

Murder of a Resolute Saint

"Nine Hours to Rama," by Stanley Wolpert (Random House. 376 pp. \$4.95), weaves a Freudian motive into the assassination of Gandhi. As a correspondent in India for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Margaret Parton covered that historic event and the subsequent trial.

By MARGARET PARTON

WITHIN a few minutes after the murderer's bullets had fatally wounded Mahatma Gandhi, the foreign correspondents stationed in India had rushed to the scene. We saw the body. We saw the mourners, the silent masses in the streets. We saw Nehru weep. We watched the assassin during his first interrogation by police. Later, we watched him again during the long trial that led to his execution. To many of us he remained as much of an enigma as the man he had killed.

It is necessary to mention this background in order to explain why this reviewer wrestled through every page of the first half of "Nine Hours to Rama," quarreling all the way with Mr. Wolpert's presentation of a supreme news event which is now history. It was only when the story gathered in power and movement that the shift could be made from judgment of historical fact to judgment of historical fiction. This is a novel, and must be read as such.

Only three of the characters are actual persons: Gandhi; the assassin, Naturam Vinayak Godse, and his colleague, Vishnu Apte. All the others, the author claims, are fictional, though they often seem tantalizingly similar to certain well-remembered personalities. But the Indian setting is real enough for us to reach out and touch, and our knowledge of how it all ends does not interfere at all with the gradually accumulating suspense.

Mr. Wolpert, an authority on Indian nationalism and the author of one previous novel, has chosen an extremely tricky form: an alternation of the events of the day when Gandhi was assassinated with many long flashbacks relating the private and public histories of the half dozen people who play a major role in the tragedy. It is a difficult form to write and, unless read at one sitting, an irritating one to follow.

Godse, then, spends the day hiding in a railway station retiring room, at a movie, making love to a prostitute, and, just before setting out for his fatal appointment, in the arms of his high-born mistress. Apte, who was supposed to do the shooting, cowers for most of the day in the home of a tough old terrorist. Gopal Das, acting superintendent of police, spends frantic hours trying to convince various politicians that Gandhi's life is in danger and vainly attempting to persuade the resolute saint to call off his scheduled prayer meeting. In Poona, Dhondo Kanetkar, founder and director of the right-wing nationalist movement to which Godse belongs, waits for the news he knows will come and hopes

that his failing heart will hold out until his mortal enemy is dead. Back in Delhi, politicians scheme and plot while the sun moves on across the sky.

Yet with all this activity each of these people as well as several others find time to relive their pasts in reflection. There are memories of student meetings in London, of bombing plots against the British, of old grudges, old rivalries, old loves. For Gandhi, there is the weary memory of a lifetime spent trying to tell people something to which they will not listen. For Godse, there is the memory of the rejecting father he had sworn to kill—and, at last, moving slowly through the twilight garden, the face of the man who was called "Bapu"—father.

It's an exciting if sometimes over-intricate novel, and it will probably make a good movie. But let's not confuse it with history. Gandhi wasn't killed by a stray neurotic youth with a father (or mother) complex. It was entrenched religious traditionalism, cold-blooded and intellectualized, that killed Gandhi. As it may yet kill India.

Snatches of Life at Twilight

"The Marquise Went Out at Five," by Claude Mauriac translated by Richard Howard (Braziller. 311 pp. \$4.95), is a novel about a novel and a novelist who is his own chief character, in the style of the "nouveau roman." Laurent LeSage is professor of French literature at Pennsylvania State University.

By LAURENT LESAGE

PAUL VALERY's quip that he had never written a novel because he could not bring himself to say "The Marquise went out at five" has become the proverbial phrase to ridicule conventional fiction techniques. Just for the fun of it, Claude Mauriac begins his very unconventional novel with this gambit. To open a "nouveau roman" on a phrase that symbolizes the old-fashioned novel raises our hopes for burlesque and fun throughout; alas, Mauriac seems to be through with satire when he has turned the Marquise into an old "auntie" cruising the neighborhood, and, although imitating to perfection all the techniques of the "new novel," he is apparently in dead earnest. What a spoof we could have had if someone had jolted his elbow a bit!

The place is the Carrefour de Buci,

an intersection in old Paris redolent of history and present-day markets; the time is between five and six. "Unity of place, unity of time, multiplicity of actions: an undertaking doomed to failure, especially since the unity of actual time would be surrounded, penetrated, absorbed in my novel by the infinite pullulation of innumerable past moments." So says the novelist who is ruminating on the novel he will write, which is this very novel in the process of being written and in which he himself is a character—a novelist who is an unavowed adept of the "new novel" and a clandestine reader of Michel Butor in particular.

There are over a dozen other principal characters shown intermittently in their rooms or on the street. Each has an interesting story—an adolescent trying to resist the allure of risqué pictures, a maid in a hotel listening to lovers in the next room, a sad child on the curb, a tourist reading his guidebook, a detective about to make a capture, bosomy girls on mysterious errands—but we are not permitted more than brief glances back and forth, from one to the other. "It would be cheating if I extended them until they constituted coherent and well-proportioned stories," declares the novelist. He will not extend or particularize: "the names, the per-

sonalities have no importance." What we must be made to feel is humanity in its collectivity. The talk and thought of the characters, which come to us in snatches, are augmented by utterances of chance passers-by until the veritable din of street sounds is produced.

But, as the novelist says, we must hear not only the present swarm of human traffic, but the legions of history. To avoid that "abomination, the historical novel," he explains, "I'll use my artisan method . . . without chronological order, in separate 'takes,' according to a previous pattern." The pattern is tiny and intricate: countless bits of dialogues, documents, camera

shots, and mindstream recordings deftly and swiftly combined to produce "the reality of time both aggravated and denied by this crowd which . . . has unceasingly crossed the same Carrefour."

Before such painstaking craftsmanship and such a lofty objective, it may be indelicate to admit that the book just makes you dizzy, ready to cry out with the novelist, "O mad crusade, my poor crammed mind is giving way!" Mauriac cannot be unaware that many, on putting the book down, will turn his novelist's words against him: "A pure exercise in virtuosity . . . a game, a wager . . . the last sentence, borrowed, like the first, from Paul Valéry."

Mores in Erin



"God Made Sunday and Other Stories," by Walter Macken (Macmillan. 250 pp. \$3.95), tells of a fortunate twenty-five-pound trout and other natives of the west coast of Ireland. Edward McSorley is the author of *"Kitty, I Hardly Knew You."*

By EDWARD MCSORLEY

IT SEEMS there was a summer visitor ("people call him the Taleteller,") on Colmain's island off the west coast of Ireland, and he it was who inspired Colmain to put painfully down Walter Macken's "God Made Sunday." As a device it's one not often employed by Irish writers of the short story, among whom Macken is surely one of the best, but he uses it well. Macken avoids the sometimes irritating detachment of Frank O'Connor, and he isn't clever in the sense that Sean O'Faolain is. However, one doesn't feel the chilly separation of the writer from his subject usually present in the works of the other two, and it is good to be reassured that the Irish do have emotions that function as well as their rather tricky brains.

Macken has a sure touch and shows it, in this collection, to great advantage in "The Big Fish," a twenty-five-pound trout that Tickler, an old man, lets go—to the dismay of his companion Joe, a small boy—after they hook it. It's the biggest fish either of them will ever take, undoubtedly, but once Tickler landed it, as he explains, they would stuff it, put a card on it, and he would be pointed out as the man who took the big fish. All very well, but what would he do for fishing then? And how

would you explain this complex situation to a small boy?

There are three stories in the book about "Solo," a young priest. He's a very interesting priest, neither a Father Conmee nor a Father Ring. Solo is a footballer, or has been. In the story "Solo and the Nine Irons" he swims a torrent when a bridge is washed out to take medicines to dying young girl, upon whom the nine irons spell is about to be pronounced. Solo brings the medicines before the nine irons are applied, and the girl's life is saved. But you can't help wondering (or I couldn't) what would have happened if Solo couldn't swim. What is interesting, in an Irish story, is that Solo relies on modern drugs, not prayers, to cure the girl. In another story Solo invites a village Magdalen into his rectory to live until her problems are solved (such problems being soluble even in Ireland, it appears) thus bringing down on his own head the hostility of the village and, what's far worse, the anger of his bishop. Here Macken is probing somewhat deeper into the mores of the countryside, and he does so with great skill.

The marrying of Tom Flannagan to Dan the Dancer's daughter, who is young enough to be his own daughter, is Macken's way of saying it isn't always so sad when age and youth are united; illusions are illusions and all you have to do is keep them alive. Not a bad idea in a country where the men are usually getting on in years when they marry—if at all.

Expert yarnspinner that Macken is, he cannot escape the patterns set by a long tradition of Irish storytelling. As Joyce said: "Every telling has a taling and that's the he and the she of it"—and that's also the hell of it.

Trifling Gentlefolk

"An Unavoidable Delay and Other Stories," by Diana Athill (Doubleday. 215 pp. \$4.50), record, in the main, the inner struggles of the mildly neurotic. Joan Bostwick is a free-lance writer and critic.

By JOAN BOSTWICK

THE CHARACTERS cavorting through Diana Athill's collection of short stories have one thing in common: most of them have their fingers wrapped around a flask labeled "Love Potion." Some take a swig, some merely sniff the mildly irritating vapors, and others simply shrug and refuse to uncork the philter. Miss Athill, an Englishwoman who is new to the writing profession, manages to describe their varying reactions to the potion without making platitudinous observations about Life and Love.

These are gently cynical stories about gentle people faced with alternatives and hampered by character limitations or impossible circumstances. Most of them are mildly neurotic individuals whose inner struggles are being recorded by an articulate analyst who, with a sardonic quality that is delightfully illuminating, has penetrated their emotional barriers.

Miss Athill's range, however, is somewhat limited by her tendency to view captiously any love but that which is brief. If the stories are read in rapid succession, this begins to emerge as a parochial refrain. "An Unavoidable Delay," the title story, and "For Rain It Hath a Gentle Sound" are both about fleeting affairs. In each the women have made unchallenging, mediocre marriages and engage in short-lived liaisons with doctors whom they have casually met. After a night of love, the first woman, finally assured of her femininity, bids her husband and her lover *adieu*, taking the whole business in lighthearted stride. The second woman remains married to her drone-like husband and, in time, recognizes that the beauty of her extra-curricular love existed only in its brevity.

In the manner of Katherine Mansfield, several of the stories rest quietly on implication. For "Buried," the best in the collection, the author effectively utilizes the symbolism of buried chestnuts in exploring the repressed desires in a brother-sister relationship. Another is "The Return," in which two female Simon Pures, ". . . either fastidious or not yet much saddened by the years or their circumstances . . ." have a brush