be accepted, and in silence, too.

A piquant illustration of the respect, even veneration, with which Colette’s fellow writers came to regard her is given in Goudek’s account of a visit from Gide. Though they had exchanged letters, their meetings had been infrequent and when Gide came to call on her after she was already bed-ridden, the two aging authors strove to make a bridge in vain. Yet Gide had confided to his journals years earlier: “[In Colette] there is much more than a literary gift: a sort of very peculiarly feminine genius and a great intelligence. What choice, what order, what happy proportions in an account apparently so unbridled! What utter tact, what courteous discretion in confidence; not a touch that fails to hit the mark and to mark itself in one’s memory, sketched as at random, as if while playing, but with a subtle, accomplished art . . .”

In his account of Colette’s later years, Goudek has given us a rare understanding of the spirit behind the accomplished artist.

“Close to Colette,” by Maurice Goudek, translated by Enid McLeod (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 245 pp. \$4), a memoir by the third husband of one of France’s foremost modern woman novelists offers many insights into her life and writing techniques. The book will be published on June 7.

By Frances Keene

COLETTE wrote many books which have strong overtones of reminiscence, from “La maison de Claudine” (which has much in common with the later “Sido”) to “La vagabonde” (from the whole Claudine series itself, begun in 1895) to “Le fanal bleu” of fifty years later. She built her books from life, a synthesis of her own experience caught in minute, unsentimental observation and screened to eliminate the merely subjective. Her aim was to communicate her awareness of what was universal, hence valid, in each phase of living which was reflected in the single novels and plays.

But this system of screening out the too personal, though intrinsic to her art, has left many gaps in the reader’s understanding of her as a human being. That is why Maurice Goudek’s admirable yet modest memoir of her last thirty years, entitled “Close to Colette,” has particular interest and is, indeed, of unique value. Goudek, as the “beloved friend” and husband of this woman of genius, had day-by-day opportunity to relate the mature artist to her work and to evaluate her cumulative experience in terms of her final product. That he did so without invasion of privacy is convincingly revealed in this moving, devoted but never cloying account. (“If I had not completely forgotten, in our daily behaviour, that I was concerned with an extraordinary person, our relations would have acquired a sort of constraint which both of us would have disliked,” he writes. A sublime under-

statement if ever there was one!)

Goudek, almost twenty years Colette’s junior, met her at the home of friends in 1925 when she was fifty-two. He had been reading her books for two decades and still remembered the “delicious shock” of his first literary discovery. The generation that had passed since then had, one gathers, made of the young man a fairly self-conscious poetaster, sufficiently well-heeled so that his own scarcely-promising literary future need not disturb him too much from a material point of view. He had learned to check, or at least to camouflage, a “madly imaginative” nature so that “by the time I was thirty-five I had still not sobered up much [but] in order not to betray this childish state of mind I behaved with the greatest circumspection, which made me appear cold and formal, not quite at ease.”

Colette, on the other hand, was thoroughly established as novelist and journalist. “Cheri,” her greatest early success, had come out in 1920, and 1923 had seen the publication of two small masterpieces, the short novel, “Le blé en herbe,” and the evocation of home, “Sido.” The three powerful volumes inspired by the Paris music halls, most important of which is “La vagabonde,” had been out and had run into many editions during the decade that preceded her Easter-holiday meeting with Goudek. He must have seen her as the literary lion that others considered her to be, not as the literary hack she sometimes called herself.

From the start, the two friends gave each other something each was lacking. Goudek says: “The world she restored to me was the real world, the world of everyday poetry, which was to become our dwelling place.” And though he never states or implies that Colette would have been the poorer had she not met him, the reader is left with the conviction that Colette herself knew this to the core.

For those interested in Colette’s