

class—he has taken on their soap operas, and such stuff works on a level beyond argument. At least he makes no demands, his story is sprinkled with interior-decorating touches, and his publisher doesn't embarrass his readers with a lurid jacket. But it is a sobering thought that our melodrama has come to this. By comparison, old Joan Crawford movies are epics. Epics. □

Mysteries in Review

ON THE DOCKET

BY O. L. BAILEY

That singular Dutch policeman, Inspector Van der Valk, is now ten years old! In 1962 his creator, Nicholas Freeling, introduced him in the superb and beguiling adventure, *Love in Amsterdam*, and it wasn't long before the most diehard of Inspector Maigret fans were willing to let Van der Valk share at least some of the honors. From the beginning, Van der Valk, like Maigret, displayed a concern for the role that character plays in crime, and he pursued unorthodox solutions. *Criminal Conversation*, one of Freeling's best, had Van der Valk stalking a virtually uncatchable killer through an intriguing psychological game of nerves.

While the tenth in the Van der Valk series may not be Freeling's best, *Auprès de Ma Blonde* (Harper & Row, \$5.95) is destined to be the most memorable: It is Van der Valk's swan song.

There he is, kicked upstairs to a quiet desk job to work out his days until retirement. But he's still the maverick of the Amsterdam police force, and his mind is too restless for paper work alone. A seemingly minor incident sets him off on a personal investigation that becomes—yes, he is killed in the middle of it—his last case.

The end? No, just the beginning. Freeling steps in to tell us about the actual man after whom he modeled Van der Valk. We have not recovered from the shock of the inspector's demise, but at least our suspicions have been confirmed: Van der Valk, under another name, did in fact exist. And, Freeling tells us, so did his attractive, intelligent wife, Arlette, who is determined to investigate her husband's death and bring those responsible to justice—which she does.

Freeling fans will inevitably speculate as to whether Arlette will carry on the series. Whatever. Few detective novels pay as much attention to the milieu in which the detective plies his trade. Freeling has given us a picture

of a part of postwar Europe that puts his work in a class by itself. If this is your introduction to Van der Valk, *Auprès de Ma Blonde* will make you want to read the previous nine; and if you are an old friend, you will want to reread them.

Shaft, the black shamus with cool and charisma, is back. And author Ernest Tidyman, whose initial Shaft adventure was made into a swinging film, taxes all of his superhero's ingenuity in his not-to-be-missed *Shaft Among the Jews* (Dial, \$5.95). In this case, the screenplay—the movie has already been released—preceded the book. But no matter; there is really nothing sacred about order of composition. Or, if there is, *Shaft Among the Jews* is one of those proverbial exceptions.

Shaft thinks he is hallucinating when, while innocently wondering what time to have his fast-breaking drink and/or broad, he first encounters "the seven men." They look like a posse of cowboys, Jewish cowboys to be sure. Dressed to the nines in beards and basic black, they constitute a committee of diamond merchants who want him to get to the bottom of a scandal that is threatening to ruin the diamond industry. Their pleas are discounted, but their money is not. The result: Shaft takes the assignment.

Disguised as a janitor, he penetrates the inner world of crafty jewelers who cater to equally crafty millionaires. As the adventure spins forward, Shaft finds himself, one black diamond in the rough, surrounded by Israeli secret agents. As if that weren't enough, his perpetual nemesis, Lt. John Androzzi of the NYPD, reappears to resume his bugging. Tidyman's talent keeps it all within the bounds of good taste, and the denouement demonstrates conclusively that you can't tell a crook by his cover.

The Lingala Code, a first novel by

Warren Kiefer (Random House, \$5.95), is a sinewy, stinging spy story set in the steaming Belgian Congo of the Sixties. Its narrator is Michel Ryan—French scholar, ex-fighter pilot, and now the CIA's number-one snoop operating out of Leopoldville's American Embassy. It's an unenviable position in a perilous environment that grows even more so when the U.S. air attaché to the Congo (who also happens to be Michel's best friend) is murdered under very suspicious circumstances. The pursuit of his friend's killer leads Michel to the top of some very high ladders. The repercussions of his discoveries register all the way from the seedy edges of the shabby underbelly of Congo politics to Washington's

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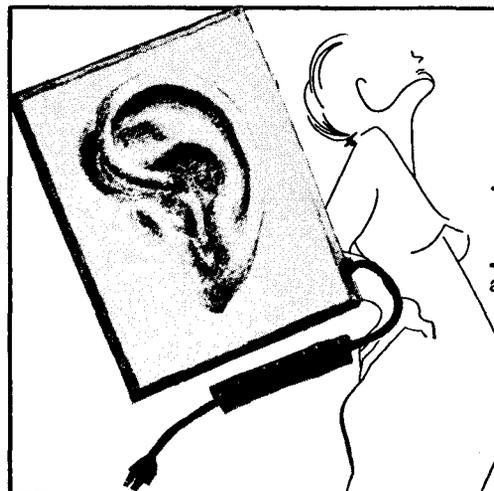
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STEIN AND DAY/PUBLISHERS

Foggy Bottom and its Kremlin counterpart. Kiefer is a comer whose most rare gift is the truly surprising ending twist.

Night World by Robert Bloch (Simon & Schuster, \$4.95) is an arresting little thriller. There is a psychopathic killer on the loose, a populace alarmed, a police force methodically pursuing its schizoid role of detection and protection, and the wife of a mental patient snared in a web of love, fear, and uncertainty. These are the elements that unsettlingly juxtapose the sane and the psychopathic.

The writing is taut, never deviating from the classic concept that the shortest distance between two points is a straight plot line. *Night World* is a fast read. Bloch, the author of *Psycho*, demonstrates a commanding display of sensitivity to the variety of language and life-styles and the social heterogeneity that typify the Los Angeles scene.

Stanley Ellin is one of the most prolific and prize-winning of our mystery writers. His latest, *Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall* (Random House, \$5.95), is an eerie excursion into psychopathic crime, a horrific account of victim and violator.

A strange body is discovered in an apartment. The finder is vaguely uneasy, suspecting that the body might be linked to his past. If so, how? Interrogators prod his mind and bridge the gap between present and past, inner self and outer world. The novelist's technique parallels that of the psycho-

analyst, constructing a coherent pattern from detached, seemingly unconnected flashbacks that build to a shocking and disturbing climax. Whatever solution you might conjure up, Ellin's mirror yields the scariest of them all.

The publisher has tied the last twenty pages of the book with a paper band. If you leave the band intact, you are promised your money back. It's a clever ploy, but there should be few takers. There is no backing off; pernicious pyrotechnics such as Ellin presents penetrate the very marrow of your being.

John Dickson Carr, master of the arcane, adds to his repertoire the "Victorian Detective Novel" with *The Hungry Goblin* (Harper & Row, \$6.95). Once again, Carr, justly famous for his locked-room mysteries, gives us one that is seemingly insoluble—except upon hindsight when, of course, the solution becomes almost obvious.

Set in London a century ago, Carr ornaments the tale with an erudite and entertaining excursion through the life-styles, conceits, and concerns of the time. The story involves a switch in roles of two beautiful women possessing identical physical, social, and intellectual characteristics. Wilkie Collins, whose *The Moonstone* was the first detective novel written in English, is introduced as an actual character in the book and a key volunteer in aiding the police to solve a thorny case of attempted murder. (Mystery buffs will appreciate the fact that Collins's novel, *The Woman in White*, was built on a

similar plot.) The atmosphere is rich the authenticity convincing, and Carr's stylistic and storytelling skills are quite up to snuff.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Bag (World \$6.95) has arrived again. This twenty seventh annual compilation of short stories culled from Queen's mystery magazine is a very mixed and uneven bag. Two short stories, however, are outstanding, and both are reminiscent of the wonderful Roald Dahl stories. The first, *A Specialist in Still Lives* by Carole Rosenthal, is a shivery study in fantasy and deception set in a placid and proper art gallery. The second, *The Beauty in That House* by Florence V Mayberry, is about a doomed *ménage à quatre* and is absolutely strange the author has an offbeat view of life that stamps her an original. Altogether not vintage Queen, but it has enough flavor to justify a sampling. □

ABOUT TELEVISION

by **Martin Mayer**

Harper & Row, 433 pp., \$10

Reviewed by *Richard D. Heffner*

"What is surprising about the triviality of the literature of television is the mismatch with the obvious importance of the subject," Martin Mayer observes on the very first page of his readable new volume, *About Television*. Unfortunately, this popular interpreter could repeat it as accurately on his last page, for, while he writes entertainingly and well, he has not done justice to the medium.

No one else has either, to be sure, and Mayer brings to television a better, more discerning mind, a sharper wit, and surely a more delightful style than have characterized other efforts. But he hasn't written a definitive study, not even a particularly significant one. And perhaps, to close the circle, one must turn to Mayer's own very last words: "The important criticism of television is that its leaders have not sought for tragedy or triumph in invention and artifice. They don't do the best they can." Neither does he.

Moreover, what finer moments *About Television* has—and it has many—are peculiarly disjointed, a flaw particularly evident to the former practitioner for whom the medium is much more of a piece, for whom there is in reality

Richard D. Heffner has been an executive with NBC, CBS, and public broadcasting in New York. He is now university professor of communications and public policy at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

Your Literary I.Q.

Conducted by *David M. Glixon*

TITLES HOMONYMOUS

Each of these literary works has the same title as another of the works described below (with perhaps the difference of an article). In Column 2 are the pairs of authors who used the same title. Stuart Lewis of Boulder, Colorado, wants you to match each work with its author and to write down the six titles (before peeking at the answers on page 67).

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. An epic poem based on early biblical events () | a. T. S. Eliot & |
| 2. A novel about Anglo-Asiatic relationships () | b. Henry James |
| 3. A poem in which a man alone in winter prays () | c. Ralph Ellison & |
| 4. A play about middle-class life in the 1930s () | d. H. G. Wells |
| 5. A novel about an American girl's romance and disillusionment in Europe () | e. Faulkner & |
| 6. A poem that celebrates the welding of cultures and their apotheosis in America () | f. Hawthorne |
| 7. A play about jealousy in a Sicilian family () | g. E. M. Forster & |
| 8. A novel about a science student who puts his discovery to criminal uses () | h. Walt Whitman |
| 9. A book of poems by a southern novelist () | i. Milton & |
| 10. A novel about a youth's progress from affirmation to a sense of total rejection () | j. Odets |
| 11. A novel describing Americans involved with art and murder in Italy () | k. Dylan Thomas & |
| 12. A poem in which a couple converse at tea () | l. Shakespeare |