

the work, and the work has succeeded as work!" Hart had no need to worry about his work or his reputation, nor need John Fairbank worry about his own 40 years' labor. It was worth it, and the achievement was formidable. In our own lifetimes there will not be such another I.G. of Chinese studies. ■

Fiction Briefs

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant

by Anne Tyler

Alfred A. Knopf, 285 pp., \$13.50

ANNE TYLER'S brooding, darkly introspective new novel, her ninth, explores the interior life of an unhappy working-class Baltimore family through 35 troubled years. Pearl Tull—85, blind, and dying—is an abusive, angry, mean-spirited matriarch. Unable to contain the bilious emotions stirred by her husband's desertion years before, she has inflicted her pain on her family. Tyler's concern is how these outbursts of bitterness and rage—years of unjust accusations, grudges, evasions—scar the children.

There is a disquieting determinism to all of this, an assumption that character is shaped early and disfigured before the will can intervene. Not love, but injuries—the inability to forgive one another—bind the Tulls together. And without forgiveness in the present, suggests Tyler, there can be no redemption of the past.

There is much of Flannery O'Connor's gothic South in this book—the same sullen, psychic menace. Gone is the jaunty, madcap mood of *Morgan's Passing*. Tyler has turned inward and compressed her focus to write a stunning psychological portrait of a family estranged from itself. —ANDREA BARNET

Nobody's Angel

by Thomas McGuane

Random House

212 pp., \$14.50; paperback \$6.95

IT'S LAMENTABLE that the wit, inventiveness, and poetic sensibility that inform Thomas McGuane's sixth novel are adumbrated by his deadpan approach to the story. At times, his book seems a perverse exercise. The ironic underplaying of dramatic moments is vexing, but the lyricism that marbles the arrhythmic prose is pure gold. *Nobody's Angel* is a haunting, headstrong work in which the author makes no concessions to his

readers. Such spirit is admirable, but the book ultimately suffers because of it.

Patrick Fitzpatrick is a cryptic sort who drifts back to his family's Deadrock ranch after an interlude as an army tank captain. Patrick tends to let whiskey get the better of him, and he conducts an aimless affair with his neighbor's pretty wife. Neither the whiskey nor the woman provides a cure for what ails him—an amorphous malady that he thinks of as "sadness-for-no-reason."

Stranded amid the remorseless vistas of Montana, McGuane's characters shrink and become lost against that terrible sky. The book is so emotionally and stylistically compressed that, in the end, the author's vision seems hopelessly myopic. Still, this terse novel is remarkably disturbing, and one wonders what would have happened if McGuane had loosened his grip on the reins.

—MICHELLE GREEN

Bodily Harm

by Margaret Atwood

Simon & Schuster, 266 pp., \$13.95

RENNIE WILFORD, the heroine of *Bodily Harm*, is a freelance journalist who writes on such subjects as "the return of the open-toed spike-heel sandal." A dispassionate chronicler of "lifestyles," she views her friends as "contacts" and her experiences as a series of magazine articles neatly labeled with clever captions. That is until she is stricken with breast cancer and can find no tidy little phrases to shield her from the vulnerability of her own body. When her apartment is broken into by a "faceless stranger" who has apparently been observing her for some time, Rennie flees to a remote Caribbean island on the pretense of doing a travel piece. There nobody knows her. But she soon finds out that even tourists are not exempt from "massive involvement" (her doctor's euphemism for terminal cancer) when she inadvertently becomes embroiled in a bloody insurrection and ends up in prison. The realization that the "authorities," the men she expects to rescue her, are the very men who are detaining her and brutalizing the local people leads Rennie to an ironic discovery of the source of her own power.

Though this story gets off to a slow start, there is nothing gratuitous here. Margaret Atwood has extracted the conviction and intensity of *Surfacing* and the subtlety and scope of *Life Before Man* and created a sophisticated, superbly orchestrated allegorical novel. Her char-

acteristically introspective style is greatly enhanced by an unusually cohesive plot and a political theme that manages to steer clear of didacticism. *Bodily Harm* is Atwood's richest, most fully realized work to date. —CAROL VERDERESE

Distant Relations

by Carlos Fuentes

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 225 pp., \$11.95

"THERE MUST BE ghosts all over the world," wrote Ibsen. For Carlos Fuentes, who once observed that "the Mexican character never separates life from death," these specters are as palpable as the flesh-and-blood creatures who struggle with them.

In his Paris club, an aging count tells a story to a friend. It begins when Hugo Heredia, a Mexican archaeologist, brings his son to France. The son, for whom the past is still alive, embarks with the count on a Proustian journey to the place where childhood and destiny coexist. The Heredias are "distant relations" returning at last to the bosom of the family. They are the New World's revenge against the Old, bearing the sins of colonialism to their source. Time contracts and expands, exhaling memories that ensnare each of the characters.

In its brilliantly conceived permutations and transfigurations, its fusing of all time into one time, this is typical Fuentes—dense and mysterious and, finally, unresolved. "If everything becomes too clear," Fuentes wrote in *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, "I'll lose interest." It hasn't happened. —JAMES POLK

Malgudi Days

by R.K. Narayan

The Viking Press, 244 pp., \$11.95

CRITICS ARE RIGHT in comparing the renowned Indian writer R.K. Narayan to Dickens. He summons up a whole city (the imaginary "Malgudi") and populates it with the kind of people of whom one would say in real life, "What a character!": phony doctors, scamps, scalawags, liars of all types, and what seems to be a stock figure of Indian fiction—the railing, complaining wife and mother whose son or husband is never successful or devoted enough to please her. She finds her complement in an old man who wears out three wives, or in a mistress who brings her man riches at the expense of her own feelings. There is even an American hippie.

They are all "types" and as such, lend themselves to characteristically "strong"

situations verging on farce or melodrama. Two of the most affecting of these 30-odd stories are full-blown tragedies in miniature. Some end with ironic, O. Henry-like twists.

But these colorful tales also share some of Dickens's and O. Henry's limitations. The later stories reflect Narayan's advancing age; people are apt to wonder gloomily what they did in their last incarnation to deserve *this*. Narayan is not interested in answering. He cares neither to instruct nor to meditate, only to amuse. These dramas do amuse, but they don't involve or engage the reader.

—ANNA SHAPIRO

To See You Again: Stories

by Alice Adams

Alfred A. Knopf, 285 pp., \$13.50

ALICE ADAMS'S heroines spend enormous energy looking for good men. At worst, this searching unfolds in an uninspired chronology of major loves, minor loves, and time spent with friends. At best—as in her second collection of stories, *To See You Again*—the passion is complicated with stiff doses of wisdom and affection. More is at stake than romance.

"The Girl Across the Room," one of the finest stories in this new collection, is about a frail but strikingly handsome couple in their late sixties. The wife muses about what might have happened had her husband run off with the young dancer who had loved him years before. "It would have all gone bad," she thinks, "the girl bored and irritable, Matthew worn out, not understanding anything." Matthew has grown to need her. Yet when he confesses that without her he "wouldn't have had much of a life at all," she denies it—lying beautifully, out of sheer fondness.

The best of these stories are charmingly precise—more deftly executed than Adams's novels (*Rich Rewards*, *Families and Survivors*, and *Listening to Billie*), and more delicately complex than her first collection, *Beautiful Girl*.

—RHONDA BRAMMER

Pinball

by Jerzy Kosinski

Bantam Books

256 pp., \$14.95; paperback \$7.95

JERZY KOSINSKI is an important author. He won the National Book Award for *Steps*; he was presented with the American Academy and National Institute of Arts and Letters Award in Literature;

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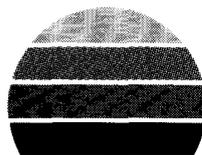
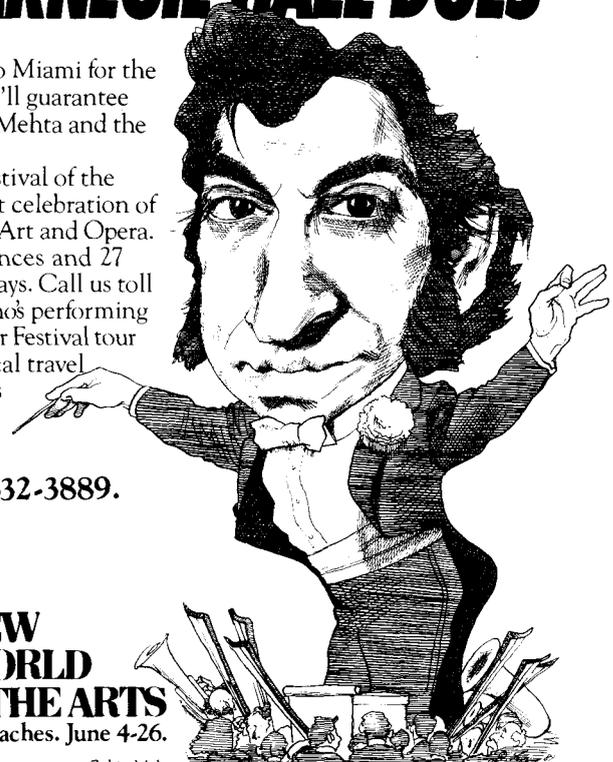


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