



# BOOKS and REVIEWS

Two of The Eccentric's reviewers read the same book not long ago. In comparing notes, they found their reactions to be diametrically opposed. In fairness to the book, which has been widely discussed, we decided to publish both reviews. Why don't you read it, see what you think, and join the discussion.

## A Death In the Family

By James Agee, 329 pp. New York, McDowell, Oldensky, \$3.95.

Reviewed by ROBIN BAHR

James Agee's last novel, published posthumously, poignantly describes the effect of death upon the living. It is a simple book in terms of plot, dealing as it does with a not uncommon event in the lives of rather ordinary people.

The first part describes a day in the life of Jay Fuller. It pictures the quiet happy world in which he and his family lived and the close relationship within that family between husband and wife, between parents and children.

On the following day Jay is killed in an automobile accident. The major portion of the book gently and eloquently explains the effect of his death upon his wife, Mary, his children, Rufus and Catherine, and upon Mary's close relatives.

IN SPIKE OF the tragic nature of the event, it is not a depressing book. The emphasis is placed, not on the negative effects of death, but on the courage, strength, and those who must cope with the loss. We do see the awfulness and finality of death, but in a light that, by contrast, reveals the extent of Mary's courage. We do see the "aliveness" of grief and inability of even loved ones to help or understand each other.

But what is significant is not their inability to help or understand, but their persistent attempts to do so. Even in the case of Mama, one can't feel contempt although her deafness makes it necessary for the painful story of the accident to be repeated again and again. You feel, as does the family, a kind of pride that, in spite of her helplessness, she is trying and wanting to share Mary's pain.

THE AUTHOR treats the emotional scenes with objectivity and

restraint. By describing each situation with infinite detail, the impact and shock are dissipated. It is as you reach a critical point, the phone rings or the tea boils over. The result is that the reader never becomes lost in a maze of feeling. This is done purposely, I believe.

For it has the same effect on the characters. It is the constant intrusion of daily human needs—answer the phone, eat, sleep, bath, work—that attracts attention and diverts the emotional tension.

That the book deals with the ordinary in a quiet, unadorned fashion does not mean that the book is ordinary. Definitely not! Perhaps it is because of the quiet simplicity, the bondiness of the people, the commonness of the event, that the specific death is transformed into universal experience—that of man coping with the inexorable necessities of life.

IT IS so refreshing to find one who pays tribute to that struggle. Agee liked the people about whom he wrote. Not that they were people in any sense; they were human and weak in many instances. But, in spite of their weaknesses, they are seen as inherently good and lovable.

Finally, we are given a glimpse of Agee's poetic genius. There are three chapters of italicized print, included in the book by the editors after Agee's death. Although unrelated to the time span of the story, they give great insight into the characters, written as flashbacks in the mind of the son, Rufus. It is here that Agee wrote without restraint displaying anency and understanding of the mind of a child and a gift for lyrical, evocative prose.

Reviewed by JACK JACOBS

In the face of overwhelming critical and un-critical acclaim, extended this book, I feel an uneasy kinship to the man who threw stones at the Mona Lisa. I did not like James Agee's novel; and at the risk of expiring more of my faults than his, I shall give my reasons.

First, I feel that it would have been better as a short story,

## A Poor Man's Guide to Europe

By David Dodge, 392 pp. New York, Random House, \$3.50.

Reviewed by AUDREY MACKNIESE

Arrive! Pack your bags! You, too, can tour Europe if you can find \$140 a day. You'll even have money left over for luxuries.

You doubt it? David Dodge is your man. His latest work is a masterpiece of miserly know-how for people with itchy feet and that pocketbook "tipsober" not only tells you how to cross the Atlantic for a song, but how to have enough money left over for the return trip.

THIS IS NOT a guidebook listing places to see, but rather a collection of useful tips compiled for the average American tourist working from an average American budget.

Dodge has taken each phase of traveling, from planning a wardrobe to re-entering the USA, and shows how it can be done cheaply and painlessly. He cleverly guides the reader through Europe and patiently explains how not to spend money.

Dodge also tells some of the funny adventures he and his family had when trying to get "the mostest for the leastest" in Europe.

Although he concentrates on the free-lance traveler, the helpful hints he passes along are far too valuable for any traveler to pass up, even the one on a rigid guided tour.

## The Opium Of the Intellectuals

By Raymond Aron, 324 pp. New York, Doubleday, \$4.50.

Reviewed by ANN JACOBS

One of the great enigmas of our time is the power of Communism to seduce intellectuals from free societies into the seductive fogs of dogma and totalitarian rule. How a man who lives by his mind can renounce the freedom to think for a doctrine that has failed, seems unanswerable. In his somewhat formulaic book "The Opium of the Intellectuals," Raymond Aron gives an answer—perhaps the answer.

Aron begins by laying a ground work for understanding the Communist ideology and the confusion surrounding it. Prevailing political and philosophical "myths"

## False Feeling

Drinking after drinking is responsible for an estimated 25 per cent of the country's fatal highway accidents. This figure increases sharply on holidays and weekends. There appears to be a good reason for "alcoholic accidents." In a recent cross-country poll by the In-

stitute for Safer Living, 94 per cent of all drivers questioned felt that they could handle any amount of wine or beer without getting drunk. This figure increases sharply on holidays and weekends. There appears to be a good reason for "alcoholic accidents." In a recent cross-country poll by the In-

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