

does Marianne discover (having meantime discovered what Lucy and Arnold's staid exteriors have hidden for half a lifetime) the nature of Lucy's friendship, the depths of smiling, prevaricating malice—or is it all well-meant, to save Marianne from social disaster? So many questions remain unanswered, so many things that need saying (as in life) remain unsaid. Miss Farrell writes superbly good dialogue, with the back and forwardness, the repetitions and amendments of life: even the polyglot Johnny's absurdly off-key English, with everything he says meaning something slightly different, is perfectly right and at the right moments perfectly moving. Deftness, tact, and intelligence are not, perhaps, the most resounding qualities to praise with, but where the intelligence is as high, the deftness as sensitive, the tact as humorous, they give a short novel like this one the gleam of something in its small way entirely satisfying and satisfactory.

*The Fable and the Flesh* is a first novel, interesting for what it stands for rather than for what it achieves, and noticeable mainly for the extreme and at first persuasive assurance of its author, Michael Lewis. It seems to stand for a good many attitudes (of style and outlook and behaviour and manners and so on) current today; in fact to be a representative novel, even something of a portent.

The most portentous thing about it (in both senses) is its hero, who, though young and almost permanently angry, is not in the usual sense of the initials an AYM, for he has a private income and obviously never lived (the classic qualification) in a house with an outside lavatory. Rather he is a splenetic young man, liable to ill-natured and worse-mannered explosions the moment the fancy takes him; and at twenty-eight, having lived what is known as a "full" life with the sort of joyless doggedness displayed by everyone else in the book in pursuit of the same sort of fullness, he has the weary sophistication and some of the mannerisms of an elderly roué, or, if you prefer it, a dirty old man. He belongs to one of those bush-telegraph gangs that always seem more literary than actual, composed of people who keep meeting by chance in street or pub, no matter what part of London they happen to be in, who take an enormous interest in one another's affairs and cats-cradle all their separate existences; and falls in love with a lesbian (she had to be, of course) called Charlotte, who, though his own age, has "lived" at much the same pace: indeed, the whole book suggests that no one ever lives at any other. What I find most portentous (again in both senses) about these absurd and unimaginable young people is that, however few years they have had to fit it in, they have managed to do

just about everything: have been everywhere, seen everything, eaten and drunk everything, know the answers to the subtlest hints and innuendoes; in fact, they are intellectual James Bonds, but without any tongue-in-cheek about it. When the hero finally sang his Charlotte a love-song in Provençal ("The accent, I'm afraid, is rather awful"), and, what's more, she understood it, I burst into fits of laughter. The writing is sometimes shrewd and wiry, sometimes unintelligibly turgid; one paragraph I have read conscientiously twenty times without being able to understand a word it means (page 14, the one that starts: "After all, it's not as if she were your mistress..."). Its exuberance is often hypnotic: I only hope the hero sets no fashions, for there are enough low-lifemanship snobs about already, heaven knows.

Isabel Quigly

## Chintz, Chits, Cheetahs

**Origins.** By ERIC PARTRIDGE. *Routledge & Kegan Paul.* £4 10s.

**O**RIGINS is no more than a fancy name for (as its own sub-title has it) "A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English." Such a dictionary, as Mr. Partridge points out, "supplies neither pronunciations nor definitions." It is concerned only with histories and relationships, a sort of Burke or Debrett of language, except that *all* family-trees, whether noble or workaday, are traced with the same impartial care. Such a work has long been needed. Neither Weekley's nor Holthausen's compilations ever went really far to replace the 19th-century dictionaries of Skeat, which have remained invaluable. Since Skeat's day, however, the science of etymology has inevitably progressed, new facts have been discovered, old theories exploded: the necessary revisions and corrections have awaited an incorporator.

What will the reader find in *Origins*? The most striking thing will be that the words are listed, not alphabetically, but under such head-words as correspond most closely to their roots. Thus if he looks up *tweed*, he will find it of course properly ensconced between *tweak* and *tweedledum* but this entry will merely refer him to the head-word *TWO*. There he will find that it belongs to a family which includes *twain*, *twin*, *twice*, *twelve*, *twenty*, *twill*, *twilight*, *twine*, *twist*, *betwixt*, and *between*: a cross-reference will direct him to the cognate head-word *DUO*, with such allies as *dual*, *duel*, *duet*, *deuce*, *double*, *dozen*, *doubt*, and *duodenum*. (It may amuse the reader to trace the idea of "twoness" in all these words: thus *doubt* comes from

Latin *dubitare*, intensive of *dubare*, "to be in two minds").

Many of these collocations are perfect material for the odd-fact hunter. Who, for instance, would have guessed that *cheetah*, *chintz*, and *chit* (document, note) all spring from a single Hindu root that means "dark spots on a light background"? I have always been told, and am glad to see confirmed, that *effendi* is a variant of *authentic*, the link being the Greek *authentēs* (pronounced in Modern Greek *astēdis*), "a private gentleman." All philologists will know what slander is etymologically enshrined against the Bulgars; it is amusing to find that the Maccabees are similarly accused of being *macabre*.

IT MAY be possible to decide on a single reading whether or not a novel is a good novel. Not so in the case of the dictionary, which is much more a wife than mistress and must be long lived with before such decisions can be taken. I have in fact long lived with *Skeat's Concise* and know it for the excellent handbook that it is; it may therefore be used as a yardstick by which to assess *Partridge*. Take a single keyword, the Latin *caput*. It has almost every possible merit as an etymological example (as I know well from experience as a lecturer): Grimm's Law, as applied to every single consonant of it, gives the Germanic form *hafud*, Anglo-Saxon *heafod*, Modern English *head*; *caput* in Latin proliferates its forms, *head* in English proliferates its meanings, a neat demonstration of the different genii of Germanic and Romance. *Partridge's* list includes, from Latin direct: *capital* [head town, head of column—and for the monetary sense compare head of water]; *decapitate* [behead]; *precipitous* [headlong]; *capitation* [head or poll tax]; *captain* [head soldier]; *biceps*, *sinciput*, *occiput*. From Latin through French: *chief*, *chieftain* [head of tribe]; *chef* [head cook]; *handkerchief* [couver-chef, head-covering]; *mischief* [no English parallel]; *achieve* [bring to a head], *achievement*, *hatchment*; *cap*, *cape*, *cope*, *caparison*, *chaperon*, *chaplet*, *chapel*, *chaplain*, *copingstone*; *chapter* [heading]; and *cattle* and *chattel* [for which compare the monetary sense of capital]. This list, which merely sketches rather than exhausts—and is decidedly less puzzling (I might add) than the connections of the average English Duke—should at least indicate something of the richness of invention and suggestion lying to hand in a dictionary of this type (and incidentally how it is that the English poet who writes *head* has so much more powerful, and for that matter dangerous, a weapon to his hand than the French poet who writes *chef* or *tête*).

What happens when we compare *Skeat's* His

list is certainly a little shorter (though not much) and omits, for example, *chaperon*, *chaplain*, *chef*. On the other hand, he gives *capuchin* and *capitol*, which *Partridge* does not. He gives *cabage* (which certainly has a head), deriving it differently but no less probably than *Partridge*, who does not—indeed a minor complaint against *Partridge* would be that he tends to adopt one of alternative derivations too firmly, giving not even so much as a mention to the other. *Skeat* gives *escape* and *corporal* [folk-etymology for the French *caporal*] which *Partridge* equally refers back to *caput* but fails to give cross-references for. *Skeat* distinguishes between *capital* of a column [from Latin *capitellum*] and *capital* in its other senses [from Latin *capitalis*], a distinction which may be true or false for all I know but is not to be found in *Partridge* in any case. The preliminary verdict must be that *Skeat*, though admirably supplemented by his modern rival, is not quite due for the back-shelf yet; and Mr. *Partridge's* remark that *Skeat* "treats words so briefly and ignores ramifications so wholeheartedly that it was easy to plan a work entirely different" is neither generous nor true.

*Origins*, evidently Mr. *Partridge's* master-work, is a "Short" dictionary only in the sense

in which that word is applied to "The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary": that is to say that it is a noble quarto, full, lucid, and admirably written, and equally admirably produced. In all senses of the phrases, it is a work which it is a pleasure both to read and to hold.

Hilary Corke

### Pages of *Négritude*

**Black Orpheus.** Published by the MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, IBADAN, NIGERIA. 5s.

ASTUTE old England, well aware that in a short year's time an erstwhile colony will become an African nation that possesses a population equal to her own, the largest Negro city in the world, great wealth of nature, and a flux of ancient cultures bubbling with resurgent youth—that is, Nigeria—has lost no opportunity of preparing the way for harmonious Commonwealth relations by vigorously propagating a knowledge of West African arts among us. It is to this generous and forward-looking spirit that we in England owe the splendid displays of African dancing and drumming we have witnessed in such profusion, the recitals of poetry and music, the exhibitions of painting and of sculpture, and, most of all, perhaps, the excellent books and periodicals that have explained West African culture to the Britons.

In fact, of course, astute old England has done nothing of the kind. Out of the Western countries of the huge continent, bursting with futurity and force, only a miserable trickle of artistic information has yet reached us. For this reason alone, we may specially welcome the revue *Black Orpheus*, which first appeared in September 1957, and has now printed three more numbers. It has 60-odd pages, including plates, and publishes articles, poems, stories, and reviews chiefly written by West African authors, but also by interested Europeans, and by Negro writers in the Caribbean and the United States. It is edited, characteristically, by two writers of German origin: Ulli Beier, who teaches at the University of Ibadan, and is also joint editor of the journal of Yoruba studies, *Odu*, and Janheinz Jahn, already well known by the anthologies of Negro poetry that he has published.

*Black Orpheus* is thus no parish magazine of authors in British West Africa, but an international revue of all those writers for whom the conception of *Négritude*, as propounded by Aimé Césaire, the poet of Martinique, is a reality: the conception of a Negro culture, centred on Africa, but by no means confined to it, which has a growing social-political impulse in the late 20th-century world. So while there

are contributions by Nigerian scholars, on, for instance, the art and poetry of the Yoruba people, there are also poems by French and Spanish-speaking Negroes, like Césaire himself, or the equally illustrious Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal.

French Africa, in fact, has hitherto produced far more writers than have the British territories, and has welcomed them more enthusiastically in Europe. This is partly because the French, wishing (for political reasons) to "assimilate" the Africans they rule, have sought to "Europeanise" their intellectuals more intensely—with the consequence that the Africans write impeccable French, while remaining more resolutely nationalist than ever. In British West Africa, on the other hand, artists and writers have been left, as they are in the United Kingdom, to sink or swim, or desperately tread water, as best they can. But *Black Orpheus* shows that, besides the splendid eccentric Amos Tutuola whom we already know (perhaps too well), writers undoubtedly abound, prepared to take us by surprise, as did, earlier on, the novelists from the Caribbean: as if West Africa, like the West Indies, were a region of which we had hitherto known absolutely nothing.

Colin MacInnes