

lantic's first hundred years supplies much more than half the contents of "Jubilee," and the ratio holds when that second half-century is again cut in two. I suppose that Nathaniel LaMar, "now in his early twenties," who concludes the brief fiction section (Hemingway begins it), is the youngest author represented, but there must be others who are in Mr. LaMar's neighborhood.

At the end of the text of "Jubilee" is a list of "Some of the Notable Books Which Have Been Serialized in the *Atlantic*." The roster is remarkable for its variety: "Jalna," "Goodbye, Mr. Chips," "Rogue Male," "The Portrait of a Lady," "To Have and to Hold," "The Egg and I," "Delta Wedding," and nearly fifty more—and these are only "some," remember. On this peg I should like to hang the story of the *Atlantic*'s first identified author. In accordance with the general practice of the day—general not only in America but in Britain and the Continent as well—the *Atlantic* did not at first identify contributors. By the intervention of a harsh fate the first *Atlantic* author bore a name that will be unknown to any schoolboy of this the *Atlantic*'s centennial year. The circumstances, though certainly familiar at the time to all of the *Atlantic*'s 15,000 readers, have not been set forth, so far as I can determine, since the events that produced them occurred. The first number of the *Atlantic* published the first two chapters of a novel entitled "Akin by Marriage." The second number carried another chapter, and the third number one more. There was no instalment in the next number (February 1858); instead, at the very end of the text, this notice appeared: "The continuation of the story, 'Akin by Marriage,' is unavoidably deferred, owing to the severe illness of the author. It will be resumed as soon as his health shall permit." Nothing more was put in print about story or author for seven months. Then, in the September number, again at the very end of the text, appeared this notice: "OBITUARY: The conductors of *The Atlantic* have the painful duty of announcing to their readers the death of CALVIN W. PHILLEO, author of 'Akin by Marriage,' published in the earlier numbers of this magazine. The plot of the story was sketched at length, and in the brain of the writer it was complete; but no hand save his own could give it life and form: it must remain an unfinished work." Three sentences of eulogy followed. There is a moral here which most editors (but not all) take to heart: Never begin publishing a serial until the complete manuscript is in the office safe.

## Writers' Shop Talk

**"The Living Novel,"** edited by **Granville Hicks** (Macmillan. 230 pp. \$4.50), is a collection of essays on a popular literary form by ten novelists of the post-Hemingway generation. David Daiches of Cambridge University reviews it below.

By David Daiches

GRANVILLE HICKS'S "The Living Novel" is a collection of ten essays by ten of the liveliest and most interesting American novelists of what might be called the post-Hemingway generation (the oldest was born in 1910 and the youngest in 1925). Each talks about the novel from his own point of view, some autobiographically, some evangelically, some angrily, some analytically, some prescriptively. Granville Hicks, who contributes a foreword and an afterword, tells us that when he first suggested the idea of writing these essays to the novelists they replied that they would be much better employed writing novels. And how right they were! For while this book is interesting in displaying the problems, peeves, and preoccupations of ten good novelists, it sheds little real critical light on anything in particular.

This is perhaps because of the sense of whipped-up crisis that seems to

surround the whole book. "This book is dedicated to the proposition that the novel is important," begins Mr. Hicks portentously and one can't help wincing away from any book which opens with such a pronouncement. Mr. Hicks goes on to say that "today the serious novel is both attacked and neglected, often enough by the same individuals. The serious novelist does his work in an atmosphere of confusion and hostility . . ." Well, it is true that there are many more bad novels written than good, that slick exploitation of stock situations sells better than craftsmanlike presentations of an original and genuine vision, and that even some serious, highbrow critics are suspicious or skeptical of the novel as an art form. But this is an old story. Mr. Hicks knows as well as I do that in the nineteenth century enormous quantities of rubbishy fiction was sold and he must know, too, that serious critics have almost always been suspicious of the novel. Indeed, on the latter point, one must say that only in our own time has the criticism of fiction become thoroughly respectable as a serious critical activity. If I am not mistaken, John Aldridge's anthology of modern critical essays on the novel, published in 1952, was the first collection of major critical writing on the novel by different critics. Let the novelist stop whining and get on with the job.

THIS is a peevish reaction, I know, and some at least of the contributors to this symposium will ascribe it to that unfriendliness or sense of superiority or downright enmity which they find in so much modern criticism (Leslie Fiedler seems to be the villain here). But—need I say?—I am on their side in everything that matters. I agree with John Brooks's analysis of the present position of the American novelist; I found much that is stimulating and rewarding in Ralph Ellison's lively discussion of what some modern critics have made of some modern novels and the implications of this; I enjoyed Herbert Gold's and Mark Harris's vigorous attacks on Herman Wouk, Sloan Wilson, William Brinkley, and other writers of (I understand) best sellers, and understand and sympathize with the context of these attacks. I found Wright Morris's essay somewhat distracted but



—C. J. Hammer, Jr.

Granville Hicks—"The novel is important..."

full of vitality, Harvey Swados pungent, Jessamyn West on the side of the angels but somewhat vague, Flannery O'Connor almost cryptically brief. Obviously, one cannot discuss the points they raise in a short review. Many are complaining of the present position of the novelist, but optimistically determined to carry on according to their lights nevertheless. All are concerned about integrity and angry about the lack of it among certain successful writers.

SO what am I complaining about? Well, first, I don't believe the situation is in any measurable degree worse than it has ever been for the serious artist among novelists, and this

stood, to reach its full potential audience. If Scott and Dickens were immensely widely read in their own day, they were read largely for the wrong reasons (we remember the whole of Britain and America awaiting with delicious tears the death of Little Nell).

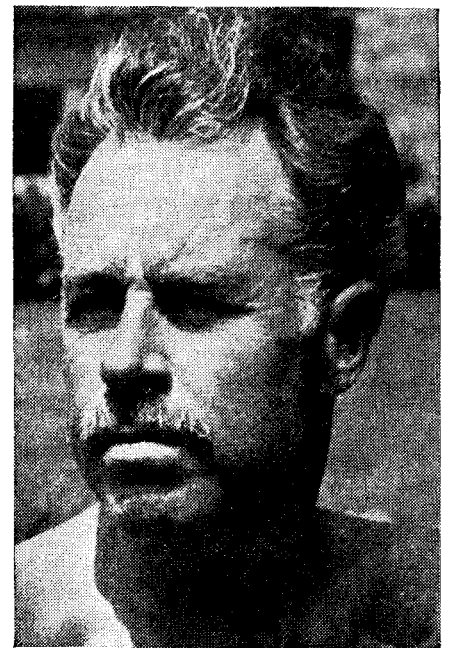
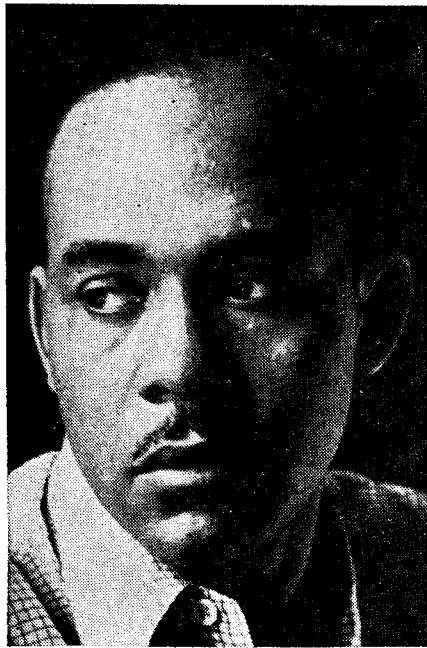
Weaving in and out of these essays is the charge that the critics have not been doing their duty. Mr. Ellison castigates Mr. Trilling, and Messrs. Fiedler and Steven Marcus are reproved elsewhere. It is true that the passages cited from the latter two critics do seem to be deserving of reproof, or at least can be fruitfully argued against. But—apart from the fact that critics are hard put to it to

## For the Ladies

*"How to Read a Novel," by Caroline Gordon (Viking, 247 pp. \$3.50), offers the observations of a well-known critic on the art of fiction.*

By William Bittner

I AM NOT quite sure what Caroline Gordon's "How to Read a Novel" is good for, but it certainly is not much help in illuminating the complex problem of the novel. "Gleanings in the Field of Henry James" might be a better title, for that foreign offshoot from American fiction claims



—Gordon Parks.

"The generation which has produced Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Wright Morris has no right to complain."

book is built on the assumption that it is. Indeed, writing from England and being very much aware of the envy with which the American fiction situation is regarded by serious novelists and critics over here, I find it hard to respond to Mr. Hicks's sense of crisis. The generation which has produced Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Wright Morris, to name only three of these contributors, has no right to complain. But, we are told, Wright Morris does not sell, even though the critics praise him (but the same writer tells us elsewhere in his essay that the critics do not praise the right novelists). Surely, however, what matters most to a serious literary artist is the esteem and appreciation of his fellow artists and of his own understanding public, however limited it may be. Serious original art always takes time to be fully under-

find time and space to discuss new fiction adequately—many of these writers see a gap between critic and artist which is smaller in our time, if it exists at all, than it has ever been. And to blame the critics for not having read all good novels is hardly fair, either. Life is short and art is long. I haven't read the novels of all the contributors to this symposium: how could I have? Writers must really get it out of their heads that the intelligent citizen has a *duty* to read everything good that is written. He reads, and ought to read, what he has time and inclination to read. And the true artist always finds in the end his true audience. God knows, there is a lot in modern culture to be unhappy about. Novelists at least can do something about it—they can write novels. Back to your novels, ladies and gentlemen.

most of her attention and forms her entire point of view. Miss Gordon trims the hedges and tidies the perennial borders of her most distinguished predecessors, from E. M. Forster to Joseph Warren Beach; but her book does not approach Forster's charming clarity or Beach's scholarly comprehensiveness. Indeed, she is neither as comprehensive as Forster nor as charming as Beach. "How to Read a Novel" seems to be a series of lectures aimed at the kind of women's club whose members want to be "challenged" without having their ignorance remotely violated.

Typical of this kind of uninformed academic piddling is Miss Gordon's chapter "Complication and Resolution," which compares "Oedipus Rex" with a children's story called "Jemima Puddle-Duck." Utterly overlooking (with a courtesy I find hard to sum-