

there is no hint in the writing as to what makes Maggie more attractive than Pauline to our young hero. As a matter of fact, and simply on the scattering of evidence presented, I suspect the reader would have picked Pauline every time.

However, it is mistaken seriousness to treat this stuff as if it could be asked to respond to the criteria of serious writing. There is no interest here in the art of writing. What there is instead is Kerouac's breathless interest in Kerouac. The total premise of such writing seems to be: "Oh, my God it happened to me: every sacred, formless irrelevance is out of my own loving memory of myself." The unique validity of his free-association so validated, Kerouac obviously feels absolved from any necessity to make his material meaningful to the reader. Or even, for that matter, to show a trace of respect for the language itself. I submit the following as a thumbnail anthology of Kerouac prose (occasional italics mine), and enough said:

... just ripened, the flesh bulged and was firm from under her shiny dress belt . . .

... she turned throwing fecund hair in quick knowing sorrying glances . . .

... frozen cold, the ruts and pock holes have ice . . .

... Maggie performed; in her sweet white skates, white muff, you see the flash of her eye . . .  
[Ed. Note: Where does she keep that eye?]

## Criminal Record

**DEATH IS AN ARTIST.** By Stephen Gardiner. Washburn. \$2.95. English ex-intelligence ace puts on harness again when painter friend is conked at easel; Yard also active; foreign travel precedes solution. Dialogue is abundant.

**THE WATCHER.** By Dolores Hitchens. Crime Club. \$2.95. Psychopathic killer in Los Angeles area leads good local cops un merry chase; sister of one victim has harrowing share in pinning down culprit. High-grade job, as expected.

**KILLING COMES EASY.** By Peter Chester. Roy. \$2.75. Yank security biggie flies Londonward to investigate murder of British officer who had rescued thirty-four American prisoners of war in daring coup. Complications abound, but yarn is well-paced.

—SERGEANT CUFF.

## Symbols and Sioux

"Mi Amigo," by W. R. Burnett (Knopf, 241 pp. \$3.50), and "Conquering Horse," by Frederick Manfred (McDowell, Obolensky, 355 pp. \$4.95), in their separate ways, recreate the West's broncho-busting days. Irwin R. Blacker is the author of the historical novel "Taos."

By Irwin R. Blacker

THE LITERARY empire loosely called the Western generally includes within its boundaries that vast area stretching from the Mississippi to the Pacific Ocean—an area actually larger than Europe. The Western label has been acceptable to Hollywood and its precocious relative, television, because producers claim that, regardless of the story told, the picture still looks the same. For those who know the varied Western landscape this argument may be confusing, but it is meaningless when one recalls that the history of the area covers several hundred years and several different civilizations. However, while geography may be all important to the filmmaker, such loose terminology also crudely lumps together tales as widely different as W. R. Burnett's "Mi Amigo" and Frederick Manfred's "Conquering Horse."

In "Mi Amigo" W. R. Burnett has turned to the Matter of America. (A not too farfetched description of the Western myth when one recalls that scholars have long referred to the Arthurian legend as the Matter of Britain.) In the myth-Western the symbols are standard. Variation is uncalled for and generally unacceptable. The quality of the story differs only with the writing style and structural competence of the author, and as an old professional (twenty-five novels) Burnett knows the rules of the game. All of the symbols are present: the youthful hero-villain (based on The Kid), the hero cavalry sergeant, who puts a quick end to what any knowledgeable reader will quickly recognize as the Lincoln County Wars, the oldtime Westerner who could not mature with the land, the pretty Mexican girl in love with the boy-killer, the efficient army officer whose wife cannot cope with the loneliness and hardships of the frontier, and the Indian who knows that in order to survive in a world circumscribed by white morality, he must change.

Only the neat, uncluttered style and the firm storytelling hand of a skilled writer like Burnett keeps "Mi Amigo"



—Penny Hellyer.

W. R. Burnett—the Matter of America.

from falling into the same class with the Western myth serials running daily on television. Some critics say that mystery and Western writers are our finest literary craftsmen because they know how best to carpenter a story from stereotypes. None would question that Burnett is the most accomplished of artisans. Both the person who scorns the Western and the one who devours the pap created in its name enjoy a good professional performance.

At the opposite pole from the myth-Western lies what might clumsily be called the anthropological Western. The usual symbols are entirely avoided and the actual practices and customs of the natives dominate, and so Frederick Manfred undertook a completely different task from Burnett when he tried to create a fictional Coming of Age or Bildungsroman of the Yankton Sioux. In tracing the steps toward manhood—the earning of a name, the fathering of a child, the counting of coup, and the final acceptance as chief—Manfred has emerged his reader in all the trappings of Indian lore and into a background stripped of all white influence. His story line is, at the same time, simple and fascinating.

**MANHATTAN INTERLUDE:** To those who enjoy their fiction served up with a New York setting and who are not put off by the apparently limitless carnal zeal of certain members of Bohemia, David Loovis's first novel, "Try for Elegance" (Scribners, \$3.95), should prove a diverting work. Mr. Loovis tells the story of the love affair between Paul Dunar, a twenty-eight year-old painter who can no longer bring himself to paint, and Lee Kroner, a nineteen-year-old student of design, who has fled the respectability of her middle-class family in Springfield, Illinois.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## SENATOR JOE

THE REVIEW BY Herbert Brucker of Richard Rovere's "Senator Joe McCarthy" [SR July 4] is a curious affair. It seems to me that Brucker is reviewing the wrong book. I am sure it was not Mr. Rovere's purpose to write a social history of the times. Anyway, Brucker is wrong, for it is a dangerous simplification to see McCarthyism as a product or reflection of the American suspicions of Communism, as dangerous as if to say that German unemployment caused Hitlerism. This oversimplification and facileness of Brucker's is revealed in a statement which he makes: "But the entire nation stood by afraid to speak, or indifferent, or actually applauding, while the guilty and innocent alike were tried, convicted and punished with incredible severity and terrible reality by the McCarthy subcommittee—and this without ever getting near a court, or being offered protection of the rules of fair trial as painfully built up through the centuries."

If these people called up by the McCarthy subcommittee never got a fair trial, how does Brucker know who was guilty, or who was innocent? Or does Brucker presume to know who was guilty merely by the quality of the answers these people gave McCarthy? [It seems that] intelligent men like Brucker apparently were convinced that some of the men called up by McCarthy, or named by McCarthy, were guilty (guilty of what?) and without the fair trial, the lack of which Brucker so soundly, perhaps paradoxically, berates.

PHILIP SIEKEVITZ.

Astoria, N. Y.

## DEFENSE OF THE WORD

CIARDI'S EDITORIAL on the "Book Burners" [SR June 27]: a 2,500-word defense of the four-letter word. Is it worth it?

H. O. BRUNN.

Seattle, Wash.

## SPLIT THE SKY

THE TWO EDITORIALS, "If There Is to Be Mobilization" [SR March 21] and "Has Anyone Mentioned the U.N.?" [SR March 28] have been cases of clear thinking and truth amidst the clangings of the sounding brass.

But your editorials have inspired me often before. Out of curiosity I checked through some twenty-one back issues that were lying about the house and found that no less than ten of these gave a clear summons to the individual to "split the sky with indignation." And how have I "split the sky"?—with a few letters to my Congressmen, an occasional note to the President, some feeble attempts in social conversation that seem overshadowed by the viewpoint of the "realist," the "practical" man.

I can't help but feel that there must be countless of your readers who could



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"History will NOT ignore your majesty—you forget about the Louis XV furniture."

make the same confession. Our concerns are deep, our intentions are good, but we are not making effective use of our power as free citizens. Part of the trouble may be the fear that we stand virtually alone in our views.

Several suggestions occur to me. Perhaps, through your magazine, similar-minded individuals living in given geographical areas could communicate with each other. We could pool our convictions, our energies, our talents; and at least expose public opinion to a different viewpoint from the Pentagon-approved one, as well as inspire ourselves to more dynamic action.

Very specifically, those SR readers who would like to talk things over together and perhaps even bond together in behalf of their concerns should be enabled to do so. Perhaps you might have a corner in SR where readers who are willing to serve as informal liaison people might be able to list their names.

If any readers think these ideas have merit and would like to see informal SR groups established in their area, they could write in and make themselves known to the editor. Those in the Bay Area might write me. Let's have other suggestions, let's exchange more ideas.

GRACE PETTY,

3158 Wayside Lane,

Walnut Creek, Calif.

## UNENDING TASK

IT WILL BE SURPRISING indeed if English teachers approve of the remarks quoted by Joseph Wood Krutch from a book called "The High School Curriculum" [SR July 4]. To me and my colleagues there is no more frustrating task than to change the "ain't got no's." However, it is one of the tasks to which all good English teachers are dedicated.

If his editorial is written to "arouse"

the English teachers in American public schools I am certain that Mr. Krutch has succeeded.

SHARON TRAUB.

Rochester, Minn.

## UNAUTHORIZED SUCCESSION

JOHN LEAR's editorial [SR July 11] refers to "President Benjamin Tyler." He seems to have confused President Tyler's first name with that of the man whom he succeeded in office, President Benjamin Harrison, the hero of Tippecanoe. Benjamin Harrison's grandson, William Henry Harrison, it will be remembered, was elected President in 1888.

MARVIN W. SCHLEGEL.

Farmville, Va.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *John Lear welcomes Reader Schlegel to the game of scrambled history. It was William Henry Harrison who passed on the Presidency (but not the first name of his grandson, Benjamin, a later President) to John Tyler.*

## THEY LINGER ON

IN YOUR DISTINGUISHED issue dealing with university presses [SR June 20], Howard Mumford Jones praises Victorian hard-cover books made to last "not for three months, but for three generations." The inference as to paperbacks is clear.

But erroneous. I have Tauchnitz paperbacks that go back to the nineteenth century and are still in excellent condition. I have American paperbacks going back to the 1930s and still good for years.

Your own report "Pick of the Paperbacks" in the same issue shows that the academics recognize the value of the paperback.

It will endure, can travel.

LEO L. ROCKWELL.

Lakeland, Fla.