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NOVELS OF THE WEEK

Ruins in California

A FORTUNE IN DIMES by Mary Carter (Gollancz 21s), THE SICK FOX by Paul Brodeur (Gollancz 21s). SCENTED GARDENS FOR THE BLIND by Janet Frame (W H Allen 16s), THE RED SAILOR by Patrick O'Hara (Neville Spearman 16s)

By JULIAN JEBB

pages of fiction, a happy, or to use the more formally accepted word, an "adjusted" man who comes from California? Only a fortnight ago there was Clancy Sigal's hero fleeing demented from the coast in search of decent human standards. All of the literature which this extraordinary seaboard has provoked seems steeped in hysteria. Nathanael West, Huxley, Isherwood have each cast a cold eye on the narcissism, triviality and materialism which prevail. For those of us who have never been there, it must surely be the place of which we have the most vivid yet circumscribed picture of anywhere in the

In some ways Mary Carter's first novel A Fortune in Dimes is ever read about the fabled strip. For the first time you have an intimate sense of the climate of feeling and morality from the inside, whereas other writers are so aghast at the fabulous aspects of Californian life that they digress, often brilliantly, into high-class reporting. Theirs was expatriate writing, Miss Carter's is native.

On the surface the protagonists —Decker, Alex and Miller—are three intelligent, moderate, insecure, teenage boys who are eager to taste the pleasures of freedom before rigor maturitatis sets in. In the first part we see how they all entertain different fantasies of non-conformity: Decker, until he falls seriously in love, indulges himself in escapist dreams of sexual irresponsibility in Haiti; Alex refuses to join a fraternity at his university; Miller defiance at their root, rather than loss of first youth is a tragedy as quite arbitrary. large as the fact of death.

Miss Carter is forty, which is as exasperating a novel as I've makes her achievement of un- come across this year. Quite quite staggering. She has entered and the book gives the impression into her hero in a way which is of being written with the most

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thetic observation or recording accurately the findings of a particularly sensitive ear. The indecisions and passions of her young people are absolutely of that place at this time, and there flares throughout her careful, witty story a fierce light of moral in dignation at the habits of mind which produced these ruined

Foxes are always in as symbols,

Whether they are the metamorphoses of ladies, or Venetian potentates or something historically nasty found in an attic, they always attract a partcularly awed response from writers. The refreshing thing about The Sick Fox is that he is very real indeed, as well as filling a nicely conceived allegorical function. Brace, an American, finds the fox whilst he is fishing, taking respite from his job as an intelligence officer responsible for the security of a nuclear weapons dump in West animal may have rables, but h does not kill it out of a respect for its wounded dignity and a vague sense of laisser vivre. Instead he tells, in passing, a number of people in the forest village where he lives of the encounter and notices that they all seem more disturbed by it than he.

What Paul Brodeur achieves very skilfully in this sharp piece of contemporary allegory is first a picture of the way in which idle people with active suspicions will seize on any incident to feed their frustrated desire for aggression and secondly, in microcosm, a fair and vivid picture of the malaise which besets contemporary Germany. The selfconscious artificial sense of community for which the Germans always strive is well symbolised by the hunting fraternity, the Ganders, with their absurd rituals and sinister little feuds. Accurate, too, is the character of the gestures have the weakness of innkeeper, Weber, a refugee forced into a semi-fascist obses off-hand moral concern, are in- whole scene of fog-bound forest capable of raising themselves is the nuclear secret, about which from the combination of neurosis no one is quite clear. All are and convention into which their determined that the beast must families seem to fall by the time die, but the chilling climax they have reached their mid- reveals that the identity and twenties. In this atmosphere, the specific villainy of the beast are

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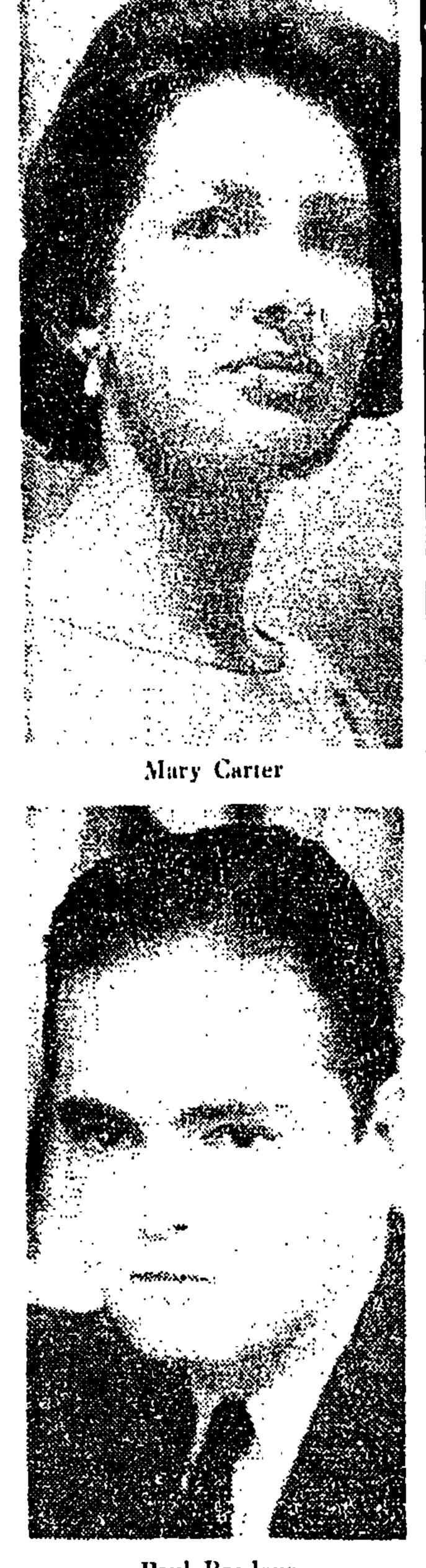
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painstaking stylistic care, but the net result is tiresome and pretentious to a degree which makes it unreadable. The theme is the destitution of human isolation. "An ordinary family, in the chaingang of the human race,

linked in the ordinary way with doom" is how Edward, Vera and their speechless daughter Erlene, are inaccurately described by the author. They are not ordinary, each being saddled by grotesquely inflated sensitivity which allows them pages of amorphous digression on Light, Death and sundry amorphous

The attempts to restore the power of speech to the adolescent girl forms such story as there is between the sub-Virginia Woolf generalising. It seems an insult to truly lyrical novelists to call Miss Frame's style poetic as several distinguished critics have on the back jacket of this novel. Germany. He suspects that the The basis of poetry is the transformation of the concrete by imagination into a higher reality. In this novel there is nothing real to transform.

The Red Sailor is worth reading, for the use it makes of Navy slang: for the first twenty pages or so it is as hard to follow as, say, New York Yiddish cross-talk, but gradually you come to learn it, like any language, and then it is peculiarly expressive. Patrick O'Hara has recorded it with great vitality in a fastmoving story about whoring, gold-running and first love in the China Seas at the time of the Korean War.



Paul Brodeur

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By MICHAEL RATCLIFFE

reproductive splendour and indestructible vulgarity, laugh and riot their way through another tax-free Kentish summer. Their godless progeny is submitted to belated immersion by the visiting (funny) curate; Mademoiselle Dupont crosses the Channel for the ceremony and Pa says "Froggies are human, Ma, in a way." Ma, patronising empathy with Decker clearly, Janet Frame is intelligent for her part, when not "laughing like a jelly," serves up Quiche Lorraine and sausage rolls.

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Corrupt Teds loom, like figures from Mars, but good old Edith Pilchester gives them what for in balanced of all portraits of my sensitive conscience shattered egomaniac enchanter, legendary a spirited burst of English pluck that will send the new opus straight to the top of the library lists. An abundance of thigh and cleavage in the buttercups—and just about everywhere elseshould keep it there. The curtain rung down, as ever, with fecundity triumphant. Another is woman who never knew her Eyre Noel (Herder 2s 6d), "The opening; but allowing for a tone on the way. Once believed to constitute a self-contained trilogy, the Larkins' fertility riots now look like being with us for ever. found "Oh! To be in England" -my first-heartless, flat and

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TALKING POINT

The facts of fiction

By JERZY PETERKIEWICZ

months earlier (there were no gliding in his sledge towards the town called O . . . , where a beautiful young widow R. usually spent her winters. IF'A novelist happens to be a This was the winter of 18—, conscientious observer of his society, he may easily be intimiit was Wednesday or Friday, dated by the modern efficiency of fact-collectors and distrust for by then I had committed myself to the hero's fate. Those capital letters and dots specified a fictional reality in a half-serious, halfmocking manner which novel writing today as much as in the times of Cervantes, Fielding or Dickens.

BUT the facts of fiction are in danger of being taken either too seriously or too lightly. The reason, seems to be our growing respect for facts. We belong to fact-conscious society which has plunged itself into a coninuous process of documentation. The present is so instantly recorded by mechanical gadgets that it never is quite with us: the steady traffic of registered

THE FIRST novels I ever read all seemed to tease my desire for facts by pin-point- ing the letters of the alphabet which I had learnt a few few hours old will peer at you from the screen. Each television objects from emotional bias. Over two centuries ago, Sterne saw the inherent duplicity of all facts of fiction and with a the present goes on, hurriedly pedant's logic turned this disand efficiently: it is we who are covery into a vehicle of humour. being buried alive. But not for Reverence is not becoming to other makers of labels will dig us up in a day, a week or a month to display us as the new social data.

> ence. Is his eye a reliable enough camera? Should it simuate the camera at all? Ever since straight reportage was admitted to novels in the Thirties, the meaning of fictional facts has been oscillating between document and fluffy nonsense, the gap becoming wider with each earnest proof of evidence that the writer has done his bit of homework, in the field or in the library. So we get novelistic treatments of suburbs, universities, offices, underworlds, each a compact social unit, well fitted with facts and under one come off, the plot is heated up by old-fashioned methods to provide the necessary steam of One is not surprised that the

the validity of his own experi-

awareness of the past. Turn new realists in France deride the knob, and the past only a such pretences of objectivity,

increase of awareness due to our obsessional self-documentation has banished for ever the epic innocence without which no story can be told with conviction and sound credible. Authentic facts like pieces of newspaper glued to a painting merely destroy the illusion.

WE ARE beginning to suffer from chronic indigestion of facts, and no super-team of experts can alleviate our discomfort with instant daily diagnosis. But the novelist should take courage and with his humorous imagination defy the portentous dominion of fact. Humour always aspires to a total vision of life because it keeps upsetting the neat arrangements, compartments and labels. And there is delight even in being outwitted by the appearances of reality. Don Ouixote will for ever charge facts, because for him, as for any true novelist, fact and fiction must remain interchange-

This is the dual way of imagination, and the novelist need not participate in the solemn burial of the present by

The Hero as Saint

338171 T E LAWRENCE OF ARABIA by Victoria Ocampo Translated by David Garnett (Gollancz 15s)

By J. W. LAMBERT

prother "has understood his same stuff of saints, and like upon the reader . . ." brother better than A.W. has inderstood T.E."; and Professor A. W. Lawrence, in his introduction to this book, unuivocally states that this is Ocampo's imagery run away with many men apparently greater than the most profound and best- her: "... this dynamiter with a himself, by this self-ravaged

tourtesies, the reader will discover here a series of mercifully orief and limpid reflections on ispects of Lawrence's life and emperament, written orginally in 1941 by a South American

a secular saint: "He was of the ments of his inner self rain down within himself, and not like a conceived and executed."

inflicted upon others. The frag- emulate.

Such rare, if revealing, excesses apart, however, Señora Ocampo's great artist in the work he had little book offers as good an insight as has yet appeared into

Only occasionally does Señora the devotion inspired, even in so himself into fragments because of embodiment of the singlemindedhis need to suffer what he had ness we revere but prefer not to

The progress of Pope Paul VI

with intensity, but seldom with he carried two large suitcases of an impressive ascent to St. excessive rapture, the portrait of for an old lady near St. Peter's Peter's chair.

The Montini Story by Gerard Square . . ." An inauspicious bject. Perfectly aware of his thin, smiling priest, one of the of cosy admiration which may mitations—notably his appalling—busiest and most important pre-- perhaps cloy even palates it is nability to love-she nevertheless lates in the world, might have designed to please, Mr Noel's inters into a close communion seemed, at that moment, to have summary of the new Pope's with her vision of him, drawing plenty of time on his hands as career offers a helpful summary

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7 Presided over an old labyrinth—bully, could

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