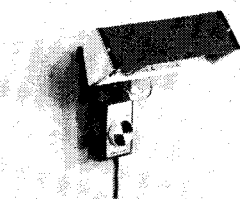


FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO READ!



TWIN-LIGHT HIGH INTENSITY BED LAMP WITH DIMMER

You can move it up and down . . . rotate it a full 360° from side to side . . . to direct the light exactly where you want it. Has two horizontally-mounted high intensity light bulbs. Easily clamps on to any headboard. Adjustable dimmer switch lets you set brightness. Handsome black/brass finish with 8-foot cord. Only \$28.50 ppd. Save Money: 2 lamps for \$55.00. (N.J. residents add sales tax).

CHERRY LANE SALES

45 PARTRIDGE HILL
UPPER SADDLE RIVER, NJ 07458

Money Back Guarantee

Wit Twister No. 109

Edited by Arthur Swan

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word. Answers on page 53.

— — — — — him in the ground
he loved to tend.
Hhis frame — — — — — with
that dark earth will blend,
His bones, like — — — — —,
nourishing the loam
From which the Holy — — — — —
— has called him home.

A. S.

Fraser Young

Literary Crypt No. 98

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer on page 51.

DB ZMI KYCLL DL
KYIISIY DS ZMI UZMIY
BIQQUV'L RCYG, QIZ
MDH VUYR CEUXZ
AXZZDSK DZ.
—BYIG CQQIS

ings in recent English history—most pertinently, the case involving the architect John Poulson and the socialist councillor T. Dan Smith, who between them successfully tore the heart out of one of England's handsomest industrial cities, Newcastle upon Tyne. It was Smith's vision of a "Brasília of the North" that caused present-day Newcastle to look like any other arrangement of multistory car parks and Muzak-haunted shopping centers. In *The Ice Age*, Len Wincobank is a man with a similar vision, and Drabble accounts for it with some sympathy. To take the Poulson-Smith affair as a symbol of all that is rotten in England's green and pleasant land has involved Margaret Drabble in risk-taking, and her descriptions of English life and landscape must certainly be acknowledged as the finest prose she has written. But novels, alas, are made of the strong stuff of character and incident, and Drabble the prophetess—the author who unashamedly quotes from Milton's *Areopagitica*, that great call to mental arms that the English have never really heeded—does not allow either one free play in her hectoring sermon. Perhaps in her next book she will descend from the throne and paint a picture of her native land that will be occupied by flesh-and-blood creatures. *The Ice Age* is a work of fiction in which only the scenery is alive ●

Books in Brief

Flesh and Blood

by Pete Hamill

Random House, 276 pp., \$8.95

A third of the way through this book, manager Gus Caputo instructs his fighter: "You study what the guy did in the past, to figure out what he's gonna do in the future. You *always* respect him." The same code applies to writing. Pete Hamill's previous novels (*A Killing for Christ*, *The Gift*) have been cogent, mannered vignettes about Brooklyn life. In *Flesh and Blood*, Hamill has unfortunately succumbed to the ignoble television-bred myth that the public will respond positively only to recycled pulp. However, despite its commercial obeisance, this book illuminates the author's ability to capture with stylized brio the nuances of the aching underbelly of society. That sensitivity in itself warrants a modicum of respect, with a cautious eye to the future.

It is an all-too-familiar tale that bounces a Brooklyn "bum" named Bobby Fallon from prison into the gray, cigar-smoke-

filled world of professional boxing. In Fallon's case, it is not out of the frying pan and into the fire, but rather out of the growing pains of his difficult youth and into the mire of manhood and impending success to which he must adapt. The world seems to await his emergence eagerly, but the perverse lust for his mother and the legacy of a deserted father stand between Bobby and the title.

Flesh and Blood is an engrossing enough study of the lineal knot that becomes slowly untied. It travels the *Rocky* road, and while it "coulda been a contenduh," it emerges as only a pretender to the crown. —ROBERT STEPHEN SPITZ

I Hardly Knew You

by Edna O'Brien

Doubleday, 204 pp., \$7.95

Edna O'Brien's new novel is an erotic mystery. The heroine, Nora, looks back on the events that led to the crime for which she has been imprisoned—the murder of her lover, who was her son's best friend. In a mosaic of vivid scenes, she recalls a night in Italy when, after fleeing a would-be rapist, she is taken in by peasants; her disastrous marriage to a bully; and her lovers of both sexes. Not until the last are we told about the murder itself, the why and the how.

Nora's sensuality is at once a break from her Catholic upbringing (women who take lovers are "whores") and a product of it ("On the day of my first Holy Communion the host seemed to fill the inside of my body with all the ecstasy I had ever craved"). She expresses her earthiness in pungent domestic associations (a female lover has "a quim as warm as jam that had just been lifted off a stove") and in her vigorous attention to her five senses. This makes for a great many enjoyable descriptions of ravenous eating and lovemaking. O'Brien's sex scenes are exuberant and tender; they reflect the sensibility of a passionate woman who gets pleasure from giving it.

Our enjoyment, however, is imperiled when we arrive at the solution of the mystery. After all the suspense, O'Brien's ending is nothing more than a cheap surprise effect, a melodramatic scene that diminishes all that has gone before it. For looking back on Nora's behavior in the light of the murder, we see her as something of a professional sensualist, one of those feckless creatures who sip and suck and smile their way through life, pretending to be ignorant of consequences. —RHODA KOENIG ●

Siftings

by Doris Grumbach

FINE BOOKS often escape notice. How can it be otherwise, with 40,000 books published in this country every year and so few national outlets for reviews? So before we are launched into another flood of books in the new year, I want to mention several of last year's volumes that are first-rate and well worth your attention, but that slipped through the critical sieves.

Lorenzino, by Arvin Upton (Norton, \$7.95), was published in August, not the most propitious month for a first novel. It deserved critical admiration for the extraordinary writing, an unusual achievement in a historical novel. *Lorenzino* takes place in Florence and Rome during the sixteenth-century rule of the Medicis and brings to almost painful life the ruthless, subtle, intelligent, and violent family that dominated Italy and the Christian world during the Renaissance.

Not since Mary Renault's *The Last of the Wine* and other such books by that English master of historical fiction have I read such wise fictionalized history. Or perhaps it might better be called an incisive look at tyranny in the Machiavellian age through the eyes of political philosophers. Upton creates this whole bloody world in very few pages and peoples it with Pope Clemente VII, Alessandro de' Medici, his cousin Ippolito, and the narrator and prime mover, Lorenzino de' Medici. History provides us at once—on the first page—with the salient fact of the story: Lorenzino murdered the ruler of Florence, a tyrant and his cousin, Alessandro, in 1535. What we do not know—and what history does not tell us, but Upton, to a great extent, does—is why.

In the course of the narrative there are wonderfully civilized conversations. One I especially admired, the talk between Cardinal Ippolito (who assumes the role of God) and a few friends, is full of subtle theology and even more subtle pragmatic politics. But the story shifts from intellection to violent action: In a moment of pique during a banquet, Alessandro throws a young page into the open fireplace, where he is con-

sumed by the flames. And then back again: Love for the city of Florence is the subject of a fine discourse by Lorenzino's aunt Catherine de' Medici.

The novel is full of witty aphorisms. "Cynicism is nothing more than the outcry of an innocence that refuses to die" and the pope's remark to Lorenzino, "You are so openly ironical that it cannot be irony," are two. The conversational interplay between philosophers and politicians, taking their impetus from their Greek and Roman predecessors, is wonderful to listen to. I urge *Lorenzino* upon you.

A novel by Kay Boyle, first published in 1938, was reissued during the summer, to the same fate as *Lorenzino*. To Boyle's way of thinking and to mine, *Monday Night* is her best novel (she has published 14 in her seventy-five years). It is a beautifully written psychological chase-thriller that portrays nighttime Paris in the late 1930s. Two young men, both Americans, set out to find a famous toxicologist who has achieved international recognition by discovering in the organs of dead persons poisons no one else could find, thus sending a number of men to the guillotine or to prison. Wilt is a drunken journalist who has lived abroad for many years; Bernie is a recently graduated doctor, still wet behind the ears, who has never been to Paris before. Wilt takes Bernie on a fantastic night tour through the city and its environs to find the scientist Bernie so much admires. The climax of their journey, on a Tuesday morning, is too good to reveal.

A devoted reader of Eric Ambler, Raymond Chandler, and John Le Carré will be surprised to see that Kay Boyle was on their turf before they were. Lovers of fine fictional prose who remember Boyle's pieces about Germany after World War II in the *New Yorker* will be pleased to have her good writing back in print. (The publisher is Paul Appel, 119 Library Lane, Mamaroneck, N.Y. 10543.)

Tillie Olsen, the revered short story writer, wrote to me in the fall to urge me to read *Legal Kidnapping*, by Anna Demeter,

which Beacon Press had just published. She said she was afraid the book would be lost in the shuffle, and so it was.

Beacon Press has distinguished itself by its series of short books on family problems, among them Carrie Carmichael's very good *Non-Sexist Childraising*. Demeter's book is unusual and moving, an account of a marriage between two physicians that fails. The wife asks for a divorce because her husband has been extraordinarily hard on their children, subjecting them to his spells of excessive rage and sulks. In a mad sort of retribution, the husband kidnaps two of the children, putting them through traumatic and wearying journeys with him while the mother and the two remaining children agonize over their departure. "A father has a legal right to kidnap his children" is the theorem of this compelling book. It not only explores the effects of the act but also offers useful advice, in an appendix, to others in the same situation as Anna Demeter (a pseudonym). The amazing thing is that this now happens very often in our society. A sensitive, scrupulously conceived and written work.

Finally, I have wanted to write for some time about *The States and the Nation Series*, a misbegotten idea that blossomed in the Bicentennial sun and was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities. A historian in each state of the union was asked to write a history of that state, and Norton contracted to publish the whole wearisome collection of, on the whole, monumentally undistinguished accounts. They are uniformly bound in a discreet gray cloth with red spine labels, and their institutional look is a faithful representation of the uniformly dull, abstract, plodding texts of most of those in the series that I have examined.

Except for Louis D. Rubin Jr.'s rather sprightly history of Virginia. Rubin has brought his well-developed literary skills to bear upon the pedestrian task to which he was set and has produced a readable, personal, and often properly critical book. With its twin virtues of brevity and wit, it is a model of what the other *States* volumes might have been, given Rubin's taste, graceful writing, and ability to find the telling fact and the meaningful illustration. And speaking of another kind of illustration, the pictures inserted in the middle of each of the volumes are on the whole inadequate, glaringly commercial, and sentimental. But that is the only poor thing about *Virginia*: The history itself is a pleasure to read. ●