

There is no real answer; but it is certainly time to be afraid when we begin to wonder whether we could save a little tax money if "the great Powers got together each year and agreed on the names and the number of scientists each of the Powers would undertake to rub off among their own nationals, so as to keep the balance of terror in perfect equilibrium." It is time to be afraid when man tries to "become a cur" since there might be "peace and innocence in being a cur." And then, it just might scare the daylights out of all of us if we could—just once—take a look at that face of innocence we had "before the world was made."

**William C. Hamlin**

*William C. Hamlin is professor of English at the University of Missouri, St. Louis.*

## **BARNETT FRUMMER IS AN UNBLOOMED FLOWER**

**by Calvin Trillin**

*Viking, 98 pp., \$4.50*

So BARNETT FRUMMER is an unbloomed flower, according to his friend and mentor Roland Magruder—and friends and mentors like Roland Magruder, who always do everything right, who needs? If your every scheme to get close to Rosalie Mondle—she who is always *avant* of the *avant garde*, the girl with "the only natural-blond Afro haircut on East Seventy-fourth Street"—was nipped in the bud, you'd be an unbloomed flower, too.

To me, however, Barnett Frummer is a blooming joy, and so are Rosalie Mondle, Roland Magruder, and their friends, all of whom populate these ten short stories that mesh to create a hilarious, satiric swipe at what passes for life among the social and socially conscious, ever *au courant* of the middle class on the Manhattan-to-East Hampton run. These are the people who are always with it, always in, who always know where it's at—the con artists of self. They are people like Elliott and Myrna Nardling, who got "their six-year-old daughter accepted at a fashionable and over-applied progressive school by formally declaring her a Negro," and whose dinner parties are in honor of the person whose book has the front-page review in *next Sunday's New York Times*; or else they are people such

as Rosalie Mondle, who one-ups the Nardlings by skipping their party in order "to help Roland Magruder sew some insignia on his Army Reserve uniforms."

The big bleeding heart who ties it all together is Barnett Frummer, scion of a family awning business. Can he hope to catch up or keep up with a lady whose typical escorts for one evening's nightclubbing are "a United States senator, a fabulously successful sixteen-year-old designer of African earrings for men, and a pretender to the Serbian throne"?

Poor Barnett is always a country mile behind Rosalie. By the time he had heard about an insurance company's plans to create jobs for blacks outside of Harlem, Rosalie was saying that the answer lay in providing investment capital inside. Naturally, Barnett joined with a group of white businessmen in backing a Negro designer and a Harlem dress store. "How does it feel to be a neocolonialist?" Rosalie asked."

My favorite adventure has nothing to do with Barnett and Rosalie. It concerns Lester Drentluss's attempt to identify with his Jewish roots, no mean feat for a boy whose family boasts only of their five generations in Baltimore, Maryland, and who once spanked Lester "for doing an imitation of Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*." It's not that Lester cares about his heritage, it's just that he's a guy who can spot a trend. When Yiddish expressions crop up in the speech of his firm's top editor, Douglas Drake, a Methodist minister's son from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, it's time for Lester to get with it.

Did I tell you this is a very funny, biting book, and that Calvin Trillin

has an eye and an ear that can nail a phony to the wall (don't give me from mixed metaphor when I'm happy!) before you can say, "Please, Mr. Bookseller, I'd like a clean copy of *Barnett Frummer Is an Unbloomed Flower*"?

**Haskel Frankel**

*Haskel Frankel is a free-lance critic who frequently contributes to SR.*

## **HOUSE ON FIRE**

**by Arch Oboler**

*Bartholomew House, 249 pp., \$5.95*

ARCH OBOLER'S FIRST NOVEL opens with the winning of a \$5,000 "National Science Scholarship" by a Los Angeles boy genius, aged twelve. Radio-TV reporters descend on him and his family. But something is wrong: Robin Shepherd, a girl magazine writer, feels a weird, unpleasant warmth in the presence of the boy and his seemingly angelic younger sister.

Eventually this adorable pair bring about the murder of a businessman uncle, a spinster aunt, a drunken uncle, and finally, in one glorious holocaust, their parents and all the other occupants of a supermodern California luxury apartment building thirty stories high.

Were the children possessed by the still-active spirit of their dead grandmother? Or were the older members of the Elias family ungrateful offspring of the grandmother? Lacking filial love, did they destroy themselves? Or were the two children so diabolically clever as to be capable without spirit intervention of pre-recording their grandmother's voice and razing the building by a high-frequency flame?

There are also some sideline outrages—the photographing of a drugged Robin for commercial pornography; a revolting painting the sight of which makes her faint.

If Mr. Oboler had filled in the interstices between these events with deeper portrayals and new ideas on the existence of ghosts, he might have produced a novel to rival Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. As it is, all of the characters are amusing types limned with some individual features.

*House on Fire* might make an excellent movie. Indeed, it is easy to see in the rather thin characterizations Oboler's previous dependence on live actors to flesh out his scripts.

**Peter Rowley**

*Peter Rowley has written for many English and American periodicals, and is currently working on a novel.*



## **LITERARY I. Q. ANSWERS**

1. Eddy. 2. Ray. 3. Billy. 4. Dolly. 5. Les. 6. Dot. 7. Jimmy. 8. Sue. 9. Nell. 10. Jack. 11. Jess. 12. Harry. 13. Sally. 14. Lena. 15. Bob. 16. Kitty. 17. Bea. 18. Will. 19. Nick. 20. Sandy.

## Groovy Revolution

*Continued from page 38*

they finally realize that dope and rock and electricity are bigger than all of us.

Roszak is a passionate humanist, but in the light of such problems he can do no more than warn that the survival of the counter-culture is by no means certain. In a chapter on drugs, this warning is very near to despair:

What if the psychedelic boosters had their way then, and American society could get legally turned on? No doubt the marijuana trade would immediately be taken over by the major cigarette companies—which would doubtless be an improvement over leaving it in the hands of the Mafia. . . . And surely the major pharmaceutical houses would move in on LSD just as readily. And what then? Would the revolution have been achieved? Would we suddenly find ourselves blessed with a society of love, gentleness, innocence, freedom? If that were so, what should we have to say about ourselves regarding the integrity of our organism? Should we not have to admit that the behavioral technicians have been right from the start? That we are, indeed, the bundle of electrochemical circuitry they tell us we are—and not persons at all who have it in our nature to achieve enlightenment by native ingenuity and a deal of hard growing.

Though *The Making of a Counter Culture* is often a defense, even a vivid example, of the counter-culture, as well as a reasoned explanation, Roszak never confronts the major problem of how that culture will elude the subtle forces that threaten it. The book has an air of having been written for those technocrats still capable of being swayed, as if Roszak were saying, "Here it is; try it!" Perhaps there is a future for revolution through seduction, in fact—it may well be the only way.

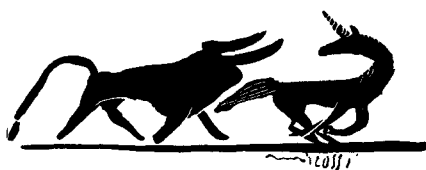
But Roszak is still in the academy; his style is still basically analytical and rational; and his attitude toward the counter-culture is, in the long run, profoundly ambivalent. Throughout the book there is a palpable straining, almost a duel, between rationality and passion, and it is a problem of which Roszak is painfully aware. Roszak does not even begin to believe, moreover, that the counter-culture has attained a healthy balance. In a chapter on the influence of Eastern culture, he is forced to admit that the entire beat-Zen movement is terribly superficial: "Perhaps what the young took Zen to be has little relationship to that venerable and elusive tradition; but what they readily adopted was a gentle and gay rejection of the positivistic and the compulsively cerebral."

In the chapter on drugs, he sounds like a nagging grandmother: "Perhaps the drug experience bears significant fruit when rooted in the soil of a mature and cultivated mind. But the experience has, all of a sudden, been laid hold of by a generation of youngsters who are pathetically acultural and who often bring nothing to the experience but a vacuous yearning. . . . I think one must be prepared to take a very strong line on the matter and maintain that there are minds too small and too young for such psychic adventures. . . ." Who, then, should be allowed to use drugs? Theodore Roszak and other dissenting academicians? Scientists in laboratories? Over-thirties?

What Roszak wants is an ideal combination of humanity and politics, tolerance and activism, and reason balanced by passion. As an example of this harmony he cites Paul Goodman, whom he lauds in a chapter that has the solid tin quality of public relations copy. Goodman has long been one of the prime intellectual movers of the counter-culture, of course, but when Roszak starts to preach rationality, one can easily envision the teenyboppers turning away in boredom. Roszak is clever and hip indeed, yet the counter-culture seems at times to be slipping away from his reasonable grasp as fast as he can describe it. The growth of the counter-culture has been toward irrationality, not away from it. Irrationality has become a last defense against the cold manipulateness of the everyday world.

Finally Roszak takes the plunge himself, concluding with a lengthy plea on behalf of shamans as culture heroes (magical, imbued with ancient wisdom and ritual, even better than Goodman) that verges on silliness. Stylistically the book is most uneven, in fact, despite the validity and strength of its important insights, for it spans the spectrum from logical essay to impressionistic blur, from hard-headed critique to mass-magazine slickness. One suspects that Roszak is quite capable of blowing his mind entirely, that he might even be happier as a Dionysiac reveler than a dissenting academician.

But the threat of the turned-on concentration camp—the infinitely tolerant technocracy—cannot be taken lightly by those who understand it. The teenyboppers and the utterly mindless have not had the problem of choosing; for the rest of us, the balance gets more delicate every day.



## Vietnam

*Continued from page 32*

provement in performance as it receives more and better weapons. The critical weakness in this whole iffy proposition, however, is the inherent contradiction between President Nixon's expressed willingness to accept a compromise peace and his continued support of the Thieu régime, which probably cannot survive without total victory.

If anything, the Thieu government has grown worse rather than better in the past few months. Persecution of the non-Communist opposition seems to have increased; and in early September General Tran Thien Khiem, a close friend of Thieu's and an outrageous opportunist even by junta standards, replaced Tran Van Huong, a civilian, as prime minister. The Khiem cabinet is uniformly right wing, hawkish, and, some say, markedly Diemist in nature. It is a war cabinet that fails to represent large parts of the Vietnamese version of the silent majority, and which could not compete effectively with the NLF were the war to end.

As the Thieu régime has become more repressive, the NLF has made a major effort to win over dissaffected elements. Representatives of the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces, a transparently pro-NLF "third force" which was formed after the Tet offensive, were given visible if not terribly powerful positions in the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Ministries were also offered to several prominent non-Communists, who did not, for the moment at least, accept. The NLF has tried with some success to convince such people as Saigon intellectuals and militant Buddhists that a united front of all authentic nationalists is the only real alternative to continued domination by Thieu and the Americans.

Recently, Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, chief PRG negotiator in Paris, went so far as to announce that the PRG would be willing to talk seriously with a peace cabinet headed by General Duong Van "Big" Minh. Mme. Binh may only have wanted to sow discord among her enemies, secure in the knowledge that her offer would not be accepted; but since formation of a peace cabinet might be taken to imply that talks could proceed within the bounds of the present Vietnamese constitution—that Thieu would not have to be replaced as at least nominal President—it would seem that American interests might be served by encouraging the South Vietnamese, NLF included, to work something out among themselves on the basis of the



present balance of forces. Big Minh, Senator Tran Van Don ( a former general and a prominent Catholic), the Buddhists, and many other Vietnamese seem willing after all to take their chances. If the NLF should prove perfidious and intractable, President Nixon will probably be able to make a far stronger case for continuing the war than he can now and the government in Saigon will certainly be stronger politically than it is at present. The United States might find it useful to discuss with Hanoi, while the South Vietnamese talks are in progress, such matters as reunification of Vietnam on a federal basis and neutralization of all of Indochina. In my own opinion this is about the best we can hope for in Vietnam.

If the above analysis is correct, or nearly correct, and if the United States continues to support General Thieu without insisting on a major expansion in his political base (which would mean his sharing power with some of his present enemies, not just giving them showcase ministries), then there is a good chance that the NLF will win notable converts in the near future. In that case, the Thieu regime might eventually collapse with disastrous consequences for Mr. Nixon's prospects for employment between 1972 and 1976. Obviously, the administration reads all of this differently; but one cannot help wondering whether a review of a book by some Republican Townsend Hoopes on the decline and fall of the Nixon Vietnam policy will appear in these pages a couple of years from now.

**FRASER YOUNG  
LITERARY CRYPT No. 1375**

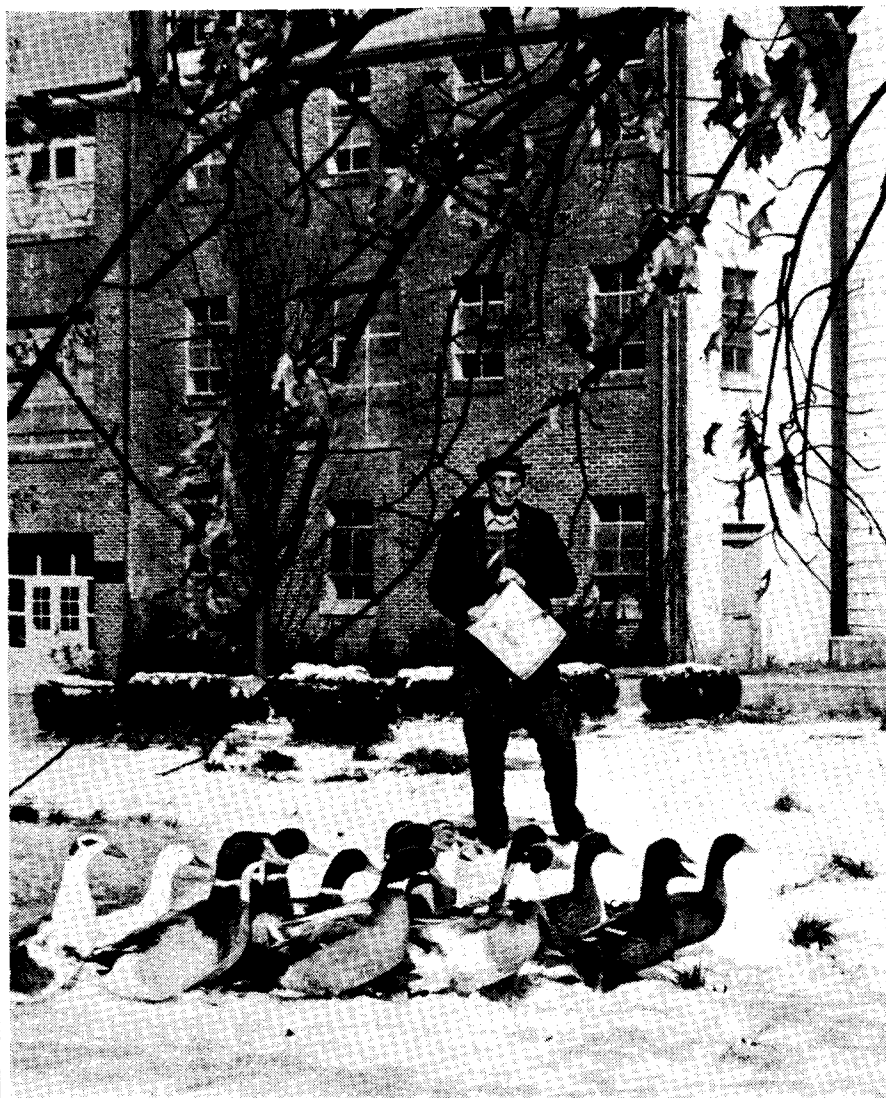
*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1375 will be found in the next issue.*

LK PCB UNHBOEWBEP QSG SG  
SKOSLT NK TLGPYOALEU PCB  
JNEGYWBO SG LP LG NK TLG-  
PYOALEU AYGLEBGG, PCLG  
QNYMT AB GNWB TBWNJOSJI.  
—CYAASOT

**Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1374**

*The world was made before the English language and seemingly upon a different design.*

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.



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