BOOKS

A Lovely Flower On The Dunghill

THE BLIND. By Luis Harss. Atheneum. 403 Pages. $5.95

The notion of the flower on the dung heap has captivated many a writer, for more than adequate reason. The contrast one achieves by the juxtaposition is oftentimes wondrous.

If one can successfully steer a course between the Scylla of corrupting the flower with the dung and the Charybdis of focusing on the compost heap instead of the flower, you've fecund soil for the growth of literature.

South American novelist Luis Harss, one of twenty-five first novelists Atheneum Press has introduced during the past year, must have thought long and carefully about the contrast and the dangers, for this novel is a minor classic of both.

In his instance the dunghill is South America of the decaying upper classes. Holed up somewhere on the western coast of the continent they are languidly resisting the change, the revolution that is bringing the teeming peasantry in waves over the old ramparts of privilege. Even in Buenavista there is evidence in the form of a beatnikista who boasts openly of his proletarian origins and proclivities. He, Julio, nevertheless is not without his patrician tastes. They assert themselves most emphatically when he longs for and gets the last flower of the defeated aristocracy — a beautiful girl who stands out in splendor from the social refuse in which and from which she has grown.

She, too, has her longings—for vitality, for the violation of the conventions which prevail over her life, for transplanting to a soil less odious. Her feelings and motives are inchoate. She can find nothing but ennui among her own. But, by accepting the irritant of a disreputable lover, she can derive pleasure by offending.

A living body of course tends to attempt purgation of that which is foreign to it, but the faded aristocracy of Buenavista is too feeble successfully to carry that off. The inevitable consequence must be violence and death and dislocation. Harss does not bow to inevitability, nor determine that this shall occur. But having set the conditions in his little world, he pursues them to their unavoidable, eminently credible denouement.

Certainly, if his first novel is anything typical of him, Harss is going to be an important man in the letters of the New World. As a prose stylist alone, he handles the English language as though he invented it specifically for his own use. When he plunges deep into the opaque mirror of the human mind in conflict with the soul, he can speak with a terrifying eloquence. His Tyresias, who for purposes of concise statement packs the vices and virtues of his world into one debauched person, will possibly not be so memorable as a Scrooge or the man without a country, but he will certainly go down in literary history as a telegrapher of note. Within the confines of the first page he has fixed mood and tone for Harss to play a fugue incredibly complex and diabolical.

"Youth was the melancholy, the vanishing age, Joaquin used to say. If you were lucky, you kept its memories intact; if not, you still carried its remains in you, it cast its shadow down the rest of your life; and that was why you couldn't go back: because it was all with you, there was nothing left to go back to. Men don't change, they relapse, he said; we all wish we had the courage to repeat our follies, but that's out of the question, youth is an elusive thing, like love's first expectation. It comes only once. There isn't enough of it for more than that; it's the price we pay for growing up, and we all know that once we've lost our youth we have nothing else to lose . . . The pity was not to die, but to age."

Harss certainly need not age to become a better novelist.

—WHS.

Blaine Writes Book On Transportation

A transportation expert at the University has just published a book which helps to untangle the complex web of laws regulating privately-run transportation industries.

In "Selected Cases and Case Studies in Transportation Regulation And Management," Prof. J. C. D. Blaine gives 1000 examples of legal cases and industrial management problems with discussions which clarify their significance for the transportation industry.

A professor of transportation in the School of Business here, Dr. Blaine has recently returned from India, where he spent six months as a consultant on transportation problems in that country.

The first section of his new book contains legal cases which illustrate the constitutional bases of state and federal regulations of private transportation companies. Dr. Blaine said the purpose of this section is to "focus attention on the role played by the courts and administrative agencies in shaping the regulations under which transportation is conducted by private enterprises in the public interest."

Included are cases which define the limits of the authority of the Interstate Commerce Commission, cases on tariff regulation, cases in which customers petitioned for reimbursement of what they considered too-high rates, and cases on the prevention of transportation monopolies in which mergers attempted by companies were restricted by the courts.

Another section of Dr. Blaine's book shows how specific industries have dealt with their particular transportation problems. The case histories he cites show examples of how one large tobacco company efficiently organized its large traffic department, examples of the accurate estimation of freight charges to customers, and how various transport companies have dealt with customer complaints.

DAVID DARYL COLLINS

Mr. and Mrs. Jim D. Collins of Pittsboro announce the birth of a son, David Daryl, on July 20 at Watts Hospital. Mrs. Collins is the former Miss Joyce Ray, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dwight M. Ray of Chapel Hill.

Wills

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3. The Glass-Blowers, Du Maurier

Non-fiction

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2. The Whole Truth and Nothing But . . . Hopper
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A Writer On Writing

Up From The Sea In Books

By W. H. SCARBOROUGH

When Ralph Dennis came to the University in 1955, he had a purpose of sorts. Like most veterans coming here on the Korean GI Bill, he was a little short of cash, long on determination and impatient at what appeared to be the leisurely pace of faculty and students.

Tuesday night, several months more than eight years later, he sat down in one of WUNC-TV's studios to talk about his writing with WUNC-TV's literary interviewer, James Gardner. He had changed, of course, in some fundamental ways. The sailor of 1955 was still apparent, but Ralph Dennis had waded into another sort of sea. The intensity and the impatience were muted, and there were a couple of new dimensions not readily discernible before. He will be leaving Chapel Hill soon for Yale University, where he will study playwriting with John Gassner and work toward his doctorate.

"It should be fun, but I hate to leave Chapel Hill," he said. In 1955 you could find people who didn't think he'd ever say something like that. Because Ralph Dennis wasn't simply a sailor when he came here. He had during and after high school been writing poems, and even at the hazard of discovery continued during his four years at sea. It didn't figure — a man with bristling moustache and prizefighter instincts writing poems. And what followed here after he arrived didn't figure either. From the moment he walked into his first class, professors and other students knew there wasn't much he wasn't going to challenge. Try and get by with a pet generalization you were accustomed to having generations of students swallow without a murmur. Dennis had a way of turning it inside out, or more terrifying, making you justify it.

But if he was impatient with his professors, he bore down on himself pretty hard too. Where he could learn something he thought useful he did, but that which engrossed him could not be predicted; it was something no one else had thought to look at. By his junior year he was battling it out with English instructors on equal terms when it came to depth of knowledge and understanding of literature. By the time he took his degree in English with honors in writing, he had a small but devoted following of younger students all his own.

And he wrote. The poems gave way in 1956 to novels — one completed, two in progress. In 1962 the novels gave ground a little bit to experimental plays when he began studies for a master's degree in the Department of Radio, TV and Motion Pictures. But he is now well into a third novel which shows great potential, and hard at work on a dramatic adaptation. Sometime in August his "A Non-Play" will be produced for its second time by the Winston-Salem Little Theatre — uncommon for experimental plays by young men who haven't looked at Broadway with longing.

Although dramatic writing has occupied his attention for the better part of two years, Dennis has also experimented with fiction, in often-unexpected directions. About two years ago Reflections Magazine carried a short story entitled "Excerpts from the Journal of a Sad, Fat Wordman." It was an outrageously funny tale, with an odd, underlying ground note of melancholy. But it was also an unusual updating of the epistolary-diary novel form, out of favor practically since Samuel Richardson's "Clarissa." The first was followed by "The Return of the Sad Fat Organization Man," and a third, "Son of the Sad Fat Married Word Man" is on the drafting boards.

"I don't know how legitimate publishers will look at it, but it ought to be fun to set American letters back about 200 years to see what happens," he says. The form has advantages that have been neglected in recent years.

"Part of the impact of the letter novel is that people believe you. I want the reader to believe in my characters, that they're real."

At this point he turns a critical eye on contemporary fiction for ignoring too much the credibility of its tales.

"If you read a good bit of the literature being written now, you find people have inserted a good bit of violence. It makes the story move, but it's overworked. The world as I see it contains a certain amount of violence, but not that much." The Negro novelist's use of violence seems particularly out of balance to him. "The Tuskegee Institute tables would not support the number of lynchings in Negro fiction."

Although Dennis wrote his "Sad Fat Wordman" off the top of his head at first, he has become rather attached to him. "I would like to believe in the Sad Fat Wordman, but not too deeply. Some of the local artists had believed in him—he was sort of 'the man living in the garret.' They identified with him. Then when I did the second story, when he began to sell out, they didn't like him anymore. I'm going to try to win them back with the third story."

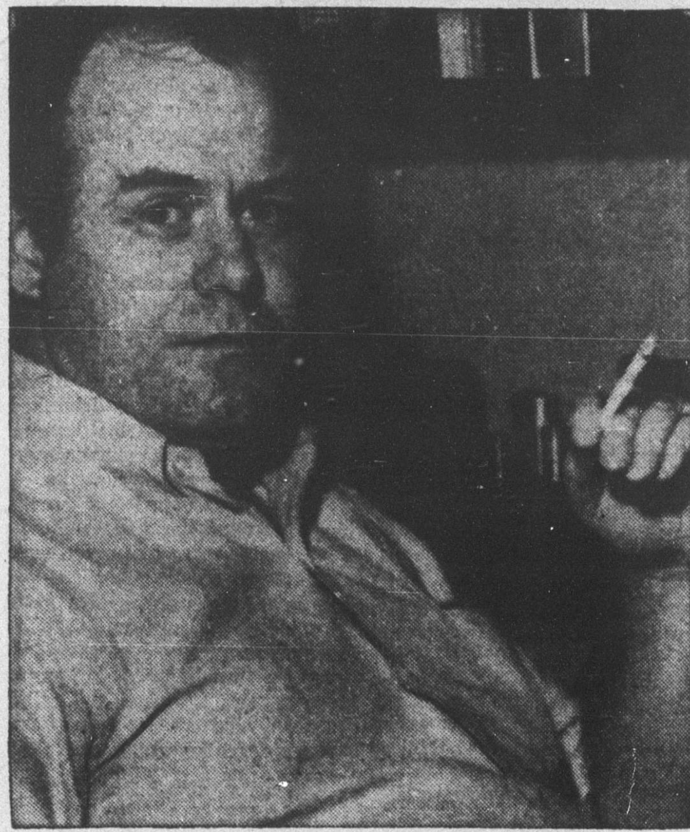
The Wordman, for those not already acquainted with him through the stories, Dennis describes as an unhappy soul who somehow remains fat although skirting the brink of starvation; he lives off what he can find left outside the freight doors of the local A&P by the night delivery men. On good nights he dines well; other times the shipment may be an inordinate amount of sheep manure intended for local lawns. His production of literature consists of improbable titles on a widely and wildly improbable series of themes. His social life is in the form of a girl, a "brain picker," who before she attends a party, comes to take notes on what he tells her about good literature. Thereby she gains the awe of her friends for her perception and good taste. Ultimately she marries the Governor. Before the Wordman, Dennis says, she (and clearly she stands for a lot of people) "preferred to read about stage struck girls from Hollywood who go to New York to make good, get hooked up with white slavers, travel from one end of the country to the other, wind up marrying the head of the Mafia and settling down in Bucks County in a $100,000 ranch house."

There is a faint autobiographical note here, to the extent that Dennis has pulled a couple of hitches in Chapel Hill garrets and basements while working and writing. "There are basements and garrets in Chapel Hill, but my wife won't let me live in them anymore."

For materials, you never know where Ralph Dennis will turn next. Anything—"journals and letters, any stuff a book could be made out of. A writer is the sum and total of everything he's read. When you get a writer like Dreiser, who acts like he never read anything, he's pretty hard to read." Dennis is perhaps one of the best-read authors on the eastern seaboard. And he is not limited in his response to varied stimuli. In his current novel-in-progress, he says, he found a use for a notion he picked up reading "Love in the Western World."

"The society we live in has pushed women toward thinking of themselves as love objects. But no one has told them anything about what happens after you're forty." This and another theme fixed itself on the outline of a story Dennis had heard, and the novel began taking shape. "But by the time the book is finished, I will have kicked enough sand over it until you can't see 'Love in the Western World' or any other statement either."

It has been a lively eight years for Ralph Dennis, and by no means a calm time for writing in Chapel Hill. Word of him will no doubt be drifting back.



Ralph Dennis Of Chapel Hill

Problem: How To Protect Atomic Power From People

THE PEACEFUL ATOM IN FOREIGN POLICY. By Arnold Kramish. Harper & Row. 276 Pages. $5.50.

By PATRICIA HUNTER

Ten years after its inception: where does the Atoms for Peace plan now find itself? At the bottom of the stockpile. Or so seems to be the answer implied by this book which examines the position of the peaceful atom in foreign policy.

Altogether though, Mr. Kramish has tried to raise questions in his study, not answer them. But while concentrating upon the technological and political problems presented by the atom for peace, he does, in turn, present new proposals and alternatives to current policy couched as suggestions.

Hopes were high, according to Mr. Kramish, when President Eisenhower first presented the Atoms for Peace plan to the U. N. in 1953. Some reasons for the decline of those hopes and the failure to achieve international cooperation in atoms control and development are explored and delineated by the author. Technical, economic, and political obstacles abound in the path to utilizing atomic energy for peaceful purposes. One of the most frequently occurring barricades is that of economic interest. Currently the peaceful atom is far less economical, far less valued, far less profitable then the military atom. Consequently, it wields much less influence upon policy making — nationally or internationally. Those who have the skills and money to invest are rarely interested in an unprofitable venture. So until the peaceful atom is given more value and made economically equal or superior to its military counterpart, the aid it receives and its subsequent power to affect foreign policy will remain close to nil.

Knowing how to utilize the atomic materials themselves comes as a technological problem. Such elements as plutonium have scientists searching for ways to most effectively apply their potential. Mr. Kramish defines plutonium as a troublesome "Janus faced" element whose potential for war is as great as its promise for peacetime uses. Here again, the problem is complicated by the easy conversion of peaceful production into that of military. Controls must be set up, the author feels, to guarantee against such facile conversion.

Besides analyzing some of the institutions such as the International Atomic Energy, Euratom, and the European Nuclear Energy Agency (ENEA) and delineating some of their achievements as well as their shortcomings, Mr. Kramish suggests means by which their effectiveness might be improved. One of their first responsibilities would be that of enacting what Mr. Kramish calls "a proposal for phased nuclear arms limitation." The proposal centers around the idea that "restriction be initiated by applying existing legal mechanisms to international traffic in nuclear materials." In sequence the phases which he proposes are: I. Registration of Trade (with the Atomic Energy Agency), II. Registration of Use of fissionable material, III. Restriction of Use, IV. Inspection.

But such duties as control and restriction are not to be the main activities of the various agencies concerned with the peaceful development of atomic energy. Their main contribution would come from further promoting research into and application of the many benign uses of nuclear science. The benefits which atomic energy can give to the generation of power, to propulsion, to medicine, to pest control, and to food preservation are among the many listed.

One of the greatest obstacles to the accomplishment of utilizing the peaceful atom is that of the human element. Mr. Kramish saves his most heated words for the "professional committeemen" and the high level conferences which he feels are too often populated with "experts at paraphrasing aphorisms" who actually have little technical knowledge. Operating in a clouded chamber of misinformation, lack of information, and befuddled policies, they only tend to stray further from and muddle the issue. E equals mc-2 comes to mean evasion equals mass confusion squared at such conferences. To combat this trend, Mr. Kramish (who by the way sees test bans as ineffective steps toward international control) would eliminate such conferences which contain scientists who little understand statecraft and politicians who do not comprehend atomic-craft, and would instead create a new personnel to deal with the problems. The basic unit for this personnel would be the man whom Mr. Kramish calls the "political atomic servant." This man would have technological knowledge as well as political savoir faire, and by combining the two would effect compromises between the two camps. For such a man to be produced a special educational program must be created, a program which the author outlines in some detail.

Mr. Kramish covers his topic simply, avoiding complex jargon, and attempts a cursory joust at the myth that atomic knowledge is beyond the ken of most humans. In this he succeeds in showing that part of the problem is not of harnessing the atom for peace, but of unharnessing it from the ignorance and obstacles surrounding it.

Duke Press Does Literature Guide

The Duke University Press has published a second, revised and enlarged edition of "Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Literature of the U. S. A."—the first volume of its kind to be printed in America.

Compiled and edited by Dr. Clarence Gohdes, James B. Duke Professor of English at Duke, the book is designed to help the professional student of U. S. literature in acquiring information and in the technique of research.

"It is believed that it will prove useful to college teachers of American literature, to reference librarians, and, more especially, to graduate students writing master's or doctor's theses," Dr. Gohdes explains in his preface.

The book, impressive in scope of treatment, lists the chief tools for the study of U. S. literature under subject headings. It also directs the reader to a selected group of books which deal with the methods and techniques of research in the fields of history and literature.

The volume also includes the chief books or bibliographies in American history, biography, art, religion and other Americana with which the professional student of literature is often concerned.

Moreover, the American studies approach is balanced by sections on comparative literature and on the relations of American belles-lettres with foreign countries and their literature. And skillfully prepared indexes assist the reader in finding data on specific topics or problems.

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In The Margin

By W. H. SCARBOROUGH

Mayhem, Gentility And Critics

There remains little doubt, despite lack of archaeological evidence, that no sooner had homo Neanderthaliensis scrawled his first crude pictograph on his cavern wall than a neighbor pronounced it a confounded poor account of a buffalo hunt. The ensuing fracas set its stamp for all time on the relationship between author and reviewer-critic.

At the same time an incredible inter-dependence between the two has grown up, spurred along no doubt by technical advances that permitted both authorship and criticism more mobility than that afforded by cavern walls. Today the critic seems to be getting the worse of it — although becoming warier and trickier and proliferating — and the author after a long time spent in preoccupation with how he was pleasing the critics is beginning to ignore him.

This is a healthy sign. For a time it looked as though the fifties and sixties were going to be an age of commentary similar to that the Roman Empire in its latter days underwent. All the good authors were critics, few of the critics good authors.

The present trend had strange origins which go back over a century to Edgar Allen Poe and his "Rationale of Verse," or to the French critics and their "explications de texte," to Baudelaire and his critical forays. At the same time this old impetus gave rise to Symbolism in literature it was also producing the "New Criticism." The New Criticism achieved an apotheosis of sorts in T. S. Eliot. Mr. Eliot's poems require almost as many footnotes as his criticism. New Criticism has gone on to make profound changes in the teaching of English literature and in the structure of English departments on Universities all across the country, while writers-in-residence were for a time practically unheard of unless they could teach courses on the History of Criticism. An index of the change is the University, which will have its first formal writer-in-residence next year (although New Criticism is still only talked about in Bingham Hall). But in the flowering of the Lost Generation there were also the seeds to the age of criticism that obtained in the fifties, largely because a number of articulate artists — Hemingway, Eliot, Robert Penn Warren — were also perceptive readers. When they played out as writers, their functions were divided between imitative writers and derivative critics.

Lately Norman Mailer has jumped the novelistic traces and started lambasting his contemporaries, perpetuating in a minor mode the tradition of Hemingway's "Green Hills of Africa." James T. Farrell while producing the Studs Lonigan trilogy managed to become one of the most acknowledgeable students of American literature we've had.

But the old impact is going. The work of the critic more often affects the sales rather than the content of contemporary writing. And the lowly reviewer — as separate and distinct from the critic (exception: the New York Times Book Review) — is coming into his own. It is nonetheless a frustrating vocation for him. Should he react violently and spew forth vitriol all over the flyleaf of the brutal, compassionate latest he may sell more books for an author than if he praised it moderately. He is consistently ridden by the nightmare of failing to perceive a book for its true worth and have it either become a best-seller or achieve the ultimate praise of his loftier legitimate brethren, the critics.

Reviewers have had their moments, though, especially dramatic and music reviewers. Few book reviewers ever enjoy the prestige of Washington Post music critic Paul Hume. Mr. Hume, you will recall, got an angry letter from the father of a local soprano and became famous for having provoked the President of the United States more than the Russians. Nor, often, do they achieve the stature of one Herr Hanslick, who reviewed music in the Vienna of the Emperor Franz Josef. The composer, Anton Bruckner, was being honored by the Emperor for his addition to the brilliance of Austrian music. As a special dispensation, Franz Josef offered to grant any wish Bruckner had. Bruckner, an otherwise impractical man, could think of only one thing: "If it please your Majesty, would you make Herr Hanslick stop writing nasty things about my music?"

Reviewing has fallen into disuse as well as disfavor. If art it be, it is often a lost one. The rising tide of books to be read and talked about finds few professional reviewers in business any longer. With exceptions here and there the task is delegated to avocationists — housewives, professors, bored newspapermen. The authors who undergo this deserve something a bit more thorough, at the same time they need no more Critics.

William Faulkner, who could have done without Critics, perhaps stated indirectly the reviewer's proper credo, when he would answer an interpretation of his work with "It's all right to think that — if it gives you pleasure."

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