

## NEW FICTION

FRANÇOISE SAGAN: *Those Without Shadows*. Translated by Irene Ash. 124pp. John Murray. 9s. 6d.

DIANA MARR-JOHNSON: *Goodnight Pelican*. 223pp. Chatto and Windus. 13s. 6d.

RAY BRADBURY: *Dandelion Wine*. 184pp. Rupert Hart-Davis. 16s.

H. E. BATES: *Sugar for the Horse*. 120pp. Michael Joseph. 12s. 6d.

WILLIAM MURRAY: *Best Seller*. 249pp. Longmans. 15s.

One of the most tiresome, and engaging, attributes of youth is its capacity for subjective engrossment, the capacity which turns a child's game or a young girl's love into a thrilling and exclusive microcosm. Mlle. Sagan, stepping out of the personal narrative of her two earlier novels, has tried to disperse this egocentric interest among a group of adults. Instead of her usual triangle, *Those Without Shadows* concerns an octagonal situation, or, to be more exact, four pairs of lovers criss-crossed by jealousy, dissatisfaction, and *ennui*. An actress, a publisher, a romantic young idiot from the provinces—their differences do not matter much, for like so many pawns they are manoeuvred into position on the sexual chessboard of their Parisian clique, pausing only to inquire from time to time what is the meaning of it all. What indeed? The novel is too short to allow any one character to arouse sympathy, and their desultory amours suggest that it is time Mlle. Sagan found a new subject for her weary young cynicism. Enthusiastic French critics are doubtless right in admiring once again the limpid polish of the Sagan style, but in a clumsy translation even this pleasure is denied the disappointed reader.

Perhaps it is intentional that the heroine of *Goodnight Pelican*, although her story belongs to Paris of the 1920s, seems more in sympathy with the independent and ruthless generation of which Mlle. Sagan is the recognized apologist. Clara is frivolous, 18, the unlikely offspring of tweedy Cambridge dons, and the new pet of a select Parisian circle which includes the Comtesse de Pariole, a widowed Russian princess of overpowering charm. Inevitably, and blind to the pricks of her honest pagan vulgarity, Clara falls in love with the comtesse's pale-eyed and devoted son André. But her role as fiancée, she soon and jealously discovers, must take second place to her role as the chosen daughter-in-law of an emotional cannibal. Callous integrity saves Clara from her rarefied romance, but too late to save an otherwise talented novel from becoming wordy; Miss Marr-Johnson and Mlle. Sagan should have pooled their books.

No unkind intrusion of cynicism or even honest realism troubles the sun-drenched

little Eden of *Dandelion Wine*. Mr. Bradbury, better known as a writer of science fiction, offers a summer in Green Town, Illinois, as it happened in the awakening consciousness of a young boy in 1928. Punctuated largely by rows of impressionistic dots, this is a novel full of fine perceptive scenes muffled by cotton-wool sentimentalism. The boy's angry fear when his best friend leaves town, his spell to bring the Tarot Witch in the slot machine to life so that she can predict his immortality—Mr. L. P. Hartley could not improve on such passages. And the bed-ridden colonel who telephones Mexico City to listen to the noise of the horns and the street cries has that touch of humour one finds in all the best fantasy. But when it comes to a journalist falling in love with an old dear of 90, a pedlar of dreams and a Happiness Machine, it is high time Mr. Bradbury returned to earth, or at any rate to the prosaic territory of outer space.

No one could be more down to earth, in spite of his tall stories, than Uncle Silas, who reappears in a fruity collection entitled *Sugar for the Horse*. Aided by Mr. Ardizzone's delightful sketches, the old scoundrel's amorous, bibulous and nefarious adventures, told to his small but perspicacious nephew, will make a good present for almost anyone. Only quotation can do justice to Mr. Bates's beautifully timed sense of humour, but it would be a pity if he sacrificed to amusing trivia his very considerable talent as a serious novelist.

Lastly, and far removed from the various private worlds of boyhood and young love, we have *Best Seller*, a raucous American exposé of almost all available targets in modern commercialism. From revivalist preachers to "action" painters, political career mothers to literary pundits, Texan millionaires to public relations men, all is grist to Mr. Murray's flailing pen. Very little of his story—about the honest author who exploits the racketeers by writing a pornographic re-hash of Poe—is convincing or coherent, and the background is too ridiculously over-written to score as satire. Nevertheless, it is an emphatically readable novel.