FICTION

Many Views from the Veld

"Friday's Footprint," by Nadine Gordimer (Viking. 244 pp. $3.95), consists of a dozen stories and a novella, all set in contemporary South Africa. Mary Doyle Curran, an American novelist, is the author of "The Parish and the Hill."

By Mary Doyle Curran

NADINE GORDIMER's new collection of short stories (and a novella) is not the work of a novice. She has two other short story collections as well as two novels to her credit. Unfortunately, "Friday's Footprint," the latest addition to her South African saga, betrays the enervation of the contemporary short story. The major flaw can be summed up in a quotation from one of the stories, "The Last Kiss": "When people become characters, they cease to be regarded as human. . ." There is a lack of warmth and compassion here that is typical of the "objective" short story. Casting a cold eye is the dominant attitude of the book. And when another approach is taken, as in the novella, "An Image of Success," and in the story "The Last Kiss," it degenerates into the falsity of undeserved pathos.

Miss Gordimer is trapped by the contemporary fad for the unresolved ending, leaving it to the reader to trek back through the veld to resolve the meaning. But the trek does not result in resolution. Stories such as "Friday's Footprint," "A Thing of the Past," and "Our Bovary" do not have the linear complexity that in Joyce led so inevitably and justifiably to the final revelation. The stories play on gratuitous shock. They suggest a psychological complexity that is, in fact, simply not there.

But, to repeat, the faults that appear in "Friday's Footprint" are those of the present-day short story: the lack of passion, the facile stance of wry irony, the tedium of protracted scenes where the author mistakes monotony for realism, types for people, and quantity of exposition for quality. Surely something vital and intense is going on in South Africa; most of these stories might have emerged from Darien, Connecticut.

The writing is uneven, wavering be-

Nadine Gordimer—the unresolved ending.

tween rather boring and clumsy author interpolations and brilliant metaphorical remarks like: "She has a way of making my father confused, so that he finds his anger like a broken stick in his hands."

There is no question that Miss Gordimer has technical skill—as demonstrated by "The Bridegroom." But most of her stories echo with compromise and acceptance. The narrator of "An Image of Success" says, "I believe that early in one's life—often in childhood, long before the experience that might give the picture some accuracy—one forms images of various semi-abstract states, poverty, fame, wealth, and so on, past which one never really sees." It is past these images, these fantasies, that the good writer leaps. In this book Miss Gordimer fails to take that leap.

The great test, finally, of fiction, is how interesting it is, how long it stays in the memory, how often it recurs to the reader. Few of Miss Gordimer's stories will haunt one. "The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight," "Little Willie," "The Bridegroom" are the only selections in "Friday's Footprint" that speak with a memorable voice of their own.

Crime at Carnival Time

"Strike for a Kingdom," by Menna Gallie (Harper. 185 pp. $3.50), reveals the private lives of those involved in the mysterious slaying of a Welsh mine manager. Elizabeth Bayard frequently comments on modern fiction for SR.

By Elizabeth Bayard

MENNA GALLIE'S first novel "Strike for a Kingdom," is set in a Welsh mining town out on strike. The year is 1926. Despite the strike, the annual costume carnival takes place and against this background of funny costumes and somewhat frantic fun Mr. Nixon, the hated mine manager, is murdered. Nobody knows who did it and the plot proceeds as a murder mystery, which in its unraveling passes through the homes and lives of many of the inhabitants of Cilhendre.

There is Jess Jeffries with her good husband and three much snubbed, much loved little girls in itchy flannel petticoats. To earn a few comforts for her family in the hard strike times she has become the manager's mistress, a part of her life that she has considered too inconsequential even to feel guilty about until the manager is found dead. Gerwin Evans, an overworked, serious collier of forty-five, fanatically devoted to his mother and dying sister, stands like a confused giant in the midst of the mystery. There is Lyshon, the village crier, an incredibly odoriferous old man who devotes himself to his pigs except in times of crisis. And Williams the Road, "very great in the chapel," who has nine children: Ebenezer, Zorobabel, Jonah, Abel, Rachel, Eliazer, Samuel, Malachi, and Shadrach.

Thus, in pursuit of the murderer, the author approaches the horrendous social themes crabwise and, taking them by surprise, avoids the clichés that cling to social injustice. She states the situation in a disarmingly simple way while underneath the local color, the humor, and the mystery runs an impassioned, unequivocal defense of the misjudged, mistreated Welsh coal miner.

The two major protagonists are D. J. Williams—a miner, a poet, and the local justice of the peace—and the inspector, a friend to the murdered man. Williams, the spokesman for the miners' dilemma, is the man whom the reader believes in. The inspector, on the other hand, is stupid, fearful, pompous, and despised by Williams. The struggle that arises, however, is not so much between the two men as within Williams himself,

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who is in a position to solve the murder and must choose between his sympathies as a miner and his responsibility as a justice of the peace.

Menna Gallie is a lovely writer and she lards her lean story with bright sharp descriptions and rich humor. The following reference to the manager's wife is typical of the humorous touches throughout: "Repressed by good manners, she was like a grate decorated with a paper fan, never meant for a fire. It would be impossible to imagine her in bed."

Mrs. Gallie has a taste for poetic imagery, a gift for description, and a Message as well – a most dangerous combination–yet the book never strays from its course as a novel but is beautifully balanced, open, and quick. The only false note is struck in the last paragraph due to the author's determination to make D. J. Williams a practising poet quite, it would seem, against his inclination.

SHIPBOARD LIFE: Frederick Morton's fourth novel, **"The Witching Ship"** (Random House, $3.95), is sunk by its prose. Sample: "Before the night was done Frau Schwabauch had loomed a creature elemental in the bar's gloaming. A phenomenon like the storm, she had been inexorable in her roseate powerful shiftings, innocent yet innocence-corrupting, impermissible yet undeniable." The entire book is written in this garbled, opaque language.

The story tells about an eight-day ocean voyage aboard a Dutch ship carrying European refugees and some Americans from England to New York during May, 1940. By voyage's end, a clergyman goes beserk, a former Viennese actress tries her hand at desegregation by romantically hounding a tortured Negro with a black mahogany pegleg, three U. of Michigan grads plot the weirdest sexual conspiracies, a touching romance between two middle-aged Germans blossoms, a balmy film maker holds the "world" premiere of his new movie aboard ship, a brief encounter with a German sub takes place during the costume ball, the captain's telescope is stolen, and the hero of the book, a nineteen-year-old Viennese lad, Learns About Life in his affair with a Nebraskan lady professor of contemporary history. The ship, which serves as the symbolic Earth-hero, has done its duty in transplanting this caravan of cosmopolitan gypsies.

The author's intention is honorable and even poetic: to describe the qualities of transience, anticipation, terror, and courage which a handful of Hitler's *déracinées* undergo. Mr. Morton shows a nice sense of warm, human commingling and occasional comic gifts, but the unpleasant fact is that his prose is about totally unreadable. Evidence of this was apparent in an early novel of his, "Asphalt and Desire." Eight years later, we are still in verbal quicksand.

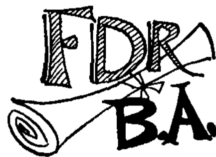
—DANIEL TALBOT.

CHILD'S-EYE VIEW: Though he has written eighteen novels, including "Fair Stood the Wind for France," an absorbing tale of downed English flyers in enemy-occupied country, H. E. Bates is probably best known for his short stories. The title of an earlier volume of these, "The Nature of Love," might serve equally well for this latest delightful collection, **"The Watercress Girl"** (Little, Brown, $3.75). The heroes of these thirteen stories are small boys, genuinely young, equipped with few facts and much misinformation; but most of them are confronted here with the sort of choices which adults must make between intense and conflicting emotional demands.

Except for one sixty-six-page adventure in which three children take decisive action in an imminent tragedy involving three strangers, the stories are brief and lyrical. All are charged with the contradictions inherent in the child's vision, which has a way of magnifying immediate details while viewing larger issues through a mist of myopia. "The larches had little scarlet eyelashes springing from their branches," one child observes. No mole or moustache on an adult face escapes his minute inspection; no nuance of lower-class speech is missed; no look or taste or smell is lacking. But at the same time we share the child's dark wonder, his sense of mystified loss and foreboding, as the fixed patterns of adult relationships shift and break around him, threatening his world.

In one of his literary studies, "The Modern Short Story," Bates says that this art form "can be anything the author decides it shall." Among a great many varieties he presents for a writer to choose from, he suggests "the piece which catches like a cobweb the light subtle iridescence of emotions that can never be really captured or measured." For a happily large proportion of his own stories, this is a perfect description.

—HOPE HALE.



Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

PRESIDENTIAL BACHELORS

The only bachelor President (a bachelor on leaving, as well as on entering, office) was James Buchanan. But he was a bachelor of arts as well. He and other Presidential bachelors by degree are listed in Column Two below. Julie McVay of Raleigh, North Carolina, lists in Column One the names of the educational institutions which the Presidents named attended, and she asks you to assign the right colleges to the right alumni. Answers on page 69.

Column One	Column Two
1. Amherst College	( ) John Adams
2. Bowdoin College	( ) Thomas Jefferson
3. Dickinson College	( ) James Madison
4. Harvard College	( ) John Quincy Adams
5. Kenyon College	( ) John Tyler
6. Miami University	( ) James K. Polk
7. University of North Carolina	( ) Franklin Pierce
8. Princeton University (formerly College of New Jersey)	( ) James Buchanan
9. Stanford University	( ) U.S. Grant
10. Union College (Schenectady, New York)	( ) Rutherford B. Hayes
11. Williams College	( ) James A. Garfield
12. College of William and Mary	( ) Chester A. Arthur
13. West Point (United States Military Academy)	( ) Benjamin Harrison
14. Yale University	( ) Theodore Roosevelt
	( ) William Howard Taft
	( ) Woodrow Wilson
	( ) Calvin Coolidge
	( ) Herbert Hoover
	( ) Franklin D. Roosevelt
	( ) Dwight D. Eisenhower

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