

nerable as to his reputation, endlessly tormented by his nerves." Fearless under fire, his pretense of patience through long trials was a "fiercely executed fraud," disguising "disorder, ingratitude, a humiliating failure of control," and even, in battlefield emergencies, a "paralysis of will." A cynic who viewed himself as an outsider, he championed centralized government as a check on democracy. Therein, says Emery, lay his chief claim to greatness.

But those neuroses, if such they were, need not inevitably lead to an authoritarian personality. More convincing is the Washington of James Thomas Flexner's biography, the "indispensable man" whose immense prestige provided the protective umbrella under which the new nation could indulge in the democratic luxury of divisive political parties. And yet Emery's interpretation is a provocative one, smoothly written, conversant with recent scholarship, and enlivened with vignettes of "pale and pudgy" Horatio Gates, "brave and bibulous" Lord Stirling, "small and slender" Alexander Hamilton, and "pale and pop-eyed" James Monroe. It may be that Washington will remain an enigma, the unlikeliest revolutionary of them all. —MAX M. MINTZ

### The Widow's Children

by Paula Fox

Dutton, 221 pp., \$8.95

PAULA FOX's newest novel demonstrates once again her original unsettling talent. Enigmatic and inconclusive, *The Widow's Children* is nonetheless astounding in its portrayal of the textures of emotional life, moment by agonizing moment. The tangible happenings are simple. The widow, a Spanish émigré to the United States via Cuba, has died in a nursing home. Her children and grandchild, all marred in widely dissimilar ways by a wretched childhood, gather together for an evening of costly drinking and eating, reminiscence, and cruel interfamilial strife, all followed by the next day's unceremonious burial. Within that narrow framework, in an understated, ascetic style, Fox releases conflicts and passions of great intensity, and sets them simmering, combining, and exploding like volatile liquid elements.

More than a throwback to the primitive state of nature, the Maldonado family is a portent of imminent social breakdown, a theme Fox explored unsparingly in *Des-*

*perate Characters*. The widow's contemptuous daughter, Laura, is a fierce magnetic force, exhilarating but spiritually lethal to her brothers, husband, and lonely child. In contrast, Peter, an outsider, is an arid New England-born editor ruled by restraint and emotional conservatism; he urges the Maldonadas toward "normal" family cohesion in the face of death. The struggle centers on these two paradigms of social extremes, poles of exuberant anarchy and desperate self-control. The end is bleak and has no winners. Neither way is adequate to life's overwhelming demands. —LYNNE SHARON SCHWARTZ

### The Eye of the Beholder

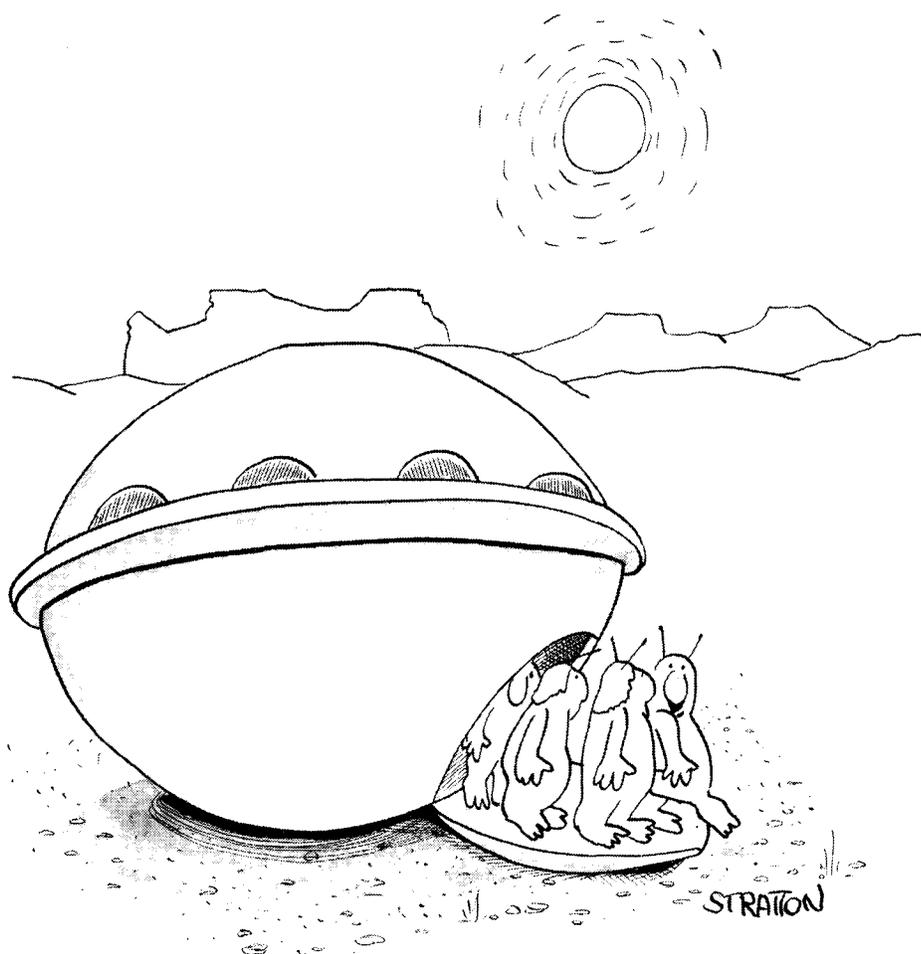
by Philip Glazebrook

Atheneum, 249 pp., \$7.95

THIS novel is the work of a writer with a multifaceted and brilliant talent. With a gorgeous rush of imagery, Philip Glazebrook creates a gallery of portraits and landscapes rendered in fine

detail. He fuses a love story with a psychological thriller as he explores the borders of sanity. Sanity, the author seems to say, is a consistent set of truths. And truth is only in the eye of the beholder. When the beholder is faced with freakishly contradictory truths and begins to doubt the reality of his perceptions, the gates to madness open.

Ned, the narrator of this novel, is passionately obsessed by his cousin George, pedantic and dour, and by George's wife, Amy, who is indifferent to facts and possessed of a feckless, brimming sensuality. George, a vegetarian, becomes a hunter. He stalks the cliffs and crevices of his Scottish estate to bring down Amy's mutilated and barely living body. Is it rescue or, as Amy charges, attempted murder? Whom is Ned to believe? George is a consummate actor, Amy a pathological liar. Is Ned himself in danger of being murdered—or of going mad? Step by step, Glazebrook seduces his readers away from the palatable surfaces to the Gothic horrors underneath. The result is a novel of artistry and chilling fascination. —SUSAN HOROWITZ



"I'll bet our luggage is on its way to Mars."

# Trade Winds

by William Cole

## Poet of Providence

Years ago, I used to read with appreciation the reviews of poetry volumes on the fine book-page of the *Providence Journal*. They were written by Charles Philbrick, and I hadn't realized until now that he himself was a talented poet. I've just read his posthumous collection (he died in 1970), *Nobody Laughs, Nobody Cries* (The Smith/Horizon, \$6.50), and it is more than satisfactory. He's a traditional poet, and his poems run in length from a few lines to a few pages. I was particularly moved by a tribute to another poet, my old friend Winfield Townley Scott, but it's too long to print here. So here is a shorter—and typical—poem, "Reprise":

After they had re-invented clocks  
And learned to squeeze the dark  
berries,

A queer boy in a backwoods town  
(Knives having long been in use)  
Whittled a goose-quill one dull day  
Which was found by a scraper of  
sheepskins.

Then it was only a matter of fifty years  
Before a genius (several towns and a  
city  
Claim him under varying names) put  
the three  
Together, and only a century or so  
(these things  
Tend to be inexact in aural memory)  
before  
Philosophers wrote treatises on Time.

## Montreal French

Can you think of many single-name authors? A few come to my mind: Saki, Bryher, Colette, and, more recently, Trevanian, that Armenian-sounding anon who wrote *The Eiger Sanction*, which I haven't read. I picked up his *The Main* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, October 26, \$8.95), not expecting much, and was immediately wrapped up in Montreal's low-life. The book is an intelligent, comfortably paced *policier* about aging Lieutenant Claude La Pointe, whose territory is the multinationality slum called The Main, and how he tracks down the person who stabbed a young Italian to death in an alley. Sounds like a thriller, but actually Trevanian has written a well-considered

novel full of information about Montreal—"the most impolite city in the world" (I disagree)—about police procedures, and about Anglo-French Canadian relations. The French dialect of the country people, *joual*, is scattered throughout, along with some English words that are new to me: epulotic and squack. I can't imagine anyone not enjoying *The Main* and, at the same time, picking up interesting, although possibly useless, information. Such as:

The French Canadian's vocabulary of shrugs is infinite in nuance and paraverbal articulation. He can shrug by lifting his shoulders, or by depressing them. He shrugs by glancing aside, or by squinting. By turning over his hands, or simply lifting his thumbs. By sliding his lower lip forward, or by tucking down the corners of his mouth. By closing his eyes, or by spreading his face. By splaying his fingers; by pushing his tongue against his teeth; by tightening his neck muscles; by raising one eyebrow, or both. . . . Each shrug means a different thing; each combination means more than two different things at the same time.

## Not Funny

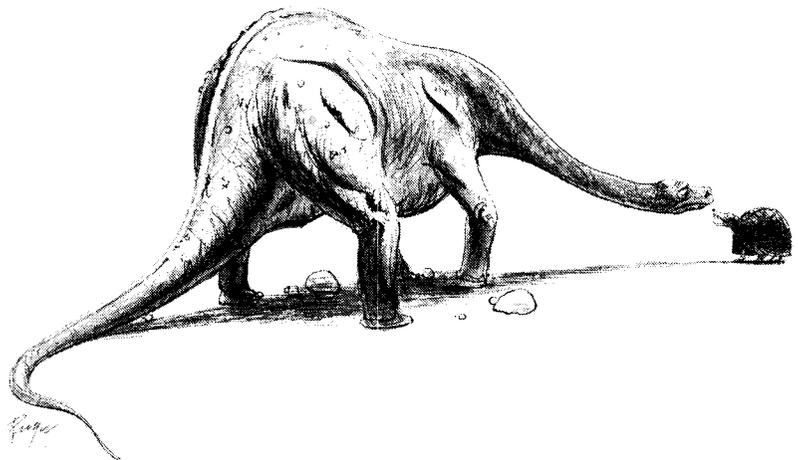
Why do unfunny people try to write funny books? Embarrassing. Makes you thank God for Peter De Vries, Richard Bissell, and John Gould. Now here's an idea that somebody thought was a bright one; an editor actually bought it: *The Phrase-Dropper's Handbook*, by John T. Beaudouin and Everett Mattlin, with drawings

by that good cartoonist William Hamilton (Doubleday, October 15, \$5.95). Here's how, supposedly, to fake your way by place-dropping and by using foreign phrases and "in" words. Ho hum. Tired old stuff, such as how funny it is to say "vincible," "maculate," and "scrutable."

## Cohen, Artist

Ignoramuses who equate Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, and Rod McKuen really bug me. Dylan and Cohen are rarities; they're artists. McKuen—dribble! piffle! This minor fit is brought on by just having read a collection of critical writings titled *Leonard Cohen*, edited by Michael Gnarowski (McGraw-Hill, just out, \$8.95, cloth; \$6.95, paperback). Various critics and journalists, mostly Canadian, muse about and expatiate on Cohen's two novels, *The Favorite Game* and *Beautiful Losers*, his five books of poetry, and the songs on his four albums. There is a long, interesting interview with Cohen ("I'd like to lead a noble life. Really, I would. But I did once and I bored myself to death"), a marvelous piece by Frank Davey on the lyrics of Dylan and Cohen, and some views of Cohen as the pop star. He's self-involved, bitter, and despairing, yet lyrical, wildly imaginative, and frequently riotously funny. I rate him as one of the three finest Canadian poets, along with Irving Layton, his good friend, and Alden Nowlan. I mean, could Rod McKuen have written this perfect poem, "For Anne"?

With Annie gone  
whose eyes to compare  
with the morning sun?  
Not that I did compare,  
But I do compare  
Now that she's gone. ©



"The way I look at it, I live one century  
at a time. Why worry about the future?"