

his own power is beyond question, but there is no doubt that in the process he helped many. Tommy Corcoran, who was in a position to know, called Johnson "the best Congressman for a district that ever was."

So the Lyndon Johnson who emerges from this sweeping, formidable biography is ultimately a contradiction. He lusted for power, obsessively lied, betrayed friends, amassed a personal fortune while in public office, abused and humiliated those who worked for him, granted favors to those who backed him financially, refused to stand up for principle. Yet he helped many, commanded respect and loyalty and, finally, went on to achieve his dream and become President. The man's story, the complexity of which matches that of his personality, was to end in tragedy, as the promise of the Great Society was swallowed up in the quagmire of Vietnam. ■

Book Briefs

The Breaks

by Richard Price

Simon & Schuster, 446 pp., \$15.95

For starters, Pete Keller doesn't get into Columbia Law School while his best friend, Bam-Bam, whizzes in with bad grades and good connections. The worst thing Keller can imagine is being like his whipped father, a "Federal Philatelist's Agent," as in his embarrassment he used to call him. But after a stint selling Power Plower ("the complete iso-tensile body-builder in a bar"), he ends up on a post office stool sorting mail. Next thing he knows he's dialing bomb threats to the Capri Room of Paradise Caterers and Ricky's Clam House, signing off "Viva Che!" and "Free the Indianapolis 500." Barely able to free himself after these stunts, he hightails it to his old college town where he hooks up with folks who put these mild shenanigans in the shade: pretty Kimberly, who warns him that the last man she slept with got the

electric chair — "I was the Angel of Death" — and Tony Fonseca, who "was simply born to torture."

A sort of East-Coast, ethnic-style *The Graduate*, *The Breaks* is a classic search-for-identity novel. The characters may run to the histrionic, but the mundane world is rendered in prose so vivid it pops, from Julia Childs' "loopy tea-time voice" and trousers "belted up two inches from the breastbone like who cares anymore," to "despair-colored" walls. In the ordinary, Price truly finds glory — and in the grotesque hidden in the ordinary, he finds humor. Despite legal aspirations and a psyche that can get him arrested, Keller has a "standing daydream of being a comic." If he is not a great stand-up by story's end, his author has still proven himself a master, standing up, sitting down, hands down. —ANNA SHAPIRO

Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography

by Sue Davidson Lowe

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$25.50

As a renowned photographer, art dealer, publisher and sage, Alfred Stieglitz played a monumental role in the development of modern art in America. His stunning achievements with a camera elevated photography to fine art, paving the way for young proteges Edward Steichen and Paul Strand. Stieglitz's galleries — 291, The Intimate Gallery, and An American Place — were among the first American showcases for European modern painters including Picasso, Rousseau, Braque, and Grosz. While providing a permanent base for American modernists Arthur Dove, John Marin and, later, Georgia O'Keeffe, the galleries also served as a forum for Stieglitz's fervent discourses on such favorite themes as quality and truth in art, his abhorrence of materialism, and his passionate belief that artistic pursuit must be independent of the desire for profit or popular acceptance.

Sue Davidson Lowe, Stieglitz's grandniece, thoughtfully counterbalances these descriptions of his public attitudes and accomplishments with her own reminiscences of his annual summer visits to the family's

Lake George retreat. She reveals how Stieglitz's apparent disdain for his family masked a deep dependency, both financial and emotional, that manifested itself in lifelong hypochondria and immobilizing depressions. These insights evince the major contradictions in Stieglitz's character: his adventurous thinking coupled with a profound traditionalism; the simultaneous need for solitude and an attentive coterie; and a staunch integrity at odds with his robust egoism. With affection and intelligence, Lowe humanizes Stieglitz's mythic character, adding an important dimension to the understanding of this complex and eloquent man. —CAROL VERDERESE

Sara & Gerald

by Honoria Murphy Donnelly and Richard N. Billings

Times Books, 242 pp., \$17.95

Sara and Gerald Murphy, often believed to have led a charmed life because of their wealth, brilliant literary friends, and cultural activities, actually had a rather sad and insular existence. At least this is the conclusion one draws after reading this plodding memoir. Though it can be inferred that their daughter, who co-authored this book, intended to characterize her parents as more than well-meaning dilettantes, she has not succeeded. Little is provided to suggest that the Murphys were concerned with anything outside their privileged private world.

While living in Paris in the 1920s they showed no interest in international affairs, economic or political developments at home, or even — which is most amazing — a passing regard for the Bolshevik Revolution. Though Gerald always complained that Fitzgerald misunderstood the Murphys in calling them the "idle rich," it is difficult to take this seriously when, only pages later, a point is made of Sara having once banned Fitzgerald from their house after he broke three of her favorite champagne glasses. Except for the anguishing early deaths of both the Murphy's sons, their crises — a lawsuit with Sara's sister; having to sell their boat when their

capital slips below a quarter of a million; a merger in the family business — hardly seem the stuff of high tragedy. This dearth of drama is compounded by the structure of the book. As characters, the Murphys remain flat and shadowy until the end, when the reader can finally hear their voices through correspondence with Hemingway, the MacLeishes, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos and others.

In a letter to Hemingway, Sara once wrote: "You are something living in a dead or dying world, to hold to." The Murphys were sensitive people; yet their only accomplishment was to know people of accomplishment. —ANDREA BARNET

Difficult Women

by David Plante
Atheneum, 192 pp., \$9.95

Had Plante remained aloof, purely the narrator of this startling memoir of three difficult women — Jean Rhys, Sonia Orwell and Germaine Greer — the intimacy of some of his details would have at moments been compromising; he would have been guilty of voyeurism. However, because he is unflinchingly candid about his own uncertain role in each of these relationships, a role that is completely passive, potentially parasitic and insecure, he does not exempt himself from the critical scrutiny to which he subjects his three friends. Instead he includes himself as a character, recreating several boozy London winters spent assisting Rhys in the completion of her autobiography, a tense two-week holiday with Orwell in Italy, and a road trip to New Mexico with Greer. Even in the most indecorous moments — pulling Rhys, drunk, out of the toilet after she has fallen in; watching Greer chop up testicle for her cat; enduring Orwell as she victimizes an innocent dinner guest — he refrains from waving a self-righteous finger. Instead he questions his own motivations in spending so much time with these three mercurial women: Is it cheap literary curiosity, he asks? Guilt for some breach in the past? Escape from himself?

All this could be terribly self-indulgent and circular, but it is not.

This is because Plante raises these psychological portraits to the narrative pitch of fiction. He brings each to life with a dramatic precision that is formidable. —ANDREA BARNET

The Only Living Witness

by Stephen G. Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth
The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 464 pages, \$15.95

In the summer of 1979 Theodore Robert Bundy was given the death penalty for the brutal slaying of two Florida co-eds. For Bundy, these sorority house killings were the culmination of a four-year murder rampage which left at least twenty women dead and many more physically and psychologically maimed. The sensational trial was widely publicized, spawning a Bundy "mystique" which has been the subject of four books and numerous articles, all trying to grasp the essential nature of "a depravity off the scale of human understanding."

Stephen Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth have come closest to penetrating the enigma of Ted Bundy through first-rate investigative reporting and by enlisting the mass-murderer to "speculate" on the methods and motivations of the psychopathic killer. What unfolds is Bundy's third-person account of his own experience, including a preoccupation with violent pornography and voyeurism, his disdain for authority, a chilling description of his "hunts" for victims, and his complete lack of remorse after their "possession," Bundy's euphemism for murder.

Bundy's astounding ability to rationalize his behavior enabled him to maintain a mask of respectability so convincing that friends and acquaintances continued to vouch for his innocence in spite of the overwhelming evidence against him; the police dismissed him as a suspect repeatedly before Bundy virtually invited them to apprehend him. The authors emphasize that this is the most terrifying aspect of his story, that society "is essentially defenseless against the intelligent, dedicated killer."

They have written with gut-wrenching immediacy and yet readily

admit they can "only say what it was like, not what it was." Though the unspeakable "entity" inhabiting Ted Bundy's body has revealed itself, it remains unknowable, disturbing, and bizarrely fascinating.

—CAROL VERDERESE

Lost Honor

by John Dean
Stratford Press, 360 pp., \$15.95

John Dean appears on the cover as the eternal preppie: a man who has passed the bar, worked at the White House, been sent up the river and *still* wears his sweater with the sleeves tied around the front of his neck. But Dean has learned a lot since law school; he has learned about regaining honor by somberly examining his guilt in public and about dropping the tastiest plum he has to offer (in this case, the possible identity of Deep Throat) in a book's early chapter and picking it back up again in the last 90 pages.

By now everyone knows Dean's research has led him to the conclusion that Alexander M. Haig, Jr. was Bob Woodward's main man. Inconclusive? Yes. Frivolous? Perhaps. But this is the book's most interesting section and the only part where Dean's style becomes something other than lumbering and self-conscious.

Lost Honor contains less factual documentation and more personal reflection than did *Blind Ambition*, and its *raison d'être* is more shady. If you like John Dean, if you find his personality fascinating—apart from the unique role it played in Watergate—then you might enjoy *Lost Honor*. If not, you'll probably be bored or even uncomfortable when you share John's first marijuana cigarette and his subsequent revelations about how the toaster far exceeds the waffle iron for raw ingenuity.

Dean—along with other ex-colleagues—has been attacked for profiting monetarily from his involvement in scandal. But those are the rules of the game; as long as the public's interest holds, these men will go on lecturing and debating and writing. And it can only be healthy for us to learn the innermost thoughts