

Each generation makes history, and historians record what has been done not only to allow others to recall the past, but also to point out what human beings may (and so often again will) do in the future. Although, each contemporary generation fails to learn from the past—especially when to learn means to oppose the lures of materialism.

The Birmingham Eccentric

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Thursday, May 7, 1959

SECTION B

Conversations with Toscanini

By B. H. Haggin. 261 pp. New York. Doubleday. \$4.00.

[Reviewed by JERRY F. HAYS

Looking back over the last half century of musical production, it is amazing to realize to what extent two Italians have dominated the American imagination. As it is

Caruso who becomes our focal point for the "Golden Age of Opera," it is Toscanini who becomes pre-eminent in the ensuing symphonic renaissance that followed throughout our country.

Although it is already five years ago this month that Toscanini gave his last public performance, who has replaced him in our esteem? His shadow still falls across each conductor. For each new interpretation of the classic repertoire must stand against his realization of the score, that strangely innocent continuum of sound and

time that always seemed so irrefragably right.

FOR THOSE among you who, like myself, made a weekly ritual of the NBC broadcasts, B. H. Haggin's new book is as much a necessity as the family photo album. The pages span those wonderful broadcast years and their remaining legacy of recordings. To most Americans this is Toscanini as they knew him, and Haggin's conversations offer a rich insight to this period of Toscanini's life.

B. H. Haggin was music critic for The Nation during these years, and it was through his writing that he became acquainted with Toscanini. Their meetings were always filled with records, music that was in preparation for broadcast or that of a recent performance. Toscanini would always stand conducting through such a record session, cue in each instrument as during an actual performance. He lived his music as actors are said to live their current roles.

YOU BECOME aware of this creative passion with renewed force, for Haggin is careful to draw out the changes which occurred in the Toscanini performances in the last years, a definite trend toward simplification of style, less expensive modifications of tempo, more subtle shadings of tempo to give greater unity to the whole composition. Toscanini's comments and explanations on these matters of tempi are of the greatest importance and provide an enriched knowledge to his recorded production.

The last half of Haggin's book is devoted to a discography of the Toscanini recordings. The emphasis is placed on the Beethoven and Verdi performances. Along with some very interesting comments on the performances themselves is a damnation of RCA Victor for its recent "enhancement" of sound

"injected" on many of the Toscanini recordings.

ALTHOUGH much of the condemnation is justified, it is poorly timed. Since the advent of stereo recording, an ominous silence has befallen the "Riverdale Project," which would point to the fact that Victor is no longer considering issuing further recordings from the broadcast tapes in the Toscanini collection. Let's not give Victor further reason to cut the available Toscanini catalogue of recordings. After all, the enduring qualities of a recording are in its performance, not necessarily in its fidelity. As such, these records belong to posterity.

THIS point is brought home most forcibly by Haggin's book itself. A book that would have normally given me a pleasant evening's reading, turned out to give me endless hours of listening pleasure. I found myself turning time and time again to my record collection to seek out passages Haggin or Toscanini had mentioned. Once brought to my attention, they greatly enriched my enjoyment of this immortal treasury of Toscanini's creativity.

The Devil in Bucks County

By Edmund Schidell, 401 pp. New York. Simon and Schuster. \$4.95.

Reviewed by SALLY PARSONS

There are probably no more typically American novels than those dealing with small town life, U.S.A., where private business is always public business. Like Peyton Place, to which it will inevitably be compared, "The

BOOKS and REVIEWS

Devil in Bucks County" chronicles events in the lives of chosen of the country and her husband's townfolk who represent a wide range of social strata, wealth, and morality. Also like Miss Metcalough's sensational work, it tends to rely heavily on the sexual life of the community.

However, Olympia, a town of 1,041 persons in Bucks County, Pennsylvania—just over the Delaware River from New Jersey—is a more diversified community than Peyton Place.

LYING as it does, 1 1/2 hours by train from New York City, it has recently been invaded by many big city executives seeking exurban living—"rich couples in search of old farms to convert into chic country houses."

But these upper middle and lower upper class migrants are a recent phenomenon. Olympia is primarily an artists' colony with a flourishing summer theater and more than a score of art galleries. It is the fact that most restaurants, bookstores, and other establishments line their walls with pictures in hopes of making money on the side. The town, therefore, has a large bohemian element: moderately wealthy ex-broadway and movie stars as well as struggling writers and artists who are, as yet, "unrecognized."

NOT TO be outdone are the natives—farmers such as cancer-ridden Otto Huttschnecker, lazy oldsters such as Matt Gipe, a junkman whose rundown shack in the midst of the nouveau riche country estates is the home of the New Yorkers' existence. These older residents watch the newcomers prance about with varying degrees of outrage, amusement and resignation.

The story bounces back and forth between the lives and loves of various Olympians. But it dwells most firmly upon the Barksdale family.

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Meanwhile their 16-year-old daughter, Laurie, quickly finds out what life is all about as she succumbs to the wily charms of a 30-year old "juvenile delinquent." The novel contains the kind of gossip material that always makes interesting reading. It is written well enough, but the thematic material somehow seems a little tired. The book's conflicts and problems—such as the Barksdales' budget difficulties—are strikingly reminiscent of situations found in women's magazines.

IF THE reader wishes to find out how Bill and Lillian Barksdale keep spending 18 per cent more than their \$32,500 a year income read "The Devil in Bucks County" and see their \$2,686 yearly liquor bill is in itself an interesting item.

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