

by cablegram to attend a business conference.

Part Three: the couple marry in London, since Zoë is having visa trouble. Mark goes to Los Angeles alone, and now we learn that he is no mere public relations man; he is doing big, unspecified undercover work for an important, unnamed branch of our government. And he must go to an unnamed emerging nation in Africa, carrying with him the new knowledge that his Zoë may be a Communist working against him.

So, off to an Africa that is as real as a "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle" set, where Mr. Wakeman tops himself for insane plotting. Mark is captured by enemies of the United States. He must make a tape-recorded statement damaging to his own country or he will be turned over to cannibalistic natives. Suddenly—in a rescue scene that Pearl White would have refused to play—a native appears, just as Mark is contemplating ending it all with a poisoned cigarette, and leads him to safety. After which the native returns to the jungle as mysteriously as he came. Not the foggiest clue is ever given as to the who, why, or what of this deliverer, but neither Frederic Wakeman nor Mark Marklay wastes a second wondering about it. Mark has to get back to the United States to change our African policy and find out about Zoë. But whether she is a loyal wife or a Communist spy doesn't matter either. That big scene is played out in the wings before either Mark or his reader gets to the courtroom.

At the ending, we find Mark Marklay . . . Oh, forgive me. I guess I just got swept away. I didn't realize everyone had gone home.



Lorenza Mazzetti — unpretentious but moving.

Fairy Tales of Fascism

"The Sky Falls," by Lorenza Mazzetti, translated from the Italian by Marquerite Waldman (McKay. 158 pp. \$3.75), sees the wartime summer of 1944 through the eyes of a ten-year-old girl. Thomas G. Bergin, professor of Italian at Yale, frequently reviews Italian fiction.

By THOMAS G. BERGIN

"THE SKY FALLS" is a short, unpretentious, and moving account of the war experiences of a little family of well-to-do but vulnerable non-combatants during the crucial summer of 1944. The narrator is ten-year-old Penny, and through her uninhibited story we learn something of the background of the family and also something of what childhood must have been like during that period of tension and insecurity. Penny's state of mind as well as her scale of values is pretty well set off on the first page:

I wonder whether it's all right for me to love my sister Baby more than the Duce. Because I love Baby the same as Jesus . . . and I love Jesus a little more than God, and God the same as Mussolini, and Italy and the Fatherland less than God but more than my yellow bear.

Penny, being an open-hearted, outgoing little girl, is indeed quite willing to love anyone, given half a chance; she likes Uncle, too, who is clearly the head of the family, although her love here is tempered with awe and some regret for Uncle's Jewishness, which of course endangers his soul. She even likes Heinz, the General's orderly, whom she sees a lot of when the General quarters himself on the family.

Penny's life is filled with more action than speculation, and she rambles on quite appealingly about her games with Baby, her school work, and her religious activity. It is outside events that force her to some reconsiderations: the Germans move in, the English bombard her home, eventually the Germans retreat, and in a terrifying last chapter Uncle pays the price of his racial irregularity. Penny hardly understands why all these things should be; her faith in Mussolini is somewhat shaken by minor incidents on the way,

but the ultimate tragedy of Uncle leaves her simply uncomprehending. The sky has fallen indeed.

This bare little story is extremely well told; the characterization is natural and spontaneous, and the narrative is absorbing as much for what we sense offstage as for what we see going on before us. Penny is very successfully realized: she is no sugar-and-spice little girl, but a totally real one. Some of her games have the authentic savagery of childhood as it truly is. The jacket tells us that the author has drawn on her own wartime experiences, which were similar to those of Penny; if so, she has done exceedingly well in recreating a ten-year-old's state of mind, and one can understand the warm reception the book has received in Italy and England. While it is hardly a "great" book either in scope or depth, it is, within the limits of its own objectives, very nearly perfect.

THE TRUTHS OF STRUGGLE: Frank Tuohy is a British writer of cosmopolitan interests and scope. His manner is somewhat like that of Chekhov—quiet, deceptively matter-of-fact, without compromise or illusion or any desire to prettify the ugly—yet he finds beauty where others might find only moral or physical squalor. Thus equipped, he explores in the twelve stories comprising **"The Admiral and the Nuns"** (Scribners, \$3.50 hardbound, \$1.65 paperback) the truths of struggle, of degradation, of compensation and redemption—among London artists, in the Poland of tyranny and agony, in the decadence of tropical Latin America.

In the South America of the title story (which in 1960 won the Katherine Mansfield Short Story Award in England) we meet a "hopelessly, slothfully inadequate" woman, who is in grave difficulty because "her upbringing had provided her with too many retreats into the cosiness of class and religion." In South America, too, we perceive in the angers and the apoplexy of the old hands, with their contemptuous approach to the "natives," the tattered banners of British colonialism. In London we experience the hurt and the longing of a middle-class girl trying to live and love among the beasts of Bohemia.

In Poland we witness the chilling

consequences of an infernal State mechanism—a man turned into a spy for the regime that had persecuted him. But in Poland we may also laugh (however briefly) over the plight of a music critic denied a passport because he was reported to have been “in contact with Western diplomats”: he had arranged the mating of his dog with that of an ambassador.

These are but a few examples of the sensitive stories that make “The Admiral and the Nuns” a splendid achievement. It is a book that deserves a wider audience than it probably will have.

—HOKE NORRIS.

IRONY AT THE INTERSECTIONS: Now being issued nationally after having received a limited printing in California in 1960, “Of Streets and Stars,” by Alan Marcus (Houghton Mifflin, \$4.50), is one of those books that arrive with dust jackets covered with encomiums. In this case the recurring word of praise is “original,” but what lies inside is actually a novel heavily influenced by Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway” (a quote from which follows the dedication), with a dash of Nathanael West’s “The Day of the Locust” thrown in. The scene is Hollywood, where the paths of a disparate group of people cross and criss-cross in and out of a major studio. The large cast includes, among others, a pathetic secretary on the verge of spinsterhood, a young novelist working on his first script, the doddering head of the studio and a clever younger man waiting to take over, a beautiful middle-aged woman who acts out scenarios for busy producers, and a desperate refugee couple.

The author is a skilful traffic manager and a writer of obvious talent, but this, his second novel (the first was “Straw to Make Brick”), is a curiously cold and unreal work. One is always aware of an omnipotent, omniscient creator, moving his characters with self-conscious wisdom and professional compassion along carefully laid out paths intersected by pat ironies. Mr. Marcus clearly is fascinated by the peculiar shapes that lives can assume, the surprises with which our natures are mined. There are few real surprises, however, in “Of Streets and Stars,” and its shape finally has less the quality of something that has developed organically than of something that has been too artfully prearranged.

—DONALD LA BADIE.

Coming April 13

SR’s Annual
Advertising Awards Issue

POETRY

The Relish of David



—Bettmann Archive.

Countess of Pembroke—“majesty fused with verbal ingenuity.”

“The Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke,” edited by J. C. A. Rathmell (Doubleday-Anchor. 362 pp. Paperback, \$1.45), provide evidence that Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, was England’s greatest poetess before Elizabeth Barrett Browning. J. Max Patrick, professor of English in New York University Graduate School, is editor of *Seventeenth-Century News* and of *The Stuart Editions of seventeenth-century authors forthcoming from New York University Press*.

By J. MAX PATRICK

THE FACT that the Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621) has not been recognized as a great poet in her own right is disturbing evidence of masculine underestimation of women. Had she been a man, it is inconceivable that her finest verses, though circulated in manuscript, would have waited until 1823 to be printed in a limited edition of 250 copies, and would not have been properly edited until 1963.

It is true that in her lifetime Mary Herbert was hailed by both sexes as “a most delicate poet” and that modern histories of literature applaud her as the learned patroness who inspired

Spenser, Daniel, and minor versifiers. But she is best known from William Browne’s epitaph, which described her succinctly as “Sidney’s sister, Pembroke’s mother.” Had she no better claim to fame, it would indeed be noteworthy that the Shakespeare folio was dedicated to her son and that Sir Philip Sidney, England’s paragon of virtuous achievement, was her brother. But the unrecognized marvel is that as a poet she was at least equal to him—and this is a statement not made lightly, for he was one of the greatest Renaissance poets.

The grounds to justify this high evaluation of the countess are contained in this volume of “divers & sundry kindes of verse, more rare, & excellent for the method & varietie then ever hath bene don in English.” This description from the manuscript title page is apt, for these Biblically inspired poems are artful re-creations of the Psalms, not mere translations. Sir Philip wrote the first forty-four; his sister revised them and added 128 more. They preserve the “fulnes of the Sence and the *relish* of Scriptural phrase” but refashion them in English idiom and meter, endowing them with a fresh, personal quality. The poems of George Herbert’s “Temple” were obviously shaped under their influence. And John Donne judged them far better than the rhymed psalms then used in English churches: he rightly observed that they “re-reveale . . . sweetly and sincerely” what the Heavenly Muse whispered to King David (the traditional author of the Psalms), and he to the Hebrews.

The superiority of the countess’s poems over those of her brother is readily seen if the opening stanza of his version of Psalm 23 is compared with hers of 120. Sidney writes with stark simplicity:

The Lord, the Lord my shepheard is,
And so can never I
Tast misserie.
He rests me in greene pasture his:
By waters still, and sweete
Hee guides my feete.

In contrast, note the intimate, personal urgency, the alliterative art, and the powerful immediacy that make her lines potent:

As to th’Eternall often in anguishes
Erst have I called, never unanswered,
(Continued on page 78)