

Fiction

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reader may well balk at being tied so irrevocably into Montero's shoes.

Montero, a young history teacher, is hired through the want ads to put the aged widow's late husband's memoirs into publishable form. But strange things begin to happen from the moment he first sets foot in the old, darkened, musty rooms in which the old woman lives with her mysteriously dependent niece and a curious garden of herbs. Certain odd contradictions, Señora Llorente's secret rites performed before a shrine in her room, the haunting Aura's literal identification with the old lady's every movement and gesture arouse Montero's suspicions. Then, references in the dead husband's papers to his wife's obsession with recapturing her youth, and an old daguerreotype of a girl who is apparently Aura, give evidence of a final victory of mind over the corrosive power of the years. But Montero has discovered too much. He also now forms part of the miracle.

There is another technical problem here—that of length. The story is too brief for Montero's desire for Aura to be credibly drawn. On the other hand,

the abundant expertly observed realistic detail, dealing with Montero and the Señora's gloomy residence, is somehow so good that it fails to submit to the irreality of the ending. One tends to feel, in the last analysis, that the best thing in *Aura* is its realistic description. And this, of course, is something that Fuentes has already shown that he can handle very well indeed.

—DONALD A. YATES.



Hole in the Affluent Society: Out of the experiences of many white-collar workers who suddenly, in their forties, find themselves unemployed and unwanted—because they are too expensive, because of their age, because they are too specialized, etc.—Allen R. Dodd has created a composite man and followed him through his “lost year” of job hunting. The result is *The Job Hunter* (McGraw-Hill, \$4.95), and it is fascinating.

The man who believes himself securely employed for life won't want to face the fact that “there's a hole in the bottom of the affluent society.” But if you have ever been unemployed you will know that this is a true account of Everyman 1965 with the rug pulled out from under him. Though the hero is in advertising he is still universally recog-

nizable. As Dodd says in his introduction: “It should be unnecessary to add that the unemployed executive may differ from the unemployed factory worker only in the length of time it takes his savings to run out. Once they do run out, he faces exactly the same problems.”

Mr. Dodd has done a thorough job in this first-person fictional documentary. We share his job hunter's every emotion, from the knowledge that the headwaiter at the old luncheon spot knows who's working and who isn't, to the sinking feeling on leaving the morning commuter train with nowhere to go but the station telephone booth. The job hunter faces every type of interview from the suggested luncheon to look over the wife to the personnel office questionnaires that must be laboriously filled out before the applicant is told that there is no job. Only when Mr. Dodd allows his unemployed Everyman to become one specific man (i.e., an incident of vandalism that the job hunter's older son becomes involved in) does this nonfiction novel lose its punch. But such lapses are few, and for almost all of its 195 pages *The Job Hunter* is both engrossing and enlightening.

—HASKEL FRANKEL.



Foredoomed Failures: Gina Berriault's *The Mistress and Other Stories* (Dutton, \$4.50) is so good a book that it ought to be better. Reading several of the stories at a time is to be avoided, like looking too long at splendid scenery; one marvels while stifling a yawn. Gina Berriault is a formidably intelligent, observant, and analytical person, but indispensable though these qualities are, they are not enough to give her prose what the landscape lacks—the ordinary breath of life.

For all that, these fifteen stories are worth anyone's while. Miss Berriault takes a thoroughly pessimistic view of human nature, using as a prefatory quotation José Ortega y Gasset's opinion that “Every life is more or less a ruin among whose debris we have to discover what the person ought to have been.” No one behaves as he should, and even supposing anyone did, it is quite clear, as the title of one story puts it, that “All Attempts Will End in Failure.” Everyone fails, from the mistress of the title story, who is appalled to discover, years after the passing of her great love affair, that “the person in her memory who affected her the most was not the one she loved the most but the one she had understood the least.”

In “The Diary of KW” an old woman loses her job as a school cafeteria helper because “it occurred to me that food was abominable and that . . . if they went on eating their hot lunches every day they would only be preparing them-



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selves to suffer, they would only grow up to suffer." The parents obtusely fail the child in "The Stone Boy," and the child inevitably fails the parent in "The Bystander." Most frequently of all, men and women fail each other, like the white woman and Negro man, former lovers, of "Lonesome Road." When he accidentally meets her in the park with her children he is unable to wave casually at them in parting "because his pity for her, the pity that he had failed to experience in the time of his love, forbade him small and amiable signals."

There are plenty of other kinds of failure here, as many as there are stories. Since no one particularly cares to think of his life and all other lives as foredoomed fiascoes, the temptation is to say that Miss Berriault has overdone it, that she is being academic about life. But if her book is, in any sense, a failure, it is better than many successes.

—DORRIE PAGONES.



Fitting the Crime: Imagined crime and irrelevant punishment are the cruelly paradoxical themes of F. M. Esfandiary's *The Beggar* (Obolensky, \$3.95), an allegorical novel that tries to embrace a world of meaning while keeping its characters at arm's length. Chief among them is a crippled beggar in an Arab village who finds himself the occasional lover of an impoverished widow. The story, an ominous trek through the human psyche, gathers force and foreboding until, at the end, the beggar is accused of causing, or at least allowing, her death by fire, and the villagers demand—and a judge ratifies—a hideous punishment: the beggar's hands must be cut off. "But if we cut off his hands," asks one of the villagers, "won't that make him even more helpless?" The judge replies. "No it won't. It will teach him never again to be lazy. It will show him that he must never again remain idle and helpless, especially like last night when there was an emergency." But by that time it hardly matters whether the crime was committed or the punishment is just; vengeance has long since routed all trace of reason.

The Beggar unquestionably makes a point, but I am far from certain it is the point the author intended. In a curiously redundant prefatory note the publisher tells us the book is a "parable of justice," concerned with what the author calls "the absurdity of punishment—all punishment particularly in view of man's essential tragedies." But what if the beggar had been guilty as charged—and the punishment less patently incongruous than it is? Few readers will be inclined to argue that some punishments, the beggar's among them, do indeed fail to fit the crime. Nevertheless, does that fact alone make all punishment absurd?

—JAMES F. FIXX.

King

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they can be convinced there is a more effective method and a more moral one—nonviolent direct action.

This method has never been utilized on a large or protracted scale in the North. But in the South it will mobilize Negroes for action more effectively than appeals to violence. Ultimately rioting has the serious defect that it can be terminated by greater force. The number available for violence is relatively small and can be countered. Conversely, nonviolence can mobilize numbers so huge there is no counterforce. Its power is such that it can be sustained by the will of its supporters not merely for days but even for extended periods.

If 100,000 Negroes march in a major city to a strategic location, they will make municipal operations difficult to conduct; they will exceed the capacity of even the most reckless mayor to use force against them; and they will repeat this action daily, if necessary. Without harming persons or property they can draw as much attention to their grievances as the outbreak at Watts, and they will have asserted their unwavering determination while retaining their dignity and discipline.

The critical task will be to convince

Negroes driven to cynicism that nonviolence can win. Many municipal government leaders will have no more imagination than to scorn it and ridicule it. Nonetheless, though they will be serving the trend to violence, they will not influence the bulk of Negroes who, I am confident, will embrace nonviolence. In the South we are taunted, mocked, and abused beyond belief. A hundred political commentators interred nonviolence into a premature grave.

YET in 1965 there is a new South, still far from democratic consistency or harmony, but equally distant from the plantation-overseer South. The Northern Negro knows this because he helped to bring it into being. He has yet to use nonviolent direct action; he has not even examined its special tactical application in his different community. He may even be reluctant in his urban sophistication to embrace its moral simplicities. But his wisdom is not less than his Southern brothers' and a power that could break the savagery of Southern segregation commands respect and induces emulation. The rushing history of change has been late to reach the North but it is now on a fixed northerly course. The urban slums need not be destroyed by flames; earnest people of good will can decree their end nonviolently—as atrocious relics of a persisting unjust past.



"If you don't mind, I'd like to stay up a while."