

Current Books

Talent to Burn



Eudora Welty

ONE of the most striking, original and gifted young writers in America is a Mississippi girl called Eudora Welty. With one volume of strange, luminous and cruelly humorous short stories, *A Curtain of Green*, she won

herself a reputation and a sure place in the anthologies. With her second book, a fantastic parable called *The Robber Bridegroom*, she gave further proof of her peculiar abilities but detracted rather than added to her critical reputation. Now her third book, another volume of short stories, *The Wide Net*,* is published.

It marks a crucial turning point in an extraordinarily promising career. Either Eudora Welty will retreat further still into her own private world of misty dreams and murky symbolism as she seems to be doing here; or she has got her almost somnambulistic writing out of her system and can now go on to do other work worthy of her glittering talents. For there is no doubt about it, Miss Welty has talent to burn; unfortunately she is burning it up at a frightful rate, extravagantly, wastefully, foolishly on material that can mean little to anyone save herself.

The stories in *The Wide Net* are mostly about early days in Mississippi on the old Natchez trace. They are marked by a strange and hauntingly beautiful phrasing, a wonderful pictorial image-making art, a sinister suggestiveness. One or two of them are healthy and humorous. But the rest are so obscure, so pretentious and deliberately baffling they must be classed as failures, and irritating failures at that. They make one want to cry out: "Please, Miss Welty, stop this nonsense. You are superbly gifted, don't deny your talents. Don't imitate your fellow Mississippian, William Faulkner, and become so enamored of mad worlds and mystifying mannerisms that you destroy your career and your books. Come home and all will be forgiven."

THE most important book that has been written about Italy since Fascism came to power that I know of is *The Fruits of Fascism** by Herbert Matthews. Its current publication could hardly be more timely. Mr. Matthews is a *New York Times* foreign correspondent of many years' experience. He has lived and worked long in Rome and has covered the Italian wars in

Ethiopia and Spain. In addition to this first hand personal experience Mr. Matthews is by nature an objective scholar and diligent researcher. His book is a history, an extremely useful reference work that is crammed with the scuppers with documentary evidence, quotations from speeches, decrees, books and papers, and references and parallels to history and philosophy.

Emphasizing that Italian Fascism never had a program but only a desire for power it is written to prove a thesis: "The premise is that Fascism is an impractical and evil way of life; the argument is 23 years of Fascist history; the conclusion is that Fascism has failed." Mr. Matthews proves all three points conclusively. But you should be warned that he does so in a moderately dry, pedantic and reference-book-historical manner. An excellent and valuable book, and a fairly dull one.

**THE WIDE NET*—By Eudora Welty (Harcourt, Brace, \$2.50); *THE FRUITS OF FASCISM*—By Herbert Matthews (Harcourt, Brace, \$3).

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BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN, THE—By Wallace Stegner (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, \$3). Outstandingly fine novel about the modern West as the frontier became more and more of a memory and frontiersmen became more and more lost in a world into which they were born too late. This is a wonderful full-length portrait of a restless, wandering, able, selfish seeker after greener fields beyond the horizon, an exciting story and a fine panorama of the West. Too long and too detailed, but still one of the best books of the year.

RETREAT FROM ROSTOV — By Paul Hughes (Random House, \$3). Huge novel about the Russian war: scores of villainous Nazis and noble Russians; terrific atrocities, melodrama and excitement; much clumsy writing and wooden characterization. An unsuccessful attempt to write a modern *War and Peace* by a young American who has never left the Southwest or seen a shot fired in anger.

—ORVILLE PRESCOTT

Art Exhibitions

Van Gogh and Much More

WILDENSTEIN has gone and bettered the Museum of Modern Art by collecting a larger exhibition of the works of Vincent Van Gogh than hung in the famous 1935 exhibition. A good cause, the American and Dutch War Relief, and the patronage of Mrs. Roosevelt and H.R.H. Princess Juliana fetched from collectors 30 paintings not formerly exhibited in America and a grand total of 68 paintings. Admission to the exhibition is 50c. It continues thru Nov. 7. Featured, too, are original

letters (displayed under glass) of Vincent to his friend, Anton Ridder van Rappard, and close by, a translation of the exposed passages. This is the show of the month.

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ARTISTS FOR VICTORY PRINTS—National competition focused hundreds of artists' creations on the subject of war. Resulting prints in many media present many fresh ideas and brave methods. Kennedy Galleries, 785 Fifth Ave. at 60. Thru Nov. 8.

BARNET, WILL—A very fine printmaker has commenced painting. Both prints and paintings are shown and while the first are hard to better, the new medium allows a fresh quality in tune with subject of the pictures (babies and an occasional mother). Don't know when childhood was better described. St. Etienne, 46 W. 57. Thru Oct. 23.

CALDER, ALEXANDER — First floor and garden of the Modern is filled from floor to stands to walls with Calder sculptures—from his first fence-rail cat and Sunnydale cow to circus animals, wire portraits, to motor driven stables and standing sheaves of steel called stables. This is 20th century sculpture and as elusive and unpredictable in its form(s) as are most elements of this century... Accompanying this review of an artist's life's work is a 68-page appreciation and explanation by James Johnson Sweeney, containing 58 photographs. Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53. Thru Nov. 28. Adm. 25c.

DOWNTOWN GROUP—18th Annual Spring opening presents a new painting by each of the 19 artists associated with this gallery. If you're not in the know, it goes like this: Kuniyoshi, Levi, Sheeler, Guglielmi, Siporin, Schmidt, Spencer, etc. Downtown Galleries, 43 E. 51. Thru Oct.

ISENBERGER, ERIC—Gentle, gracious, loving is the touch of this painter as he turns simple interiors (with lots of ladder-back chairs) into arrangements of great charm, enhanced by the whole form, or a fragment, of a girl. There's elegance in his touch; beauty in his pale, clear, thin colors; and a heart-warming point of view that came near dying with Vuillard. Knoedler, 14 E. 57. Thru Oct. 23.

JULES, MERVIN—A satirist has become compassionate and with the change, his art has grown bigger. The high points in this show are best of anything on the street this week. A. C. A. Galleries, 63 E. 57. Thru Oct. 16.

ROESCH, BEN-ZION, CAESAR—Kurt Roesch paintings are closer to Masson than before as he adds fish, birds and "ingrowing thoughts" to his repertoire. His color usages are exhilarating, his design spontaneous and sound... Ben-Zion has made a series of very moving ink drawings in which a weather vane loses its place as a direction-symbol and comes to defeat—in a heap—tangled with mankind's "weightless convictions"... Doris Caesar's sculpture is as moving as these drawings which surround it—but in a hopeful, even believing way. Her big bronze, "Seated Girl", is a symbol of the earnest, fully wise, fully prepared youth that will straighten the tangled arms of Ben-Zion's weathercock. Buchholz, 32 E. 57. Thru Oct. 16.

—MAUDE KEMPER RILEY

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