

only end of writing is to enable readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it." In fact, one of the chief uses of fiction is "diagnosis: and once in a while, when some class or profession or family of mankind has been spiritually sick, novels have prescribed something to relieve or cure the sickness." But the novelist must show what is wrong without too obviously prescribing. Mr. Wescott thinks that Somerset Maugham does this admirably, and Mr. Maugham agrees that it is in the back of his mind, but he wants the discovery to be the reader's own: "It is not the business of the novelist to tell his readers what they are to think of his characters and his plot."

Many readers have thought that few novels of the twentieth century have more convincingly shown the sickness of an age than Mann's "The Magic Mountain," and Mr. Wescott would agree; yet he regards this novel as overblown, too stuffed with philosophy and abstractions. To this reviewer the chapter on Mann is the weakest in the book, though it does contain some highly original speculations on Mann's political development. Perhaps Mr. Wescott simply has a natural antipathy to Mann, and an affinity for Thornton Wilder, whose view of the novelist's function he shares in general. Wilder would like to regard the novelist as what the Germans call a "Menschenkenner," the complete knower of human experience, "like a great eye above the roof, above the town, above the planet, from which nothing is hid."

And yet since Henry James, or rather beginning with him, the novelist has steadily retreated from omniscience. Wilder blames Freud and sociology, but Wescott thinks there are also other contributing factors that have enfeebled the novelists. One is journalism, which today performs the functions of Balzac. Another is the influence of Flaubert, resulting in a cult of stylistic perfectionism. And the economic status of the novelist is poor.

But a major difficulty is increasing cosmopolitanism and social mobility. The nineteenth-century novelist lived in a compact society, was "saturated" with his material, and knew his homogeneous readers. However, "this is a challenge, not an impediment, a problem of form and technique, soluble surely." This book contains a number of suggestions as to how the problem could be solved, but this is not its subject. Its main purpose is the sharing of literary experience, growing out of knowledge of the lives of the creators of the books discussed, and this Glenway Wescott has interestingly and provocatively done.

On Uncovering Travesty

"The Anatomy of Satire," by Gilbert Highet (Princeton University Press. 301 pp. \$5), combing the classics, distinguishes irony from parody, mimicry, hoax, and romance. Richard G. Stern's third novel, "In Any Case," was published last month. He is visiting lecturer this year at the University of Venice.

By RICHARD G. STERN

EIGHT FORTY-FIVE. The first portion of the rebroadcast Boston Symphony Concert has been consumed. The station's intermission feature is announced, and Chicago's finest fingers zoom for the switch-off. Not mine. I wait happily for the slow, Glasgow-burred elegance of his "Gud eevning, ladis and gntlm," and the twelve-minute exposition on the week's book, person, or tradition. In the middle of Martin's Forty-fourth Symphony I am still relishing phrases, making lists of books to read, anticipating next week's twelve minutes.

Gilbert Highet. Our Saintsbury. May there always be one, an Edinburgh or Glasgow hound of print, and a scribbler thereof. Can any man have lived long enough to have read what George Saintsbury and Gilbert Highet have read? Mr. Highet has already read more than Mr. Saintsbury, or at least he reads more carefully and completely. He not only reads Abraham a Sancta Clara and sees his resemblance to Bion

of Borysthenes, but he can offer us "a sound, though rather unsympathetic, portrait of Abraham in c. 2 of R. A. Kann's 'Study in Austrian Intellectual History' (New York, 1960)." Mr. Saintsbury might not have read R. A. Kann, and we would have suspected his comparison of Abraham and Bion. One does not suspect Mr. Highet's reading. When one occasionally trips up on something recognizable in his pages, one may say, "That is not what Abraham of Sancta Clara meant at all," but one knows that Mr. Highet has read Abraham, has seen something which sent him to fourteen comparative bell ropes, and then has sounded the bells as truly as his rigorous Scots wit and Chesterfieldian sentences permit.

Mr. Highet would be a hard man with whom to argue. Saints pity the man who wrestles him in the classical pit. Mr. Highet can really shiver with pain at the Syriac thinness of Lucian's Greek, and with bliss at the prose of Apuleius, "as scented and as sinuous as a magic spell"; masterfully, if respectfully, he can dispute scholarly derivations of Seneca's "Apocolocyntosis"; and, as for parallel-drawing, who else but he could find Ennius in Bob Newhart, Juvenal in Ruskin's description of the Thames Embankment or, rather, Ruskin in Juvenal when "I was last rereading Juvenal's satire on the horrors of the big city"?

What is the container of this lovely *minestrone*, the *lanx* of this *satura*? A book on satire, happily enough, that most boldly ravished of critical terms, that mask for critical incompetence. Some years ago Mr. Highet wrote his "Juvenal the Satirist," and he obviously knew his way around the country then. By now he can distinguish satire in and from parody, mimicry, hoax, and romance, can spot its misuse in "Bouvard and Pecuchet," its blooms in Rabelais, Swift, Quevedo, More; Erasmus, Julian, Mayakovsky, Ionesco, its presence in history, biography, or narrative where lesser men (cf. Jérôme Carcopino on Petronius's "Satyrice") have mistaken it for honest description.

Surely this is enough to ask of a man who can also send us book-loving ignoramus to the "Epistulae Obscurorum Virorum" and Parini's "Il Giorno," who remembers wonderful turns of



—From the book.

Reynard the Fox honored by King Lion.

Grock and novel travesties by Bret Harte, who quotes marvelous bits from all over Western space and literary time, and who finally selects such delightful illustrations as Titian's ape "Laocoön" and sculpture from the cathedral at Bourges. The heads behind the dial-twisting hands may say that Mr. Highet cannot compose a book, that he repeats himself, sometimes contradictorily, that he is discursively too short-winded, that his analytic powers are feeble, that his

opinions ("sexual energy is the central reason of existence for many Italians") are puerile and obtrusive, and that his prose ("If the results which he offers us are not always smooth with the contours of perfect art, and if their hints are not harmoniously blended, they have at least the urgency and immediacy of actual life") is not always polished. Let them say it, twist the dial, ignore the books. The rest of us will continue to attend to Highet with pleasure and utility.

in the fiction as in painting or on the stage.

This seems to be one of the failings of Sypher's extremely compressed book: It neglects pleasure, the esthetic effect of these works on readers and spectators. Granted the epistemological discoveries, what new experience do we find in Nicole Sarraute's "babble" or in Beckett's repetitions? What new tensions and anxieties, what vertiginous or stupefying pleasures? To ask this is to think also of the destroyers of conventional literary form who are not concerned with identity loss to the same degree, notably William Faulkner. The public success of Lawrence Durrell's fiction reminds us of the same thing. He too is helping to construct that myth of dissolution and annihilation which may some day seem, in retrospect, to have dominated our time.

The forms of dissolution are legion, hardly to be résuméd in a book of 179 pages. A fuller survey would have to give more attention to the psychologist's entropies, to the Freudian *thanatos*, and to the self-destructive drives of the guilty, to Eric Ericsson and others who theorize on identity-diffusion. And even to the hipster or beatnik assaults on the nervous system, who intend from the destruction of old energy to create new. The assaults of the guilty on

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In Search of Non-Being

"Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art," by Wylie Sypher (Random House. 179 pp. \$4), and **"Samuel Beckett,"** by Ruby Cohn (Rutgers University Press. 340 pp. \$6), respectively, probe identity-diffusion in painting, anti-novels, and anti-dramas—and evaluate the major figure in the endgame of annihilation. Albert J. Guerard's new novel, *"The Exiles,"* will be published by Macmillan in February.

By ALBERT J. GUERARD

THE MODERN impulse to lose the self, to dissolve consciousness and change or destroy identity, to escape the weary and burdened ego, is at least 200 years old. It provides one of the great motives of nineteenth-century literature, from Senancour and the English romantics to Nietzsche's "Birth of Tragedy." Philosophers and psychologists, the elusive Kierkegaard and the methodical Taine alike, joined in the theoretical assault on the old recognizable "self." In 1914 D. H. Lawrence warned that one would look in vain, in his novels, for the old ego of character.

Wylie Sypher, in his "Loss of Self in Modern Literature and Art," continues this tale of destruction to the present. Sypher displayed great versatility in four earlier volumes. Now he brings his subtle, epigrammatic, essentially French intelligence to bear on the diverse annihilations of the new mathematics and physics (Goedel, Heisenberg, Boltzman, Bronowski), and on those of existentialist philosophy, of Dubuffet's "brutal" painting, of the anti-novels and anti-dramas of Musil, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Beckett, Iones-

co. His essential assumption is "that there is some reciprocity between what scientists are thinking and what artists are doing," and that the true artist will feel as "strongly as the scientist or philosopher which way the deeper currents of his day are running."

It appears that one way in which they are running is down. Sypher sees an intuition among artists corresponding to the physicist's notion of entropy: "the tendency of an ordered universe to go over into a state of disorder," and a leveling of energy "until all distinctions are obliterated." Sir James Jeans reminded us, more than a generation ago, that we were running down. He could nevertheless conclude with lofty comments on the remaining immensity of the future. The *anti's* in our present atmosphere (beginning or perhaps ending with anti-matter) increase and multiply. Wylie Sypher emphasizes, perhaps more than he intends to, the degree to which the French anti-novel is a philosophical rather than literary movement. Epistemology, not esthetics, shapes and demolishes the genre.

One of the many rewards of this brief and brilliant book is the common cause it makes for experimental art and experimental fiction. There is a general tolerance, among educated beholders, for action painting or for the brutal painting of Dubuffet; and more than tolerance for the plays of Beckett and Ionesco on the stage. But another standard is commonly imposed for fiction; the nineteenth-century realisms are nostalgically invoked. Thus the novels of Beckett (or those of Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Djuna Barnes, John Hawkes) may seem silly or irrelevant to the same critic who enjoys Beckett's plays or the paintings of Motherwell and Dubuffet. Yet the same kind of destructive intention and horrified pleasure may be found as richly

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1001

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1001 will be found in the next issue.

XB KXC RG CLOA KRGB

ORPBG Q GQN ORMB.

PCODQRFB.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1000

The difference between a human being ten years of age and one fifty years of age lies altogether in the matter of toys.

—O'MALLEY.