

The Quiet Moments of Truth

***One Touch of Nature and Other Stories*, by B. J. Chute (Dutton. 250 pp. \$4.50), reach for the significance of events in the lives of middle-class American families. Warren Bower is the author of "Short Story Craft," to be published by Macmillan.**

By WARREN BOWER

IN RECENT years collections of short stories have become more viable and popular as books, a development good for writers and often for readers as well. Authors may thus take their products twice to market, as Joy Chute has done in a volume of stories all except three of which have appeared first in major popular magazines. Among the ten previously printed are most of the best examples of short stories in the volume—which may be a tentative answer, quite unscientific in determination, to the perennially-raised question: do the mass magazines publish good fiction? However, authors can also use a collection of short fiction as a means to get before a reading public stories that (for whatever reason) are unsold.

Miss Chute is an accomplished craftsman and storyteller in all her work. She writes sensitively, aware that illumination of the significance of quietly dramatic moments is one of the purposes fiction serves best. She is adroit in the choice of words, has a fine appreciation of sentence rhythms and the color of speech. Grace and charm and competence mark her writing style, and recommend her warmly to her audience.

It is in the management of her characters that Miss Chute seems to assent to the tacit demands of the market for which she writes her short fiction. Her women almost invariably are charming; they also manage their households, and all within them, with consummate taste and effectiveness. Their husbands are usually bumbling at home, well-intentioned but limited in ability to sense when they are inept, however successful they may be as providers and pillars of professions.

In the title story, "One Touch of Nature," which is concerned with the theme of togetherness between father and son, the father invites the boy to go with him on a camping trip, which predictably results in blisters on the tender feet, indigestion, and a cold in

the head. But because the boy, who was calling his father "Sir" at the start of the story, ends it by saying "Dad," the "long, limping, weary journey home" will be walked "on wings." An eminently satisfactory ending for the readers of a "woman's book"; but we are not persuaded it is the inevitable one.

There is no denying, however, that Miss Chute is at her secure best when she is dealing with a broadly moral problem. She may always come down on the side of the angels, but she provides plenty of arguments for both sides, and the resulting suspense makes for interest well sustained until the very end. Thus one of the best of the stories in this book is "Thank You, Dr. Russell," in which the issue is whether a new headmaster in a boys' school can stand up to the challenge of a recalcitrant boy who knows his father has bought his graduation by an ample gift to the needy school. He does, in something of a surprise ending rather too quickly arrived at; but the story has dimensions and implications and a skill in telling that give it real import.

Another of the distinctive stories in the collection is, oddly enough, one that apparently did not get first publication in a magazine. "The Web" is a wry account of how a man mismanages a mistress and a wife so that they come together and during several moments of truth have revealed to them, and to him, what a cheat and a bumbler he is. This is what Miss Chute can do with an old theme: nothing less than give it point, freshness, and credibility, thus gaining applause from both genders in her audience.

"Dung-Tongue" and Other Matters: The evaluation of a collection of humorous essays is a near-impossible task. Critical objectivity, the reviewer's essential tool, is nonexistent. The only question a reviewer can ask himself is, "Is what I am reading funny?" And the answer can only be a subjective one. After all, one man's mirth is another man's acid indigestion. With that in mind, let us look at *Time Lurches On*,

by Ralph Schoenstein (Doubleday, \$3.95), a collection of fourteen essays if you count up the titles on the contents page, though in actuality many of the essays break down into several short pieces loosely strung together under a catch-all title.

The bulk of this collection, subtitled "Daddy, What Will You Be When You Grow Up?," is devoted to the author's reactions to contemporary matters: everything from the fight over prayer in the schools to the reshaping of the English language—courtesy of American advertising agencies—into something Mr. Schoenstein labels as "dung-tongue." These pieces range from fresh and funny to tired and silly, with the majority falling pleasantly, if not hilariously, in between.

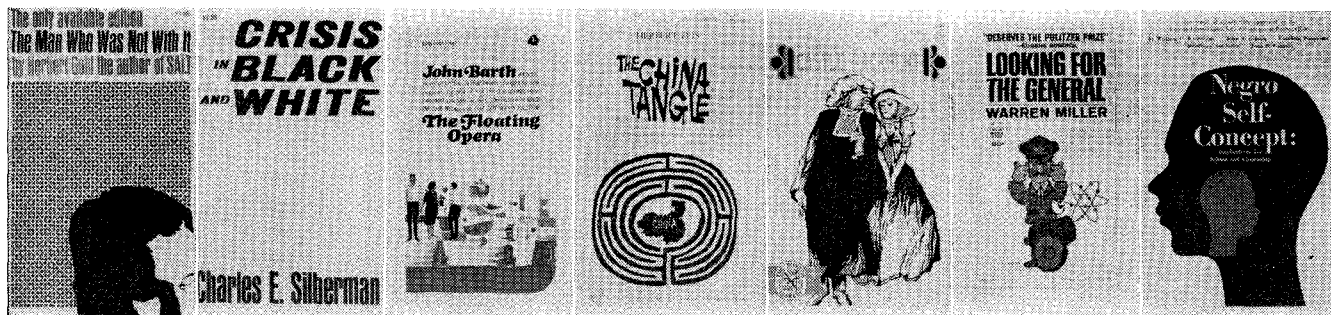
High in my estimation is a forward look into a grammar school in a fully unionized welfare state, where the teacher informs her charges that "the first thing we're going to do today is to have a shape-up for the Christmas play." Among the tired is a piece on cemeteries that contributes nothing new or half so funny as Jessica Mitford's straight reportage on the same subject. Bottom honors go to the author's swipe at the use of music in dentist's offices, which leads to a silly, unfunny list of suitable selections to serve as accompaniment to different kinds of dental work.

Mr. Schoenstein is at his best not when he is launching his barbed arrows, for he is a haphazard marksman, but when he relaxes into nostalgia. There is a fine tribute to the New York Giants and their loyal fans who stuck with them even when they were in first place and cheered them back to fifth. Another, on the "enchanted reality of radio," recalls the names, adventure serials, and catchphrases of those wonderful days when that eyeless box in the living room created pictures that television will never duplicate.

Since humor, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, there can be no flat pronouncement on the merits of *Time Lurches On*. For me it is a mixed bag; others may find it pure gold all the way. I doubt, however, that anyone will disagree regarding the likable picture of the author which his book creates. Ralph Schoenstein, as humorist, does not call to mind so rare a being as S. J. Perelman, who can light the sky with language, or Robert Benchley, whose humor suggested a nervous willingness to meet the world halfway if he could frisk it first for concealed weapons. Instead, Mr. Schoenstein comes across as that nice guy down the block who'll never quite make it big because he insists on questioning the existing order of things, instead of closing his eyes and cashing in with the rest of the mob.

—HASKEL FRANKEL.





PICK OF THE PAPERBACKS

What price success? About \$400,000. At least that's what Dell is paying John Le Carré for the paperback reprint rights to his yet unpublished novel *The Looking Glass War*. That's quite a boost in pay from the \$25,000 Dell reportedly paid for his first novel, the runaway *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, which has sold more than two million copies in two months. Mr. Le Carré, who recently visited this country under his real name, David Cornwell, is a blond, thirty-four-year-old Englishman, a former schoolteacher and minor civil servant. The father of three small sons, he is a man who seems to take success in sturdy British style. "I had no idea *The Spy* would be so successful," he said. "I think we have grown weary of Cold War attitudes. I think we know there is a self-perpetuating quality of war which can be more frightful than war itself, because it advances new hostilities while pretending to solve the old ones. I would describe that as the propitious and fortuitous atmosphere in which *The Spy* was published." Be that as it may, the atmosphere in which Mr. Le Carré-Cornwell dwells is highly propitious, salutary in fact. His last address was simply "Somewhere in the Greek Islands."

The culture hero of our times may indeed be James Bond, but back in the 1930s the literary adventure market was dominated by a titan named Doc Savage, created by Kenneth Robeson (pen-name of the late Lester Dent). Savage was an intrepid, square-jawed, nonsmoking teetotaler and a woman-shy battler against evil in a world where the bad guys were simply bad and promptly defeated. Bantam, encouraged by the rerun popularity of Tarzan, another of nature's noblemen, has published six Doc Savage novels. The jacket art of *The Lost Oasis*, *Brand of the Werewolf*, and *The Polar Treasure* (45¢ each) depicts Doc fighting off, respectively, vampire bats, hairy wolfmen, and an outsized bear. Without even reading the books, it's safe to say that ol' Doc lived to fight yet another day. . . . From Denver, Colorado, Alan Swallow writes that his publishing house is bringing out Yvor Winters's *In Defense of Reason* (\$3.75). Mr. Swallow says, "This one volume has had more influence than any other critical volume published in the last decade and a half." . . . Saul Bellow, winner of the 1964 National Book Award for *Herzog*, is here, there, and everywhere these days. His long introductory essay to Dostoevsky's acerbic comments about European travel in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (McGraw-Hill, \$1.95), charmingly recalls Bellow's own confrontations with his *concierge*. . . . "My emotions during the ceremony had been a mixture of fear and elation. Afterwards I felt exalted with a new spirit of power and strength. All my previous life seemed empty and meaningless." That's how Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, a thirty-six-year-old member of the Kenya parliament, describes his initiation into Mau Mau in *Mau Mau Detainee* (Pelican original, \$1.25), a grimly fascinating account of revolutionary and nationalist activities in and out of British prison camps.

—ROLLENE W. SAAL.

Fiction

One of the great pleasures of reading paperback fiction is the discovery of some literary curiosity, a novel either little known or long out of print. It's a joy second only to finding a best-seller in paper covers just when you were about to buy the hardcover edition. Among the newly published oddities are some early

novels that are interesting somewhat less for complex character development than for the reflection they give of their own times. Fanny Burney's first published work (1778) was *Evelina or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance Into the World* (Norton, \$1.65), told in letters which give glittering glimpses into the manners of the eighteenth century. Another lady novelist was Maria Edge-

worth, who chose the "memoir" as her novel's disguise. *Castle Rackrent* (Norton, 95¢) reveals the dark plights of Irish gentry, "the drunken Sir Patrick, the litigious Sir Murtagh, the fighting Sir Kit, and the slovenly Sir Condy." Then of course there was Emily Brontë, far more "counter, original, spare, strange" than either the Misses Burney or Edgeworth. Her *Gondal's Queen* (McGraw-Hill, \$2.45), a novel in verse patched together by Fannie E. Ratchford from bits and fragments scrawled on bits of paper, stands as a weird, wild tribute to that fanciful imagination which peopled a mythical land.

New and noteworthy: John Barth's *The Floating Opera* (Avon, 75¢) and Warren Miller's *Looking for the General* (Crest, 60¢), both devilishly humorous, satiric, and almost always original; Herbert Gold's *The Man Who Was Not with It* (Random House, \$1.95), poetic exploration along the "carny" circuit where the midway offers prime pain of living; Erich Maria Remarque's *The Night in Lisbon* (Crest, 60¢), the secret, shuffling world of refugees in transit along the labyrinth of intrigue and lost hopes; Eudora Welty's *Thirteen Stories* (Harvest, \$1.65), finely wrought and better than we remembered.

The American Negro

The greatest national issue of our time is unquestionably race relations, and any number of books have been published recently examining the problem from every vantage point. Some are purely historical, like *Black Cargoes* (Compass, \$1.85), a history of the Atlantic slave trade. Written by Daniel P. Mannix in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley, the book is a violent, fascinating record of three hundred years of a grotesque and financially successful commercial enterprise.

No era was so important to subsequent events as Reconstruction in the South, the subject of Vernon Lane Whar-

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