

tiously literate, and, given the themes, shallow. I mean, really shallow.

—ANNA SHAPIRO

White Horses

by Alice Hoffman

G.P. Putman's Sons, 256 pp., \$12.95

IN *WHITE HORSES*, her fourth novel in five years, Alice Hoffman tells the story of Teresa Connors, whose incestuous obsession transforms her into a modern sleeping beauty. Unfortunately, it lulls the reader as well.

Dina, Teresa's mother, tells the tale of the mythic arias, "men who appeared out of nowhere, who rode white horses across the mesas." Teresa then becomes obsessed with her charismatic older brother, Silver, a man who resembles an aria. From preadolescence to womanhood, Teresa sleepwalks through her dreary life, always waiting for Silver to wake her and carry her away. When Silver does finally appear, she has somehow learned to relinquish her fantasies and reject him, although it remains unclear how she gained this strength. Her mother comes to recognize that "a man who traveled beneath an orange moon on nights that were scented with wildflowers and thick with heat suddenly seemed much less marvelous than a man who would sit on the back porch and hold her hand for hours without having to say one word." There is little to suggest that Teresa has earned this same understanding.

The novel is laden with beautiful images of air and earth, scent and color. They should be hypnotic when piled one on top of the other, but instead they become merely labored. Yet despite its many flaws, *White Horses* leaves the reader feeling the promise of a better novel from Hoffman next time out.

—BARBARA F. WILLIAMSON

The Patriot Game

by George V. Higgins

Alfred A. Knopf, 233 pp., \$12.95

AS FANS OF *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* will attest, George V. Higgins can write low-life dialogue so authentic it rings in your ears. The hero of *The Patriot Game*—a federal agent who is hunting IRA gun-runners—speaks a diluted version of the hard-boiled sarcastic idiom that fit the cops and robbers of *Eddie Coyle* perfectly. Unfortunately, so do a couple of priests, a trio of adolescent golf caddies, a political fixer, and several

other characters in the novel, Higgins's 11th in as many years. This is hard to forgive in a book that relies so heavily on conversation to tell its story.

A Massachusetts-born-and-bred attorney, Higgins is clearly at home in the Boston-area political back rooms, the rectories, and the Catholic country club where much of *The Patriot Game* takes place. But these locales amount merely to backdrops for a plot that has nothing like the pace of *Eddie Coyle*. Only in the climactic showdown in a South Boston dive does Higgins finally put it all together—the suspense, the deadpan wit, the local color. Too bad his characters have had to bend our ears bringing us there.

—ERIC GOLDSTEIN

Nonfiction Briefs

The Fate of the Earth

by Jonathan Schell

Alfred A. Knopf, 211 pp., \$13.95

THIS BOOK, by a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, is in places almost too terrifying

and too despairing to read. It is the most important general work on nuclear war since Linus Pauling's *No More War!* was published almost a quarter-century ago.

Much has been learned over the past 25 years about the probable effects (we can never know the *real* effects until it is too late, stresses Schell) of a large-scale nuclear exchange. And Schell catalogues it all: what nuclear weapons are; the grisly aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; how a war might break out; the fallacies surrounding the concept of "limited" nuclear war; the chilling consequences. He discusses the dilemma of removing the nuclear threat in the face of the permanence of scientific knowledge. And he reminds us that we shall live in the shadow of possible self-extinction for the rest of time.

Where do we go from here? In delineating the absurdities inherent in nuclear deterrence theory, Schell knows that there is but one answer: Disarm and develop a system to solve international disputes peacefully. As naively, simplistically silly as this solution sounds, it is our only choice. In W.H. Auden's words, "We must love one another or die."

Our inability to deal with the nuclear

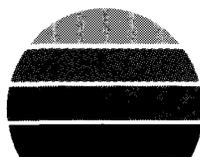
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Tennessee Williams

threat—our denial of death, perhaps—makes us resist this book. But as Schell writes, “A society that systematically shuts its eyes to an urgent peril to its physical survival and fails to take any steps to save itself cannot be called psychologically well.” —CAREY HORWITZ

**Stuff of Sleep and Dreams:
Experiments in Literary Psychology**
by Leon Edel
Harper and Row, 224 pp., \$20

DURING HIS LONG and distinguished career, Leon Edel has written about most of the great writers of the 20th century—Henry James, James Joyce, and the Bloomsbury circle. In this volume, he has collected those pieces in which he applies “literary psychology,” which he defines as “a study of what literature expresses about the human being who created it.” He is persuasive in his defense of this discipline—without which, he says, “we work in a twilight of irrelevancy”—and he is brilliant in the practice of it.

Edel finds neat and intriguing solutions when he poses small puzzles, as he does with Thoreau—Why did he really

go to Walden Pond? And Edel composes penetrating and moving essays when he asks large questions, as he does of Joyce—How did a man at war with himself shape his language and his fictions?

Edel’s most poignant essay, “Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man,” concludes with his praise of James and Yeats: “They acknowledge despair, they acknowledge their instincts and their feelings, and grow old without the rigidities of aging. Within the tattered coat upon the stick there is a radiance.” The description applies to Edel himself.

—BARBARA F. WILLIAMSON

**This Was Harlem:
A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950**
by Jervis Anderson
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
245 pp., \$17.95

HARLEM. WHAT COMES to mind? The fast life, big-city chic and sin, old-time religion, big hearts and big crime, names like Fats Waller, James Baldwin, and Billie Holiday. A mecca to blacks since the turn of the century, Harlem never has had its portrait painted so clearly and so coolly. *New Yorker* writer Jervis Ander-

son illuminates its culture and pulls together the voices of historians and participants.

During the Depression—and despite it—Harlem’s music thrived. The Savoy Ballroom was the place to go—black and white, rich and poor—to hear Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Chick Webb. During the 1950s, the dream that Harlem was a heaven ended. Its greats had died and the middle class began to move away. Concludes Anderson, “The hearts of new-arrivals no longer missed a beat just at being there.” It’s a loss felt more deeply because of this sweeping, albeit discreet, tribute.

—VALERIE BROOKS

What’s the Good Word?
by William Safire
Times Books, 297 pp., \$15.50

IN THIS SECOND collection of *New York Times* columns on language, William Safire’s implicit subject isn’t grammar, but diction. His breezy pieces reveal little about standard English, but volumes about *molar mashers*, *cheese-eaters*, and other quirky relics of Americana. Al-

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