

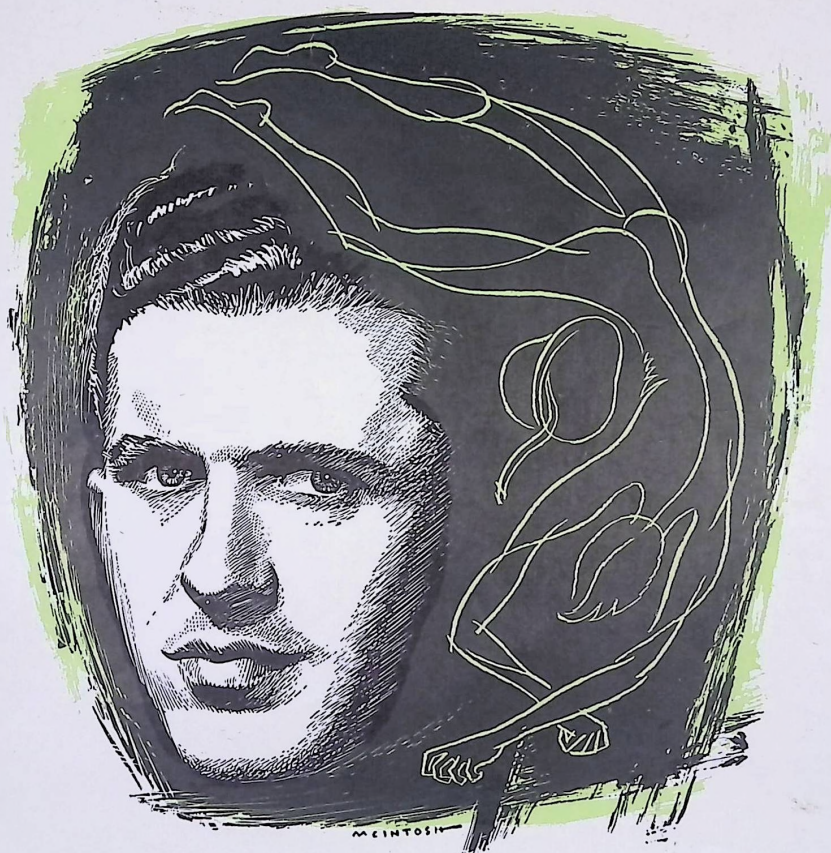
Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

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FIFTEEN CENTS



Norman Mailer, author of "The Naked and the Dead." (See page 10)

Twisting the Tail of the Cosmos

By JUSTICE OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Fiction. *Young Norman Mailer's 700-page war novel is the most significant of those reviewed this week. It heralds the arrival of a new talent on the literary scene who has been able to create living human beings out of the nightmare invasion of a Pacific island. Three other American first novelists take their bow in this issue. Hiram Haydn, a publisher and editor of The American Scholar, has written in "The Time Is Noon" a mature account of flaming youth in the hectic days before the axe fell on the stock market in 1929. David Goldknopf's "Hills on the Highway" tells in today's terms the old story of the writer who succumbs to the necessity of making easy money in the big magazines. The clock industry and the jewelry trade take a beating at the hands of Frederic Laing in his "Six Seconds a Year," another story of a young man's surrender.*

Nightmare on Anopopei

THE NAKED AND THE DEAD. By Norman Mailer. New York: Rinehart & Co. 1948. 721 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by MAXWELL GEISMAR

JUST when we have stopped talking about the new literary voices of the 1940's, they seem to be appearing. Norman Mailer is a young American writer who grew up in Brooklyn, went to Harvard, and found himself, as a rifleman, in Leyte and Japan. His earlier work has appeared in *Story* magazine and "Cross Section," but "The Naked and the Dead" is his first novel. It is a solid and interesting story of the capture of Anopopei, a typical Japanese island in the Pacific, a nightmare in short.

Mr. Mailer uses some of the technical devices which John Dos Passos initiated in the American novel, while there is also an influence of tone. But "Three Soldiers," like most of the typical stories of World War I, was essentially a novel of individual protest. The military organization was something to escape from, not to understand. The virtue of "The Naked and the Dead"—and I think it will be the typical pattern of the new war novels—is that it sees the individual within the military organization, and attempts to evaluate the whole complex structure of the American Army in war and peace, as a manifestation of contemporary society, as well as a weapon of conquest and destruction. Or perhaps even, in the Tolstoyan sense, as one-half of our "natural" existence.

That doesn't mean Mr. Mailer particularly approves of army life, or that the campaign on Anopopei was an idyll of human decency. The novel opens with an amphibious assault upon the island. The central group of characters are members of a re-

connaissance squad; the slow, blundering, and tortured progress of the military action also marks their physical and moral disintegration as human beings. The plump and foul-mouthed Wilson, the superstitious and embittered Gallagher, the ambitious and servile Brown, the tough and rebellious Red Valsen, all are partially or completely destroyed by their ordeal: to live through it is not necessarily to have survived. Only the slow-thinking farm boy, Ridges, and the "intellectual" Brooklyn Jew, Gold-

stein, seem to have the necessary resources, whether of sheer animal vitality or of spiritual comprehension, to endure the impervious jungle, the sickening climate, the steady, demoralizing contact with filth, pain, and terror even more than the actual and paralyzing shock of combat.

Staff Sergeant Croft, too, an excellent soldier to begin with, becomes a rigid and implacable tyrant; if he has accepted the hatred of his men as part of his job, he soon begins to nourish it. As the novel moves up through the ranks of the military hierarchy, it is particularly good on the relationship of these men with the commissioned officers. There is an ironical episode in which Major Dalleson, a typical disciplinarian and drill-master, goes into panic because the Japs have given him a chance for a breakthrough, and he is forced to use his troops. Lieutenant Hearn is a social rebel who has broken away from the conventions and prejudices of the ruling class, financial or military. General Cummings, who has given up human relationships completely, for the sake of organization and efficiency, who believes that the only value of a human soul is the use it can be put to, also believes that, after the war with Russia, the next century will belong to the reactionaries and the capitalists. And why not?

The antagonism between these last



THE AUTHOR: Trees and occasionally even writers grow in Brooklyn—vide twenty-five-year-old Norman Mailer, author of two unpublished novels, his first to be accepted reviewed opposite, and a new fiction work incubating in Paris. While at Harvard (B.S. 1943), he wrote for the *Advocate* and won *Story* magazine's 1941 college contest. The 1944 "Cross Section" included his novella "A Calculus at Heaven," the 1948 edition a chapter from "The Naked and the Dead."

"There are really no such things as types in America," he says. "As a result an American writer has to spend a good bit more of his time defining his characters down to the sections in which they live, their speech, and the particular prejudices they've assumed. An American writer has to define his characters and redefine them before he can be concerned with such abstractions as courage, humanity, good, and evil. I've been very fortunate in cutting across a lot of social groups," he adds, listing a patchwork history as dishwasher, soda jerk, flat-painter, usher, theatre publicity assistant, and mental hospital attendant. In the Army he served in Leyte, Luzon, and Japan, was a surveyor, regimental intelligence clerk, aerial photograph expert, wireman, reconnaissance platoon rifleman, cook, and baker. He doesn't think the last decade's writers have been sufficiently political, holding that "partially accountable for the poverty of American letters in this period." After finishing "The Naked and the Dead" (it took a year and a half) he and his wife, an ex-Wave lieutenant, went to the Sorbonne on the GI bill. Always slight, he's now down to 130 pounds. His manner is confident, his expression forthright, but he shies at publicity. "I have started fooling around with oil painting," he writes, "—pure fun for me, since I have no talent at all, and therefore can have no disappointments." —R. G.

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figures, too; these may be a solace for the common man, and even a source of strength, but they don't constitute his only achievement.

I think this is the main weakness of the novel, for there is no real balance of the dramatic forces in it, just as there is a final lack of emotional impact. The story ought to be more impressive than it is. Within these limits, however, "The Naked and the Dead" is a substantial work, and Mr. Mailer is a new novelist of consequence.

Atomic Age Antics

PLUNDER. By Samuel Hopkins Adams. New York: Random House. 1948. 348 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

MAYBE the saddest commentary on the state of our Government, military and civilian, in the Capital of these United States today is that Samuel Hopkins Adams's new novel about it is almost credible. It is not quite. Indeed, Mr. Adams obviously never intended it to be. But his noisy satire of the sons-of-bitches and the ungrammatical melodrama which they make along the Potomac are just a little too fantastic to make sense even in a fantastic satire of the atomic age.

He has written, nevertheless, a lively tale of loot and plunder in a 1950 which is designed to look remarkably like the spring of 1948. His Neanderthal patriot Martin Strabo is certainly a recognizable, if exaggerated, type of the Washington dealer in contacts and contracts. Even Strabo's weird Scott Circle establishment, equipped with statues of the American heroes and a free bar for the American politicians and camp followers, seems vaguely familiar in a capital hot in the pursuit of both Communists and cash.

By the time they get to Washington, the Martin Strabos have usually already taken diction lessons unless they are with equal care preserving a Texas accent. Not many of them remain naive about getting into the right club after they have found out how to get to the right people in the War Department. And, sadly enough, not many of them have receptionists quite as pretty, promiscuous, and sentimental at the same time as Mr. Strabo's Claribelle Claire. But the woods of Washington, as is well understood in the Atomic Age, are filled with both charming and eccentric nuclear physicists like those who are involved for good or evil in the Strabo promotion deals.

Naturally an America eager for protection from atomic rays falls hard for Strabo's protective patents. Generals, Senators, and others with their hands out are ready to help the lucrative business along. Indeed, it seems pretty clear that nothing could have come between Martin Strabo and ultimate occupancy of the White House if he had not made the mistake of thinking that a country which does not object to a man fixing the government, including the armed forces, can safely also fix a football game—and the Army and Navy game at that. (Incidentally, Mr. Adams's satirical description of the football game is also first-class sports melodrama.)

Of course, in the end, when the sports reformers have grabbed the safe in which Strabo keeps his books listing the price tags on various VIP's, he and his beautiful receptionist have to fly the country. Reports coming back, however, are that they are doing very well in exile and the same old Washington waits for the next Strabo or the return of the old one.

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