



A Sampling of First Novels

By Granville Hicks

SEASON after season the first novels come from the publishers. Perhaps one in a season catches on—is chosen by a book club, reaches the best-seller lists, is sold to the movies. Perhaps one, usually not the same one, is regarded by even the more cautious reviewers as a work of some distinction. The majority go almost unnoticed; the kindest word thrown them is “promising.” The authors grieve, and the publishers hope that next time the lightning will strike.

Of the three first novels I am examining this week, one seems average, one above average, and the third below average but bad in an unusual way. To describe a first novel as average, incidentally, is not to suggest that it is without merit, for in any season's crop there is always a good deal of unmistakable talent.

Zena Garrett's “*The House in the Mulberry Tree*” (Random House, \$3.50) is a fair specimen of the more serious kind of first novel. Basically it is the story of an eleven-year-old girl, a girl who is just beginning to understand the complexities of the adult world. That story has been told many times, but innumerable variations are possible, and when Mrs. Garrett is writing about Elizabeth Henderson, she writes freshly. The reader is always being surprised by Elizabeth's perceptions, and yet he never doubts their rightness.

But this is not merely the story of Elizabeth's growing up, and that is where the trouble comes in. In this particular summer two pairs of newlyweds are living in the vicinity of Elizabeth's home—a farm in Texas—and she watches both marriages come to grief. One breaks up because the husband cannot forget his first wife; the other ends in violence because the man is dominated by the memory of his mother. Furthermore, it turns out that there are skeletons in the Hendersons' closets. In short, the novel is complicated, and Mrs. Garrett tells it in a complicated way, taking us into the minds of all the principal characters. Again and again the reader loses sight of Elizabeth, and yet he is not really involved in the life of anyone else in the book. The various elements are never fused, and it is only with difficulty that Mrs. Garrett pulls the novel together.

Eugene Mirabelli is a young man, and “*The Burning Air*” (Houghton Mifflin, \$3) is a youthful novel, but it is redeemed from mere youthfulness by both insight and literary skill. Although it seems to be in some degree autobiographical, there is no wild outpouring of personal experience in the Thomas Wolfe manner. On the contrary, the little book is sharply focused, and Mr. Mirabelli is never in danger of losing control.

The situation is simple and familiar. George, the narrator, is spending a week end with the family of Giulia Molla, his girl. We see the family clearly—father, mother, grandmother, and younger brother—and we realize that Mrs. Molla is cast in the role of villain. For George and Giulia want to be married, and Mrs. Molla is too ambitious for her daughter to consent to such a marriage.

The week end passes. George and Giulia go out together, quarrel a little, make love. Always there is the question of marriage, with George pressing for a decision. Although she is afraid of her mother, as she confesses, Giulia does speak to her about their plans, and the response is what she had expected. In full family conference Saturday evening Mr. Molla overrules his wife, but the reader knows that she has not really given in.

What we are beginning to understand, however, is that Mrs. Molla is not the only, nor indeed the most important, obstacle in the way of the marriage, for George has gradually let us see the blackness of his self-distrust. It is essential to him that he should be all-important to Giulia, and at the same time he is convinced that he cannot be.

I don't want you to have anything or anybody except me [he says]. That's why I try to get rid of everyone else. So there will only be me. And there is only me, and I'm scared you're going to see through me and see that I'm nothing. Nothing at all. Then you'll go away.

In the desperation of fear, he persuades her to elope at once, but at the last moment she cannot go through with the plan, presumably because, in spite of her struggle not to, she recognizes the truth of what he has said.

“I have tried so hard to tell the truth,” George reports at the end, “and now I have only a feeling of emptiness and failure.” It is not easy to present emotions so subtly complicated as those with which this novel deals. Writing with a fine simplicity, Mr. Mirabelli has achieved a notable success. The obvious thing to say about such a writer is the true thing: he is someone to watch.

If there are autobiographical elements in “*The Burning Air*” and probably in “*The House in the Mulberry Tree*” as well, that is something no one is likely to say about Angela Tonks's “*Mind Out of Time*” (Knopf, \$3.95). Miss Tonks, who is British-born though she now lives in the United States, has written a wild sort of fantasy with allegorical trimmings. In a POW camp in Germany during the war a man named Erikson discovers that he can read other people's minds and is in some measure clairvoyant. Another prisoner, Kramer, has the same powers but in a more limited degree. After the war Kramer uses these powers for his own selfish ends, and the two men become involved in a conspiracy in the Near East. Erikson, who has always been a reluctant partner, finally rebels against the evil in which he is implicated and finds a way that leads to salvation.



I pass lightly over the plot, which will not bear much scrutiny. In the chapters about the POW camp Miss Tonks manages to create a certain illusion, and here the story is quite lively, but later on, as she introduces more and more details in an effort to achieve plausibility, the novel becomes almost ludicrous. As for the allegory, Miss Tonks is saying that the familiar kinds of knowledge can be abused by evil men as surely as the special kind that Kramer exploits, but this is not exactly news.

Miss Tonks's novel is interesting only because she has tried to do something out of the ordinary. Mrs. Garrett's book, on the other hand, has enough freshness to hold the attention, and Mr. Mirabelli's is continuously appealing. His is the kind of book that rewards the constant reader of first novels. No one could think for a moment that it is a great novel, but it shows sensitivity and discipline and a feeling for language. Of course, Mr. Mirabelli may never write anything else so good, but I have an impression that the book is no accident, that he knows what he is doing and is likely to grow in knowledge and skill.

[SR surveys other “firsts” of the season on pages 36 and 38.]

SR Suggests Forty-One Ways to Spend Three Months



THIS is a busy time in publishing. During the next three months, before the lull of summer sets in, many new books will appear. SR's editors present a forecast of those books that we consider to be probable highlights of this active, if interim, season.

FICTION

THE CHARIOTEER. By Mary Renault. *Pantheon*. \$3.95. An earlier novel by the author of "The Last of the Wine" and "The King Must Die" treats the subject of homosexuality with clarity and sensitivity; World War II is the setting.

COMMAND THE MORNING. By Pearl Buck. *John Day*. \$4.50. The strange, circumspect world of atomic scientists is the subject of this novel about the bomb and the men and women who are absorbed in its creation.

DOCTOR SAX. By Jack Kerouac. *Grove*. \$3.50. *Paper*, \$1.75. Beatnik Kerouac's account of growing pains and a French-Canadian boyhood in Lowell, Massachusetts.

THE LIGHT INFANTRY BALL. By Hamilton Basso. *Doubleday*. \$3.95. Turning back from "Pompey's Head" to its characters' forebears, this tells of life and love in the days of the Confederacy.

THE LONG, LONG LOVE. By Walter Sullivan. *Holt*. \$3.75. Tennessee of the 1950s is the setting for this novel about a modern Southerner, who lives in the ancestor-ridden world of the past.

MEASURE MY LOVE. By Helga Sandburg. *McDowell, Obolensky*. \$3.50. A story of the rugged life of simple people on a Michigan farm.

THE OPTIMIST. By Herbert Gold. *Atlantic-Little, Brown*. \$4.50. College, the war, a foray into politics figure in this novel of two Michigan boys' growth to manhood.

PROVIDENCE ISLAND. By Jacquetta Hawkes. *Random House*. \$3.50. An archeological expedition to a remote island discovers a race that has endured for 10,000 years; a witty, fantastic tale.

THE TEMPLE OF THE GOLDEN PAVILION. By Yukio Mishima. *Knopf*. \$4. A strange, powerful story about a Zen Buddhist acolyte, written by one of Japan's most original novelists.

THRESCORE AND TEN. By Walter Allen. *Morrow*. \$3.50. An old man remembers things past in a lifetime that encompassed most of the exciting events of this age. The author is a noted English literary critic.

NONFICTION

ANATOMY OF A MORAL. By Milovan Djilas. *Praeger*. \$2.95. Political essays, written before Djilas's imprisonment, shed new light upon his own ideology and that of the Communist Party.

THE CHICAGO REVIEW ANTHOLOGY. Edited by David Ray. *University of Chicago Press*. \$5. The best stories, poems, and articles that have appeared in *The Chicago Review* during its eleven active years.

THE COMING OF AGE. By Babette Deutsch. *Indiana Univ. Press*. \$3.95. Poems from 1919-1954, some new verse, and Miss Deutsch's excellent translations of other verse, including Pasternak's.

THE CRITICAL WRITINGS OF JAMES JOYCE. Edited by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann. *Viking*. \$5. Joyce, as a critic, writing satirically, richly about other writers, the rights of authors, censorship.

THE CURSE OF THE MISBEGOTTEN. By Croswell Bowen. *McGraw-Hill*. \$5. The fate-driven life of the O'Neill family, and particularly playwright Eugene, recreated in all its drink-and-drug-shadowed aspects.

DREAM AND REALITY. By Louis J. Halle. *Harper*. \$5. American foreign policy, reviewed against the background of historical and philosophical thought, by a former member of the State Department's Policy Planning staff.

DUTCH DRAWINGS AND PRINTS. By J. G. Van Gelder. *Abrams*. \$12.50. Woodcuts, lithographs, sketches from five fruitful centuries of Dutch art.

THE ELDER STATESMAN. By T. S. Eliot. *Farrar, Straus & Cudahy*. \$3.75. Mr. Eliot's fifth verse play concerns a celebrated hero, who, at the peak of success, is faced with the misdeeds of earlier days.

KENNETH GRAHAME. By Peter Green. *World*. \$6. Grahame, born 100 years ago, gained fame as the author of "The Wind and the Willows," and his life story is filled with the contradictions of a man who lived in the fanciful world of his imagination.

GREAT COMPANIONS. By Max Eastman. *Farrar, Straus & Cudahy*. \$4. Recollections from a lifetime of friendship with interesting, illuminating, and often egocentric men and women. Included are Casals, Einstein, Hemingway, and Trotsky.

HELLENISM: THE HISTORY OF A CIVILIZATION. By Arnold J. Toynbee. *Oxford*. \$4.50. Dr. Toynbee turns his attention to the Graeco-Roman civilization and traces its path through some 1,800 historic years.

THE HOLY BARBARIANS. By Lawrence Lip-ton. *Messner*. \$4.95. A "sociological survey" of the most recent trend in Bohemianism—the Beatniks, who they are, what they are, and why.

AN HONEST PREFACE, AND OTHER ESSAYS. By Walter Prescott Webb. *Houghton Mifflin*. \$3.75. Essays in Americana, in which a witty and genial Texan discusses subjects ranging from education to Coca Cola.

I KNEW A PHOENIX. By May Sarton. *Rinehart*. \$3.75. Reminiscences by a poet and novelist of her Belgian childhood and of her growing-up years in Boston's particular milieu.

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY. By Karl Jaspers. *Beacon*. \$3.75. Higher education and its place in the life of society and of the private citizen, as perceived by a distinguished Swiss philosopher.

JOY RIDE. By Dwight Taylor. *Putnam*. \$3.95. The decade of the Twenties and its most fabulous stars, recalled by Laurette Taylor's son, who chanced to meet a good many people during those years.

KAETHE KOLLWITZ. By Herbert Bittner. *Yoseloff*. \$10. 150 drawings in the distinctive Kollwitz style, prefaced with a long and ap-

preciative introduction to the works of this famed modern artist.

KING OF PONTUS. By Alfred Duggan. *Coward-McCann*. \$3.95. The world of the First Century recreated in the person of Mithradates Eupator, who ruled from Asia to Europe.

LIFE STUDIES. By Robert Lowell. *Farrar, Straus & Cudahy*. \$3. This collection of poetry, by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, contains his long autobiographical essay, "91 Revere Street."

MEMOIRS OF A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER. By Simone de Beauvoir. *World*. \$5. The transition from bourgeois Parisian childhood to new maturity with Sartre and the café crowd makes absorbing autobiography.

NASSER OF EGYPT: THE SEARCH FOR DIGNITY. By Wilton Wynn. *Taplinger*. \$3.95. A vivid account of Nasser's ascendancy, set against the background of Middle Eastern nationalism, by the chief of the Associated Press's Mideast Bureau.

PICASSO. By Roland Penrose. *Harper*. \$6. A full-scale study of the artist and his works, complemented by ample reproductions.

THE PULITZER PRIZE STORY. Edited by John Hohenberg. *Columbia University Press*. \$6.75. From Columbia University's Pulitzer Prize archives, award-winning cartoons, pictures, news stories, and lively accounts of modern journalism.

RICHARD NIXON. By Earl Mazo. *Harper*. \$3.95. A biographical portrait of the politician and the man, written by the *New York Herald Tribune's* Washington correspondent.

SENATOR JOE MCCARTHY. By Richard H. Rovere. *Harcourt, Brace*. \$3.95. A pungent biography of the man from Wisconsin traces his dappled career through its rise and fall.

J. M. SYNGE: 1871-1909. By David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens. *Macmillan*. \$6.75. John Millington Synge, poet-playwright, is the subject of a lively literary study, which includes just about everyone in the Irish Revival.

THE SLEEPWALKERS. By Arthur Koestler. *Macmillan*. \$6.95. This "history of man's changing vision of the universe" retraces the search for nature's meaning in a study of the travails of such men as the Greek astronomers, Newton, Kepler.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION. By C. Wright Mills. *Oxford*. \$6. The well-known social scientist's critical study is directed at the new offshoots from classic sociology.

THE STATUS SEEKERS. By Vance Packard. *McKay*. \$4.50. What is status, how do we achieve it, what do we do with it once we get it, are a few of the questions answered with sociological coolness by the author of "The Hidden Persuaders."

THEOLOGY OF CULTURE. By Paul Tillich. *Oxford*. \$4. Essays by an eminent Protestant theologian touch upon leading aspects of modern society: politics, art, science.

THE WAR MEMOIRS OF CHARLES DE GAULLE. By Charles de Gaulle. Translated by Richard Howard. *Simon & Schuster*. \$6. These memoirs, subtitled "Unity 1942-1944," recall the war years, revealing the men with whom de Gaulle worked, and, above all, his own fervid devotion to the cause of France.