

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, no 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

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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 |

WIT TWISTER NO. 286

Edited by ARTHUR SWAN

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.

Our ----- men suggest the ways of peace.

Our standing army ----- itself for war,

To give the nation's ----- swift release

When Wisdom's voice is credited no more.

A. S.

(Answer on page 66)

a discernible flow or connection between the seemingly disparate parts of the medium, a flow that seems largely to escape the author. Mayer pays his respects to Merrill Panitt, Robert Kotlowitz, John Fischer, and other distinguished print editors who were wise enough over the years to assign him articles on many of the subjects dealt with here. But it is television that is, or at least should be, the subject of this book—not television-and-news in one chapter-article, television-and-sports in another, television-and-children in a third, and so on. There is an episodic quality to the book that belies a real sense for the continuity of the medium itself. Articles are fine in their place, but at least in this place they have not been—could not be—molded into a book that has the unity of purpose and insight that an understanding of television demands.

Someday someone who has Mayer's skill and perception will "put it all together," making description and analysis of the medium move together as continuously and as meaningfully as its electronic impulses do. But the inadequacies of *About Television* suggest that the one who ultimately does write about television in the way both it and we deserve will come from inside, not from outside, the medium.

More sophisticated and rational by far than so many of American television's rabid critics, Mayer accepts the scientific basis for the sampling procedures necessary for the broadcasting industry to estimate what parts of the large universe of its audience are actually watching. He is appropriately critical of the numbers sleight of hand that too frequently marred early efforts to count viewers, and he takes us through some of the unsavory background of the ratings game. But he doesn't let the inadequacies or inequities of past—or present—audience-measurement techniques blind him to an appreciation of the fact that someone out there is watching. A great many someones, in fact. Those who speak grandly of huge segments of the national audience turning away from the medium are largely misinformed or are indulging in wishful thinking.

Indeed, a no-nonsense realism is probably Mayer's most delightful characteristic, and it surfaces more frequently than one might expect in an adversary age when the medium is the victim of so many irrational onslaughts from critics frustrated by its seeming omnipotence and their seeming powerlessness. Many distinguished broadcasting people helped the author in his research, but one who knows the

cast of characters must shudder when Mayer mentions some of the industry hacks who were "graciously" the source of (presumably) accurate information about the history of the medium. Nevertheless, one also senses that the author has been neither bought nor even sold by television's public relations minions in his friendly recognition that the broadcaster isn't simply talking to, or appreciated by, himself and his friends alone. Television continues to build its huge audiences everywhere, Mayer recognizes, because it continues to provide them with a quantity of pleasure "greater than the quantity ascribable to any other facet of their lives. Perhaps this should not be so, but it is; and anyone who approaches this phenomenon with the notion that most people don't like what television offers them will never begin to understand the subject."

Well-intentioned programs too frequently have comparatively small audiences; they are considered failures. Nonintentioned programs that appeal at best to our instincts for the light, the frivolous, the diverting frequently have massive, loyal audiences; they are considered successes. Nor is this true only of the United States, with its predominantly commercial system of broadcasting, where audiences are translated into ratings and ratings translated directly into dollars, and where almost every effort is made almost all the time to produce the lowest common denominator of television programming that will attract the largest possible audiences.

It is true elsewhere, too. With the aid of some of its friends (high-rated American imports), BBC maintains a generally "higher" level of "better" programs than do its commercial American cousins. But when its ratings begin to go down and its license-fee subsidy needs to go up, then BBC has been known to compete for audiences with its commercial rivals in the United Kingdom in a way that would gladden the competitive hearts of our own ABC, CBS, and NBC. Nor is it only when the dollar (in earnings or subsidies) is at stake that broadcasters almost everywhere set aside their "better" programs and appeal to larger audiences with trivia. Increasingly, broadcasters everywhere on a more and more egalitarian, majoritarian planet seem to sense an almost mystical kind of living connection between themselves and the millions and millions who make up their audience (the voice of the people is the voice of God!). Increasingly, their sense of their mission is to serve that audience by mirroring

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