

for vile housing, for narcotics, for prostitution, for disease, for below-average schooling. But when the area is analyzed it looks quite different. It has a "mix"—41 per cent Puerto Rican, 38 per cent Negro, 21 per cent Italian and others. It is volatile: half its population has moved within a five-year period.

No one reading Mrs. Sexton's book will come away with a feeling of futility, of tasks beyond our ability. Rather, one shares her reaction: "I went to East Harlem in ignorance and hope. I came away less ignorant and no less hopeful. I saw things that most Americans miss. I saw what the poverty of the slum can mean in suffering and squalor, and I saw what it can mean in human warmth, life, diversity, color."

East Harlem is on the move. And if East Harlem can move, who is prepared to say that Central Harlem, and the multitude of smaller Harlems in Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, and St. Louis cannot move as well?

But, it may be objected, what about color? What happens when the mobile middle-class Negro family moves out of the ghetto? *At the Edge of Harlem* takes up this problem with a case study of John Creary, his wife, and their six children, a Negro family carefully, purposefully discovering a new way of life at the edge of the ghetto. It is a life that preserves personal principles, yet samples and savors experiences in a once all-white world, in the expanding areas where individuals and groups drawn from both races are learning to relax, to work, to argue, to shop, to pray together with gradually lessening self-consciousness.

THE Crearys' story is not without rough edges. And more lie ahead. There is nothing in the difficulties which they have encountered to give any human heart grounds for complacency. But the evidence is equally clear that we have been moving forward.

Yet, a giant step remains, and it is the fine, intelligent, middle-class Crearys and their white counterparts who must take that step together. Will they succeed? The Crearys and their friends, in Edward Wakin's words, share "a profound sense of uncertainty—about life itself, about each man's ability to cope with it and about the added uncertainty facing Negro parents."

But their own life and conduct are built not upon uncertainty but upon confidence, upon faith in the solvability of problems, a faith that can only be strengthened by a critical assessment of the enormous distance already traveled, the transformation that has been wrought in the City of the Poor which Jacob Riis delineated in 1890 and the City of Abundance now beginning to take shape on the horizon of our dreams.

Summer Leaves the Lost Alone

August Is a Wicked Month, by Edna O'Brien (Simon & Schuster, 220 pp. \$3.95), concerns a woman whose inability to say no lands her in a constant round of predicaments. Elizabeth Janeway is the author of "Accident" and other novels.

By ELIZABETH JANEWAY

EDNA O'BRIEN is right: August is a time of loose ends, a time of summer bachelors, of desolation, and sudden romances that spring up and die in a quick shower of shame. It is "time out" from the rest of the year, when lonely people, despairing of good fortune from the gods of the Regular Cycle of Life, reach out to each other, under a sun that seems to burn away the plodding responsibilities of winter and to offer a roof of brightness beneath which new loves and friendships can grow. Another country, another climate.

Then comes autumn. Suddenly reality sparkles with new promise. The season turns, life begins. Summer is over and the rank growth that reached toward the light so hopefully in August withers and dies.

Miss O'Brien's protagonist in what, after all, is so familiar a situation that musical comedies have been based on it, is not a summer bachelor experimenting with temporary freedom, or an unmarried girl determined to make the most of Italy or a vacation camp, but a figure more lost and adrift than either. Ellen, living in London, is a young divorcee with an eight-year-old son, a husband who visits occasionally and with whom she has reached a stage "of sullen peace [though] they talked now as she always feared they might, like strangers who had never been in love at all."

Ellen grew up in Ireland, in a tangle of family relationships and intimacies (they move dimly in her memory from time to time), and she is simply not adapted to living alone, responsible to and for no one. As the book opens, her husband is taking their boy off for a camping vacation. It is all agreed and amicable. But when they drive off, Ellen sits in the dark crying. She doesn't begin to know what to do with herself. Handsome, energetic, outgoing, extroverted, she is a person who can't just do nothing. There's a barrier missing



—Horst Tapp.

Edna O'Brien—"a little book about a big character."

between herself and life; she literally doesn't know how to say no. In a way she's frightening. Men who come to her in need are apt to run away again. She's too open, too easy. They can't believe she's as simple as all that—or life, either. When they stop to think about it, she behaves like a slut.

Is she a slut? No. For she feels, participates, and shares. Yet any sensible person must despair of her. Lonely without her boy, taken up and then dropped by a man, Ellen goes off to France on one of those travel-agent-arranged vacations that the advertisements make at once so tempting and so unconvincing. "France will provide an adventure in all that is pleasurable in existence," says the booklet; the young man in the agency adds that it's "breathtaking," and Ellen heads for the South of France.

What happens to her there is horrible, funny, tragic, absurd. Does she get into trouble? Up to her neck. Does she make friends? Well—yes and no. She's so indiscriminating! That barrier she's missing is certainly the place where judgment lives, and self-protection, too. But if she were cautious she wouldn't be Ellen. She's magnificent, silly, dangerous to herself and to other people—and vividly alive. More than a character, she's a person who moves into your mind and upsets you, starts your memory and your emotions going. We've all known her one way or another, I suspect. She's not an "unforgettable character"; she's someone nextdoor or a girl you grew up with. To a man, perhaps, she's the

one you loved first and didn't marry.

The rest of the book, outside of Ellen who is absolutely and utterly believable and moving, is a series of vivid episodes. Each one catches the reader as it occurs. But put together they somehow don't cohere. I found myself accepting everything as it happens, but not the totality of the story. It's as if Miss O'Brien were saying, "I know this girl [and, we agree, so do we] and this is the sort of thing that's always happening to her." Then she rattles off a string of anecdotes, and though it's clear that this is the sort of thing that happens to people like Ellen, the anecdotes don't stand up.

The world around Ellen flickers by, odd, not quite recognizable, too fast.

Of course it is Ellen's world, and no doubt this is the way it seems to her. But to the rest of us, Ellen's world is not entirely plausible—that is part of the truth about Ellen. When she accepts events, we want to ask, "Why? Was it really like that? What did it mean?" Miss O'Brien won't tell.

Too bad. I know Miss O'Brien chose to do it this way, but I wish she hadn't. The reader is entitled to a frame for Ellen, just that bit more invention that would solidify her world and make it real for us. Miss O'Brien has written a little book about a big character.

I hope Ellen gets loose in a larger and more differentiated world in another book. She could stand up to it.

place, Pavese has his speakers point out, in primitive times when all beings lived without inhibitions and in their natural state. Then came the Olympians to introduce order—but introducing order meant, at the same time, ruthlessness and destruction. The Olympians, though called immortals, are not truly so; they are the creation of men's fears, and will live only so long as those fears last. For all their seeming blissfulness, they are accursed: they have the gift of foreknowledge, which means that they cannot experience life; they can only exist. Humans, who know nothing of the future, are the sole beings for whom this unique experience is possible. It is no wonder that Zeus so often sought to be among them.

An air of melancholy, of regret for lost pleasures, even of despair, haunts these pieces. Greek myths, not exactly joyous to begin with, can take on an added dimension of grimness in Pavese's hands. His Orpheus, for example, explains that when he looked back at Eurydice and thereby caused her return to the underworld, he did so deliberately, for he realized that death was nothingness, and that a Eurydice returned to life with death in her bones was a hopeless illusion. His Sappho observes that love means only bitterness and torment (certainly it meant only that for Pavese himself), that one woman alone—Helen—was successful at it, and then only by leaving behind her a path of fire and slaughter.

THE translation, the first in English, is good, but not as good as it could be. In a check limited to two dialogues selected at random, I found three out-and-out mistakes (when Ixion explains to a cloud that a god he saw was *della stessa carne tua* he means "was of the same substance as you," not "a creature of flesh, like you"); several places in which the proper tone was missed ("Go on. Cry," for Leucothea's *ecco, piangi* to the abandoned Ariadne, distorts her attitude; the words mean rather, "There, there, you have your cry"); three phrases that had been inadvertently omitted, and half a dozen places where the translators, in my judgment, quite unnecessarily over-interpreted (why not simply "You haven't told me who you are" for Ariadne's *Non mi hai detto chi sei*, instead of "Look, who are you?," which makes her sound like a rather truculent tart). There are some freshman-level mistakes in English grammar and a disturbing inconsistency in the use of contracted verb forms. In short, the translation, though it reads smoothly, shows signs of hasty workmanship. Lastly, I think it was a mistake not to include a translators' foreword; Pavese is hardly so well known to Americans that he needs no introduction.

Night Thoughts from Olympus

Dialogues with Leucò, by Cesare Pavese, translated from the Italian by William Arrowsmith and D. S. Carne-Ross (University of Michigan Press. 166 pp. \$5), expresses, in imaginary conversations among characters from Greek myth, the author's unhappy observations on life. Lionel Casson, professor of classics at the Washington Square College of New York University and director of the Summer Session of the American Academy at Rome, has translated Lucian's "Dialogues," among other works.

By LIONEL CASSON

CESARE PAVESE's biography reads more like romantic tragedy than real life. His childhood was spent in poverty, and from the age of six, when his father died, he was under the thumb of an austere martinet of a mother. In the Thirties Pavese laid the basis of his literary reputation by becoming Italy's foremost translator and interpreter of American literature. During the same period he passed a year in Mussolini's jails, and also suffered a trauma when he was brutally thrown over by a woman he loved deeply and devotedly. In the early Forties, while rising to eminence as one of Italy's most celebrated novelists and poets, he went through a second trying and unsuccessful love affair. In 1950, shortly after receiving the Strega Award for his fine novel *For Women Only*, he was rejected by another woman, this time an obscure American movie starlet for whom he had conceived a desperate passion. It proved to be the breaking

point. Still in his early forties and at the very height of his fame, this lonely and troubled genius put an end to his unhappy life with an overdose of sleeping pills.

From 1935 to 1950, Pavese kept a diary (available in English under the title *This Business of Living*) in which he recorded the most meaningful observations on life and literature that occurred to him. His *Dialoghi con Leucò*, composed between 1945 and 1946 and published in 1947, are, as it were, variations on these themes. For, in these brief pieces, he takes the ideas baldly sketched in his diary and, to underscore their significance and universality, makes them the topics of imaginary dialogues between figures from Greek mythology.

In turning to such a device, Pavese followed a tradition that reaches back to the second century A.D., to the amusing and caustic dialogues between the gods of Olympus or between the shades of celebrities in Hades, invented by the famous Greek satirist Lucian. These have served as inspiration for some of the great names in Western literature—Erasmus, Boileau, Fénelon, Voltaire, Landor.

MOST adopters of the form have used it with a light touch. Pavese, however, is somber and serious, putting into the mouths of his speakers his pessimistic and deeply felt views of the world and its ways. The familiar Olympian deities—Zeus, Apollo, Athena, etc.—are conspicuously absent. We listen most often either to those who knew the world before the Olympians came into it, or those who felt the Olympians' ruthless might after the latter had grasped the reins of power. The world was a far more joyous