

ography, is the child of a Spanish mother whose "idealism" is a cloak for her inexhaustible vindictiveness and of a French father whose crassness differs only in degree, not in kind, from the desire for a comfortable, "respectable" position. The Spanish Civil War ended such family life as he may have had. At five he fled to France, where, betrayed by his father and abandoned by his mother, he was interned in a Vichy concentration camp; at nine he was sent to a German one. After the war he had no place to go but a Spanish orphanage, which was ghastly by any standards and, considering its ostensible mission, quite up to comparison with the concentration camps. From this he finally escaped. After an interlude of two years' happiness and rest at a school in the south of Spain, he finally got to Paris for a last, dreadful encounter with his parents. As the book ends, he is once again alone.

As this bare summary will suggest, the book is simply heartbreaking. What a summary cannot suggest is the tone of the writing and the quality of del Castillo's sensibility. He has no complaint, although his life has been one of incessant suffering; no demands, although he has had nothing, and no expectations because he has seen everything. The brutality of Tanguy's situation has stripped him down to the core of his nature, without any of the trappings and pretense; yet it is this unrelieved horror, we find, that has preserved his innocence. After all, the most insidious sort of corruption comes from situations which are not wholly evil, which admit of plausible justification and prudent compromise. These, Tanguy never knew: the extreme viciousness he lived through kept intact, in him, the extreme purity of a child. What remains, after so much ugliness, is a beautiful person, who can feel no anger and even no regret, only pity and a desire to love and be loved.

But in spite of itself, "Child of Our Time" is a terrible indictment, for as the excellent title of the translation insists, del Castillo's life cannot be dismissed as merely the product of freakish coincidences. The locale typifies something widespread and the individuals express a whole society—composed, perhaps, largely of the well-intentioned, but too ineffectual to prevent del Castillo's tragedy and others like it, not to say to repair them. The refusal of the author to express a condemnation he has every right to pronounce, and the extraordinary poignancy of his voice, make our failure still harder to bear. We cannot live down the impact of this innocence and simplicity; but can we live up to it, either?

## FICTION

# Big Poor from the Panhandle

**"The Bone Pickers," by Al Dewlen** (McGraw-Hill. 408 pp. \$4.95), is a novel about the Munger family of Amarillo who, despite a modest facade, are members of the Panhandle's Big Rich. It is reviewed by Joe B. Frantz of the University of Texas, who has written books about his state, its cowboys, and his fellow Texans.

By Joe B. Frantz

AMONG the caricatures of the excesses of Texans that have become fashionable almost to the point of satiation nowadays, Al Dewlen's "The Bone Pickers" will have at least the distinction of downshifting its gears. Instead of a flamboyantly tasteless family of Big Rich conspicuously consuming around Neiman's and Houston's Petroleum Club, the Munger family of Amarillo—worth \$160 million—are studiously plain to the point of being ridiculous.

And yet somehow Mr. Dewlen has taken this improbable family and made its progress seem probable. The only real improbables are the male in-laws, who sit idly—and idling—by while their spouses let themselves be ruled by a bloodless younger brother, Spain, whose only gifts are logic and an ability to scramble clichés. The odds against three heiresses worth \$30 million-plus each finding three men who would be willing to drive three-year-old Chevrolets and live

in FHA housing to satisfy a brother's reverse ego are too great to figure, but if the reader can accept such odds, he can go on to have a cracking good time watching this self-conscious poverty disintegrate.

Best drawn are the idiot brother, June, and a character who is dead when the story begins, the atlas-reading, alcoholic, foul-mouthed father, Cecil Munger. Brother June, a 240-pound, forty-year-old infant who likes to use the heads of live chickens for golf balls, is the family skeleton, something to be hidden and at the same time a thing to be treasured by the superstitious family—for being imbecilic, he is somehow Beloved of God. So June flashes around in one of his three Cadillacs, flies to New York to see "Li'l Abner," chases girls, and generally indulges himself, as no one else does—law or in-law.

Cecil Munger is responsible for June's condition, for in one of his rare alcoholic bursts of work, he set out to make a garden. As he swung his mattock extravagantly, the steel head bounced loose and lodged in Brother June's head. Thereafter the Munger family had a problem, and author Dewlen had his motivation.

The book is not a novel of Texas, as its publishers claim, or even of Amarillo. The focus is almost exclusively on the five surviving Mungers and their little-spirited father.

On the other hand, Mr. Dewlen exhibits an ear of near-perfect pitch for Amarillo sounds and smells. To



## Criminal Record



**SOMEONE FROM THE PAST.** By Margot Bennett. Dutton. \$2.95. Murder of London editress tizzies former roommate, who does several wrong things that arouse cops' interest; victim's boy friends also crowd roster of suspects. Action unfrantic, dialogue abundant but sprightly.

**THE SILENT SLAIN.** By Chad Pilgrim. Abelard-Schuman. \$2.75. New England's women college student's body found at pondside; male death follows; toothpick-chewing Inspector Matt Ruffins quizzes profs, others. Too much goes on.

**MURDER PREMEDITATED.** By P. H. Powell. Roy. \$2.75. Rural English medico jolted when matriarchal neighbor (and his patient) succumbs to slug of arsenic; relatives on spot (and so is he); was Yarder dumb or not-so? Agreeable.

**THE BURNING OF TROY.** By Malcolm Gair. Crime Club. \$2.95. Mark Raeburn, London eye (and ex-Yarder) tours Paris, Auvergne, Venice on trail of missing opal (named in title); variant on ancient evil-gem theme has nice air of authenticity; accelerates steadily. —SERGEANT CUFF.

anyone who knows Panhandle folks and attitudes, there are a thousand and one little brush strokes that delight: the right hat for the Downtown Club, the letters of protest to Eastern industry, the pleasure in peanut butter, and Brother June's singing of "Jesus Loves Me." Furthermore, Mr. Dewlen has had the honesty to present some Texans who do not spend their days spitting on Negroes and Mexicans or who do not try to buy their way to position. The Mungers just want to be left alone, to decide in concert whether they can buy a power mower at a discount and to determine how to plug five-cent leaks in a 100-million-dollar enterprise. Whether such people can be real, however, is, in the words of Spain Munger, "a bird on another bush."

## Peon Passion Player

**"Manuel the Mexican," by Carlo Coccioli; translated by Hans Koningsberger (Simon & Schuster. 370 pp. \$4.50), tells of a young boy, caught in the forces of ancient Aztec legend and ardent Christian belief. SR's reviewer is Donald Demarest, a novelist and editor who lived for many years in Mexico.**

By Donald Demarest

THERE have been almost no good novels written about Mexico—even by Mexicans. That complex, of-a-piece, evasive, and blatant country seems to call for tracts and travelogues; it lends itself to the wildest theories and provides a significant backdrop for the dullest whodunit or comedy of manners. It has proved a pitfall for the greatest artists—from D. H. Lawrence to Graham Greene. It has been a fatal trap for writers of the second rank like Steinbeck. And the "big" Mexican novels of the past twenty years share the same faults; wordiness, tub-thumping, sentimentality about the Noble Indian, and carelessness in construction haunt Azuela, Guzmán, Vasconcelos, and Yañez, just as they betray the tourist bards.

This book is a theme novel too. At times it tacks dangerously between the dark blood mysticism of "The Plumed Serpent" and the Redemption through Sin and Pity of "The Power and the Glory," between the lisping bucolic lyricism of "The Pearl" and the brutal nihilism of "The Underdogs." The fact that it does tack is enough to make it unique. Its very formlessness—its constant shifts in point of narrative and from allegory

to the picaresque to private journal—provides the framework for some remarkable insights into the essential ambiguity of Mexico.

Carlo Coccioli—one of the younger and least fixed stars in the postwar Italian Pleiades—has chosen to work a fairly exhausted seam: that of the peasant protagonist of a passion play who is literally crucified. But he uses this as a valid springboard for an analysis of the creative and continuous interaction between the old and new religions—between Quetzalcoatl first and Tezcatlipoca, between Tonantzin and the dark-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe, between Christ and El Tepozteco.

The last, of course, is a marvelously rich legend and the village of Tepoztlán is an even better setting for a novelist than for the anthropologists who have made it their private stalking ground. El Tepozteco, an Aztec folk hero identified with Ometochtli, the divinity of pulque and gambling, who became converted to Christianity on the Feast of the Nativity of The Blessed Virgin—and who is now identified with both Christ and Zapata—is an essential symbol.

The boy Manuel, who has been raised by an anticlerical uncle to an understanding of the old myths, has a vision of El Tepozteco and runs

away with a peddler who was a former *Cristero*; he takes up with Miss Howkins, a refugee from her Protestant missionary father's jealous God, with a dancing master interested in reviving the ancient dances and with the author—whose arrival on the scene at page 285 further muddies what has become an opaque narrative.

"Manuel the Mexican" for all its prolixity is an absorbing and challenging work. It may stand for some time as the definitive fictional statement of the Meaning of Mexico. But there are some young Mexican novelists, like Juan Rulfo and Carlos Fuentes (more desperately and more personally concerned with Coccioli's easy antonyms, although they lack his technical range), who are producing novels about Mexico that are also a lot more universal.

**DIOR DRESSED:** It is difficult to say a great deal either for or against "Mrs. Arris Goes to Paris" (Doubleday, \$2.50), because it is a gentle, wispy little fable that neither pretends to be more than it is nor has any thesis with which anyone could possibly take issue. It is all in favor of goodness and love and understanding, and it points out that people are pretty much the same all over the world.

It is to Paul Gallico's credit that



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

### BIBLICAL ONE-TIMERS

For the Scripturally-minded, Nan Carpenter, presently of Pasadena, California, has compiled a list of names each of which occurs but once in the Bible. Can you identify these from the clues in the second column and name the book of the Bible in which each is found? Answers on page 41.

- |               |                             |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Anna       | ( ) An Areopagite           |
| 2. Baalis     | ( ) Another name for Esther |
| 3. Bithiah    | ( ) A prophetess            |
| 4. Blastus    | ( ) Caesar                  |
| 5. Buzi       | ( ) Chamberlain of Ahaserus |
| 6. Candace    | ( ) Chamberlain of Herod    |
| 7. Carcas     | ( ) Damsel who met Peter    |
| 8. Chuza      | ( ) Daughter of Pharaoh     |
| 9. Cyrenius   | ( ) Oldest son of Samuel    |
| 10. Dionysius | ( ) Father of Elihu         |
| 11. Erastus   | ( ) Father of Ezekiel       |
| 12. Ethbaal   | ( ) Father of Jezebel       |
| 13. Hadassah  | ( ) Governor of Syria       |
| 14. Hen       | ( ) King of Assyria         |
| 15. Joanna    | ( ) King of the Ammonites   |
| 16. Lysanias  | ( ) Proselyte of Antioch    |
| 17. Mercurius | ( ) Queen of the Ethiopians |
| 18. Nicolas   | ( ) Roman god               |
| 19. Rhoda     | ( ) Son of Jonathan         |
| 20. Sapphira  | ( ) Son of Zephaniah        |
| 21. Sargon    | ( ) Steward of Herod        |
| 22. Tiberius  | ( ) Steward of the city     |
| 23. Tohu      | ( ) Tetrarch of Abilene     |
| 24. Vashni    | ( ) Wife of Ananias         |
| 25. Zaza      | ( ) Wife of Herod's steward |