FICTION

# Manners Left by Their Mistress

***"The Watsons," by Jane Austen; continued and completed by John Coates** (Crowell. 318 pp. $4), is a fragment of a novel about matrimony and manners, developed at full length by a devoted Janeite. Joseph Wood Krutch, who writes frequently about English letters, is the author of many books, including literary studies.*

By Joseph Wood Krutch

NOT long after finishing her first two novels, "Pride and Prejudice" and "Sense and Sensibility," Jane Austen began a third, "The Watsons." Presumably because she had found no publisher for any of her work she abandoned it, and when, after an interval of several years, she resumed writing she made a new start with a different story. John Coates's book is actually more his own than the jacket description—"Jane Austen's fragment continued and completed"—might suggest. Only about one-fifth of it is Jane's and even with this first portion he has taken some liberties. On the whole, however, this makes the work even more to his credit since the story is made interesting in itself and strikes me as a remarkably convincing imitation of the Austen manner.

Why should one undertake a task so difficult and, some might say, so unrewarding? Mr. Coates is described as "a strong Janeite since the age of fifteen" and the answer is in part, I suspect, that he intends an interpretation, even a defense, of his idol. Was she a snob or a satirist of snobs? Was her attitude towards money low-minded or merely sensible? To some extent Mr. Coates answers these questions by unobtrusively making what he believes to have been her attitudes more explicit than she usually made them herself.

Of Miss Austen it has been said that she had no predecessors and also that she was above all a describer of the comedy of manners. Neither of these statements is quite the whole truth. Her predecessor was that prig of a genius Samuel Richardson, who first demonstrated that the minute analysis of the emotional problems of quiet people could be made absorbing. Her comedy of manners is actually a great deal more. That is the form but the subject is always Manners, Morals, and Prudence: how they are related, to what extent they conflict, and just how the conflicts should be adjusted. If there have been disputes and misunderstandings, that is largely because, unlike most idealists on the one hand and most "realists" on the other, she attached great importance to all three members of her trinity. She held that only a fool undervalued either a good income or a good social position but she despised heartily anyone who overvalued either. In the present tale (and the conclusion she intended is known) the heroine accepts the proposal of a respectable gentleman with a decent income rather than a rich lord because she likes the respectable gentleman better. But certainly Jane would not have approved a thoroughly imprudent marriage merely "for love."

Mr. Coates, as was suggested above, takes the liberty of making even Jane's own text rather more explicit than she made it herself. When, for instance, the heroine is accused by her sister (and also, I think, in Jane's own hinted opinion) of putting a trifle too much emphasis upon "strict rules," she is made to reply, "It is not I who lay them down, dearest Elizabeth, it is society. I think . . . everybody would be well advised to follow them." But I cannot find that bit in my text of the original. Or, to take a more striking case, Mr. Coates seems himself to have added at another point the remark apropos the rude behavior of one of the "best people": "Elizabeth had too much good sense not to recognize hard-hearted prosperity, low-minded conceit, and wrong-headed folly when she saw them." But why not? Jane may have forborne to make the remark and she might have thought it unnecessary, but she would not have thought it inappropriate.

—Culver Service.

J. Austen—"a snob or a satirist?"

Does she actually consider money more important than the majority of decent people think it today? I doubt it. If she sometimes seems to do so, it is partly because she is frank and partly because in a society where "social nobility" is conspicuously absent, the question "how much is his estate worth a year?" takes the place, not only of a similar question today, but also of the far more inclusive question "what are the chances that he will ever be able to make a decent living?" In her society few had any "prospects" they were not born to.

# Test-Tube Trickery

***"The Scientists," by Eleazar Lipsky** (Appleton-Century-Crofts. 375 pp. $4.95), is a novel about the intra-laboratory intrigues and jealousies that surround a scientific discovery. Critic Maxwell Geismar is the author of "American Moderns."*

By Maxwell Geismar

THE GIFTED son of a distinguished father, Eleazar Lipsky is the lawyer-writer and former assistant district attorney, who started his literary career with a series of excellent mystery tales. In "Lincoln McKeever" he extended his fiction in the direction of the problem novel, and "The Scientists" continues this mixture of literary forms. It is very readable, entertaining, and the writing, often sharp, is also rather pleasantly artificial.

The title of the novel is somewhat misleading. To the contemporary mind—if there is one—this almost implies something in the vein of atomic research, or at least in the realm of C. P. Snow. Mr. Lipsky's scientist is a worker in genetics, who has come up with a stabilizing element for the antibiotic drugs. He has made his discovery in the laboratory of a tyrannical and Germanic college professor, who claims half the credit and a goodly share of the profits. The novel is a study of academic types and uni-

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versity politics more than of science or scientists.

Mr. Lipsky's forte is in the description of academic intrigue, of money-raising college presidents, of self-seeking department heads, and of self-protective or intimidated teachers. The picture of Haverstraw campus—a mediocre university which is revolutionized by the discovery of "biocin"—is the best achievement in the novel. David Luzzatto has come to this college as an impetuous and ambitious research worker who becomes the assistant of the "great" Professor Ullman. Only very slowly does Luzzatto discover that Victor Ullman is the tragic wreck of the man he should have been, and that his jealousy and envy of his gifted young protégé will have disastrous consequences.

These consequences form the plot of the novel, and they keep the action almost continuously interesting, even though we begin to realize, towards the middle of the story, that the narrative is highly contrived. Where Mr. Lipsky is weakest is in the love and marriage relationship in the novel; the depth relations of human beings which center around the feminine portraits. What is curious, too, is that such an intelligent and well-informed writer should select only the more superficial aspects of scientific research for his theme. The hero is triumphant, the novel has a noble moral end; but some of Mr. Lipsky's readers will still be worried about what the scientists are going to do next. There is "biocin," and there is the big bang.

**KANSAS CITY LADY:** Evan S. Connell, Jr.'s **"Mrs. Bridge"** (Viking, $3.75) is an unusual novel whose central character is peripheral, even in the world she privately occupies. Mrs. Bridge is the wife of a Kansas City lawyer, who loses first the love and then the friendship of her three children. She is a "bona-fide country-club matron, . . . whose insights usually arrived too late to illuminate the situation." She is a woman of too much leisure, who is always on her way home from a luncheon, or an Auxiliary meeting, or a cocktail party, thinking of "what she should have said, and could have said, instead of only smiling and replying, 'It does seem too bad,' or, 'Well, yes, I expect that's true.'" She is always beginning: to study Spanish, or to paint, or to enlarge her vocabulary; she is always waiting for someone to call or to need her, wondering why she is waiting. For her appearances are an abiding concern: "a lady always carries a purse" and wears stockings. She follows "the manners" she has been taught. She is committed to her cliché of living; being committed, there is "nothing to do but proceed" through her life of fathomless incidents.

In 117 titled episodes Mr. Connell creates his picture. The book appears casual, as if one incident, by the way, reminded him of another possible incident. The little scenes move almostly idly with quiet humor, like life, through the unspecified time of changing relationships: Mrs. Bridge ages, life ceases. The difficulty of such telling lies in the danger of hiccoughing the reader into boredom as actual as Mrs. Bridge's own.

But Mr. Connell is a skilled pointillist. Rarely does he fail to place his dot of character in the proper place. The novel, for all its fragility, is sturdy. Although the heroine does not realize her moments' significances, the reader does understand—and cares. —HOLLIS SUMMERS.

**JUNGLE STRONGMAN:** In the last few years we have had a crop of native African writers, such as Mongo Beti and Amos Tutuola, writing in English, neither very dramatically nor informatively. Chinua Achebe's fictive biography, **"Things Fall Apart"** (McDowell, Obolensky, $3.75), is probably the best of them. No European ethnologist could so intimately present this medley of mores of the Ibo tribe, nor detail the intricate formalities of life in the clan.

The story weaves back and forth around the great wrestler and planter, Okonkwo, a giant who deplores his clan's loss of manhood; they are no longer the great warriors of his youth. Their greatest foray was to steal in revenge a boy from another clan. Okonkwo adopted him, forgot about him until the oracle in the cave decreed his death, and then helped in that slaughter. He planted his yams, but the rains came to wrestle their roots from the earth, and the sun scorched the next planting. He had trouble with witches, who returned, reincarnated in each child, and had to be killed and mutilated as counsel to them not to come back again.

Okonkwo was badgered by polygamy, and unpardonably beat a wife during the Week of Peace before planting, thus affronting the earth goddess, Ani. But, worse, he inadvertently killed a clansman and was sentenced to seven years' expulsion from the clan. He returned to find calamity. The white man had arrived with his missionaries, who had been given a plot in the Evil Wood to build their chapel. The chapel was burned, followed by reprisals by the whites. Okonkwo killed one of their convert messengers, and hanged himself in despair of his degenerate clan which would not rally to him.

The flashbacks of the book are confusing, the narration undisciplined, but as an objective view of the Ibo customs it is of both interest and value. —HASSOLDT DAVIS.

# Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

## INTERNAL EVIDENCE

This year marks the sesquicentennial of the birth of Edgar Allan Poe. As a small tribute to the star-crossed genius, who got the American short story on its way, Elizabeth Mills of Springfield, Missouri, has selected ten sentences taken directly from that many of his tales, in each of which sentences there is a strong clue to the story's title. Answers on page 31.

1. I know not how it was, but with the first glimpse of the building a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit.
2. We had birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.
3. He prided himself on his connoisseurship of wine.
4. Having failed to fall, it was no part of the demon plan to hurl me into the abyss and thus a different and milder destruction awaited me.
5. It was a low, dull, quick sound, much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton.
6. It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavor.
7. It had a large black seal, bearing the D----- cipher very conspicuously, and it was addressed in a diminutive female hand to D-----, the minister, himself.
8. Many individuals have been examined in relation to this most extraordinary and frightful affair.
9. It is of a brilliant gold color—about the size of a large hickory nut—with two jet black spots near one extremity of the back and another, somewhat larger, at the other.
10. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum.

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