With such a large subject to cover, Mr. Chapman has had to stick to sober exposition most of the time, and allow himself very few enlivening examples—such as the story of the Mayor of Fontaine de Vaucluse (826 inhabitants) who issued an ordinance stating that it was forbidden to carry or make use of the atomic bomb in his commune. But behind his factual account of the system, one is continually aware of the persons who make it work. By far the most important of these are the Prefects of the ninety Departments, whose functions and whose infinitely delicate position Mr. Chapman skilfully analyses. Servant and chief representative of the Minister of the Interior, the Prefect has absolute authority over all the other State officials in his Department, and varied powers of control over the elected local bodies: the Conseil Général of the Department under its President, and the Conseils Municipaux of the Communes under their often intractable Mayors. At the same time he is merely the executive of these elected bodies, who can appeal against him to his own Minister if he interferes unduly in their local affairs. It is infinitely complicated yet somehow infinitely absorbing too; almost most fascinating of all is the account of how the greater part of the local funds are still raised by means of a local tax based on a state tax on property which ceased to be levied in 1917, and is in consequence still assessed according to the values which then obtained.

Always vividly present, too, behind the account of the system and its officials, are the nature of the country and of the people whose institutions are described. The statement that there are 37,983 Communes in France, each with its Conseil Municipal and Mayor, whether it is a town the size of Marseilles or a mountain hamlet, is dry enough; but the information that 25,000 of these Communes have less than 500 inhabitants at once conjures up a picture of endless discussions going on in remote villages all over that rich and varied countryside. The passing reference to the fact that the Departments of France are named after rivers and mountain ranges, rather than after their chief towns, again reminds one that, in spite of the existence of the great provincial towns, France remains predominantly a rural and agricultural country.

To attempt to govern centrally so varied a country and so critical if not turbulent a people would clearly be impossible; and a great part of the interest of Mr. Chapman's book springs from its demonstration that government in France is not highly centralised. This is not only a popular misconception; it is a view held by many who claim to know the country well.

The second conclusion to be drawn from it will not surprise those who watched with admiration France's recovery from the country-wide devastations of the war: it is that France, though badly governed nationally, is most ably administered locally. This is a fact which is too often forgotten and of which the present book should do much to remind us.

ENID McLEOD

NEW NOVELS

The Time of Indifference. By ALBERTO MORAVIA. *Secker & Warburg.* 12*s.* 6*d.*

A Different Face. By OLIVIA MANNING. *Heinemann.* 10*s.* 6*d.*

The Nature of Love. By H. E. BATES. *Michael Joseph.* 10*s.* 6*d.*

Behold, the City. By RUSSELL WARREN HOWE. *Secker & Warburg.* 10*s.* 6*d.*

The Bride of Llew. By JULIETTE DE BAIRACLI LEVY. *Faber.* 20*s.*

There is nothing cheerful about these novels. *The Time of Indifference*, which was published in 1929 and now appears for the first time in translation, would have seemed unapproachable in its despondence, if these others had not run it so close. Miss Manning's *A Different Face* outstrips it at some points: lonelier, more hopeless, chilly. Miss Manning makes no effort to add heat to the English climate. Mr. Bates does. It is summer in his three long stories; and he contrives amorous situations that grow from an illusion, which he is adept in conjuring, of buzz and heat and shimmer. The Trieste of Mr. Howe's *Behold the City* is a reasonably cold spot; an Englishman feels pretty well at home there. But it is Signor Moravia who has the advantage in this matter of climate. *The Time of Indifference* is hot to the touch. Its Roman villa sizzles: the velvet curtains, the piping food, the highly-seasoned lechery—they prickle.

In Signor Moravia's writing the energy is supple and beautiful. It can spring or relax. In this novel it has poignant play, because his subject is the unhappiness of youth—a brother and sister whose family life is so persistently squalid and hypocritical that it has lamed their natures. The youthful energies of Carla and Michele flow, not into their own growth, but into the fungus of depression that rots it. But they do still flow. The unlucky pair talk, think, plan, dance, make love with undiminishable appetite. Carla plays tennis. They are self-destructive, murderous, done for. The arguments of youth with its own misery, its lamed effort to be grown-up and whole, are enhanced by the attribution to them here of a tireless energy. The couple rush upon moral suicide, but this is not fatigue; it is the fiercest protest, the supreme expression of desire for life.

It may be further to Moravia's credit, that the originality of *The Time of Indifference* seems to be an effect of his energy rather than of fine perception. But I am not certain of this. The sluttish older women and the business men, half-wolf, half-shark, who prey on them, receive as sure a touch as the brother and sister. They represent a stratum of citified commerce, a belt of that unrespectable, unaffectionate business class, which is conspicuous in peasant countries and peculiarly odious. Something more than a sure touch seems to be needed.

> Going through into the bathroom, he washed and shaved with the minutest care, then went back into the bedroom and started to dress. Clothes, suits of the finest quality, gave him immense pleasure; and the wearing of such clothes was one of his favourite hobbies. He now put on a white silk shirt and a black and silver tie, socks of red and grey wool, and finally, not without considerable contortions, a suit of blue herring-bone cloth of truly remarkable cut; then he stood admiring himself in the wardrobe mirror . . .

Of course this is ironical, but Moravia's irony seems to slip on too easily. So does his seriousness. They are quickly interchangeable and elegant, like those slick city suits. Moravia does not admire these suits, but it is not clear whether he thinks that there are any other sort. An English reader to whom this doubt occurs may find himself shrinking from *The Time of Indifference*, not quite sure whether its powerful flavour of tragedy is authentic, or just the effect of a powerful seasoning rubbed round and round the bowl. The brilliant energy is authentic; and a calmer, more profound element of criticism would have dignified it. In his mature novels Moravia tries to get this poise by sheer stylish control; but it is more a matter of perception, perhaps of vision.

"You might have been quite a different person, differently treated," says Tilly in *A Different Face* to its unsatisfactory hero, Hugo Fletcher. Tilly, a charming girl, is one of those Anima women such as no one less intent on self-destruction than a Hugo Fletcher could possibly have got rid of; and he does get rid of her, by forcing her into the arms of a rich boy in the unpleasant sea-port resort of Coldmouth, where he himself is a poor, despised boy. Hugo's misery is Miss Manning's subject, and I doubt whether, in an age of unhappy novels, there has been any whose misery is more concentrated, more unrelieved than this.

> It was then he discovered how a memory could become monstrous and break up through the mind like a black, uprisen shoulder to overthrow the structure of one's self-control.

An image powerful, fastidious, meaningful, and

characteristic of the quality of Miss Manning's writing; in quality she excels, and it here carries her very far, but not quite the whole way. She has all the power to appraise a background, to give it its due, that Moravia lacks. Her "Coldmouth," with its self-important solicitors, dreary public houses, garish cafés, and dreaded east wind, is shudderingly true. Here Hugo has been humiliated; here he returns, after an illusory spell of freedom in Egypt, to conquer his old insecurity. He has invested his savings in a private school, a broken reed as it turns out, broken by thefts and disreputable friendships.

> "Do you imagine I'm still kidding myself a glorious future lies ahead? I'm at the age when life begins to show results. If the results aren't what you hoped for, it's just too bad. It's too late to start again."

Too late: the headmaster's wife, a failed actress, speaks for everybody here. At the end Hugo, stumbling upon the dead body of the headmaster's son who had embezzled his investment, is alleged to be thereby liberated from his memories. The money is with the body; he leaves it, and sets off for London with 16*s*. It is certain, however, that he will not make good. For Miss Manning has never suggested even a flicker of vital energy, to make us believe. It is the exact and exquisite style that compels admiration.

The Nature of Love is dedicated to Mr. Somerset Maugham. These three longish tales have some of Mr. Maugham's breadth and urbane sobriety, without forfeit of their author's own gifts of scenic and amorous colour. The notion that a Kinsey-like, on the psychological side, inquiry into the "nature of love" connects all three of them may have been an afterthought; as a notion it seems slightly artificial, even cinematic. There is sometimes a feeling of cinema in Mr. Bates's most cunning effects. I do not mean anything bad exactly. There are intense thrills, painful and tear-causing situations—here are men and women suddenly caught by love, caught on the wrong foot, unable either to deny or, having admitted, to succeed. In the cinema nobody ever has trouble starting the engine of a car. Whoosh! they're off. Nobody on the verge of making love gets into an awkward physical posture, or finds his partner in one. Skies are blue, grass banks don't tickle when you sit down; if you have to shelter from rain, ten to one there is a deserted cottage to hand, and somebody will have left a bed in it or at least a bearskin rug. It sometimes seems like that with Mr. Bates. But the best of these stories, *The Grass God*, sufficiently triumphs over the convention—and does not fail to hurt.

Behold the City tries to hurt, but I think it does fail. Mr. Howe's upper lip is so stiff that it cannot help involuntary trembling, and the reader feels embarrassed for him. He clips off the crooks, smugglers, tarts, police, journalists, and underground politicians of post-war Trieste—is not going to waste sentimental words on them. There they are, stark, enforcing pity. He is impressed by them, and perhaps also by his own ready understanding, as where his foreword tells that the "Free Territory of Trieste . . . became the focal point of European unrest." It was never "the" focal point; it was one of them. The lack of proportion becomes noticeable.

Behold the City has talent and perception. It knows all the answers. I am not sure if it knows all the questions; particularly about people, whom Mr. Howe seems to patronise.

There is nothing to say against *The Bride of Llew*, an epical, pathetic story of the love of a scholar gypsy and a rich spinster with a disfiguring birthmark and a beautiful nature. Nothing unkind could be thought about this story, which also takes up many noble causes such as kindness to birds and animals, prison reform, and abolition of capital punishment. The long section in a condemned cell, where the falsely condemned gypsy awaits his terrible punishment, is rhapsodic, moving, and seems appallingly knowledgeable. Nothing can be dispraised unless the fact that Miss Levy throughout ignores, or seems not to care, that a wicked, necessary book called *Cold Comfort Farm* was once written.

GILES ROMILLY