

Thomas Muritz of Pressburg, whose fraction of French blood was his dearest possession, who loved France all his life long, adored her history, believed in her glory, trusted her character as some men trust God, became a Frenchman in all things, and lived just long enough to see French gendarmes, acting under orders of Pétaïn, deliver up their own countrymen to be shot as hostages by Germans. But hardly less effective and affecting is the tragi-comedy of Vendresse, printer and veteran of Verdun, who gave all his faith to his old commander, knowing that the man who had said, "They shall not pass!" could never let France down. Weakest of the three, in my opinion, is the narrative most heavily and deliberately loaded with horror, the one designed to be most powerful. This tells the story of an underground leader whose hideous experiences make him feel he has been degraded beyond the lowest level of his kind.

These Vercors stories are guided missiles, managed with skill, and calculated to explode on contact with minds already emotionally prepared.

Elsa Triolet's patterns are less neat, her effects of a subtler character, her writing more conspicuously stylistic. The stories of Juliette Noël and Louise Delfort, both Resistance workers, draw obviously on the author's own experience; but, oddly enough, she is most successful when dealing with the character of Alexis Slavsky, an egocentric, non-political artist, who bitterly resents the war and all its works as a personal affront, and who survives the occupation in a kind of walking dream.

It should be noted, also, that Elsa Triolet is remarkably successful with another character: the city of Lyon, with its blank-faced houses, its maze of secreted courts, its network of dark *traboules*, its multitudinous letter boxes, and its pulsing hidden life. It is when she writes of Slavsky, of Lyon, and of Louise's Russian background, rather than of the ardors and perils of the Resistance; when she wins our interest by starting, as it were, from scratch, instead of exploiting ground already prepared for her, that I am sure that her literary talent is superior to Vercors's. But it is as yet undisciplined. Her narrative sprawls, and her effects are not only impressionistic, which would be well enough, but even haphazard. Emotional tension sometimes slackens when the cord should be tightest. One might go so far as to say that when "A Fine of 200 Francs" won the Goncourt Prize the award must have been made for promise, or extraliterary reasons, rather than for performance.

## Scapegoat Symbol

THE BURNING SPRING. By Fynette Rowe. New York: A. A. Wyn. 1947. 245 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HOLLIS ALPERT

THIS is an uncommonly well-written novel. In it Jud Palmer, an upstate New York farmer, emerges as a man of honesty and patience who would have thrived off the rich land he tended were it not for the evil in the minds of some neighbors of the farming valley. A grandfather of Jud Palmer had been a Mormon, and the word alone was sufficient to evoke visions of carnal sin in people like John Ritt and Mattie Pruner. Jud's sons, Ned and Harl, also partake of the venom that poisons the community, and their adolescent years are made harsh and bitter by the implacable hostility they encounter on every hand.

This would have been an altogether grim book were it not for the way Fynette Rowe has, often enough, of relieving the atmosphere by her sensitive capture of the qualities of hill, lake, and valley in the Finger Lake district used for her setting. These glimpses are sometimes brooding, sometimes enchanting; her people are

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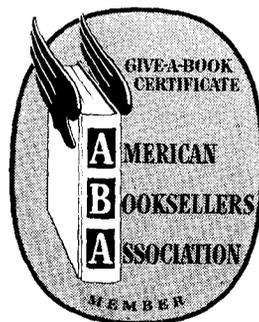
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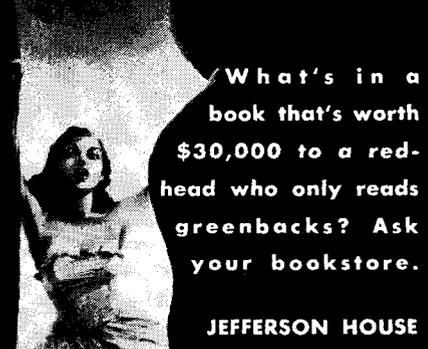
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seen against the luminous backdrop. Not quite so enchanting are some of the people who enter into the Palmers's lives. There is Sate Ritt, a malicious and sadistic spinster of forty, sister of John Ritt and owning half his farm. She is a midwife of the community and finds herself exalted with the powers over life and death she thus holds. Her brother is weak and futile and manages to focus the cause of his difficulties on Jud Palmer, instigating some of the terrorism designed to chase the Palmers from the valley.

The story takes place approximately thirty years ago, about the time of our entrance into the First World War. Up until that time the catastrophe in Europe did not impinge too startlingly on the minds of the valley inhabitants. But when the war hit home the prejudices were fanned brighter, and Jud found himself persecuted more than ever. He is an unheroic figure, for he bowed before the storm—and while Jud's story has a

real poignance about it, there is also a lack of tragic quality which might have been achieved if Jud had acted with more forthrightness. As it is, he stands as a scapegoat symbol, forced to suffer because of the evil attributed to him by those who saw the reflection of their own minds.

But although Jud emerges as the central figure, there are others who are drawn in full and careful detail. The author's view of farm-life is a sharply realistic one, and the pastoral quality of the setting is not used to take the sting from what she sees.

It is all done with such quiet, unassuming skill that a novel of such large literary merit as this one might very well be overlooked in the hullabaloo of comment on current novels written on more immediate and strident themes. Fynette Rowe won an Avery Hopwood award with her first novel, "The Chapin Sisters," and with "The Burning Spring," her second, she shows clear signs of becoming an American writer of rank.

## The Criminal Record

The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

Title and Author	Crime, Place, and Sleuth	Summing Up	Verdict
MADAM WILL NOT DINE TONIGHT <i>Hillary Waugh</i> (Coward-McCann: \$2.50)	Well-bred private 'tec finds corpse of missing Westchester siren in woods near home where dinner guests wait—all excellent suspects.	Nice to meet shamus who doesn't over-drink, fracture King's English, or try to make all possible dames. Solution cleverly handled.	Refreshing
T AS IN TRAPPED <i>Lawrence Treat</i> (Morrow: \$2.50)	Murders of Midwest beauty-with-past and diabolic crime-writer deeply involve industrial designer. Lab-minded detective helps clear him.	Bunch of high-strung characters; reasonably opaque puzzle; fancy sleuthing by detective and bemused suspect; emotional quotient consistently high.	G as in Good
I FOUND HIM DEAD <i>Gale Gallagher</i> (Coward-McCann: \$2.50)	Girl "skip-tracer," on Manhattan trail of kidnapped 'teen-ager with two frantic mothers, runs dead-heat with cops in double killing.	Female investigator, with police family-tree, quite credible, although methods madden homicide squad. Ending bit trite but previous events satisfactorily thrilling.	Above average
THE BLANK WALL <i>Elizabeth Sanxay Holding</i> (Simon & Schuster: \$2.50)	Accidental death of Long Island girl's shady swain entangles delightful mother in web of lies and blackmail. Tragic Irishman extricates her.	Unsurpassed character work carries off story which basically is hard to believe. Most of people are so real that they hurt.	Distinguished
DRAW THE CURTAIN CLOSE <i>Thomas B. Dewey</i> (Jefferson House: \$2.50)	Private op. "Mac" wades through blood to solve mystery of Gutenberg Bible and its million-dollar contents. It happens near Chicago.	Twelve deaths. Five murders, one police-slaying, four fogged by Mac, one by heroine, one suicide. What more could anybody want?	Phew!
THE ANGRY HEART <i>Leslie Edgley</i> (Crime Club: \$2)	Returned veteran, set to avenge deaths of wife and her brother, fortunately thwarted. Another party obliges. Vet discovers who and why.	Against Calif. art-dealer background author builds unusually effective plot. Characters rather overdrawn, but tale grips, right up to explosive end.	High grade