

of the unfranchised unconscious: what he brought into the realm of legitimacy, he also brought to responsibility.' In his final chapter, called, rather typically, 'The Emergence of Psychological Man,' he views the world as the emergent democracy of the sick and the hospital - he really means the mental hospital - 'as succeeding the church and the parliament as the archetypal institution of Western Culture.' About his own prescription he is inclined to be cagey and to dodge behind an academic smokescreen, but he is very well worth reading, a genuine stimulator though not perhaps a startling original.

MAURICE RICHARDSON

Short Stories

Friday's Footprint. By NADINE GORDIMER. Gollancz, 16s.

Gold and Sand. By JAMES ALDRIDGE. Bodley Head, 13s. 6d.

Blackberry Wilderness. By SYLVIA BERKMAN. Gollancz, 16s.

Nobody Knows What the Stork Will Bring. By CHARLES CRISWELL. Hutchinson, 13s. 6d.

An Aspidistra in Babylon. By H. E. BATES. Joseph, 13s. 6d.

To be in the race at all, of course, you must have *cleverness* (which all these books possess), a lightning mind, a slow remorseless eye, a sad and knowing view of human relationships. Humaneness and a large intelligence have never made much difference to the craft: some of the all-time masters have been cranky, spiteful, perverse, or persistently *enfant terrible*. And yet - when all those

special short-story skills are turned, intelligently, on the main stream of human happenings, the effect can be very strong.

On points - range, theme, quality of writing - the South African Miss Nadine Gordimer comes to the front of the lot. Her manner is not the impressionistic but rather the other sort current today, the accumulative one: a careful amassing of detail towards the climax. The tales suggest that every course in life can be tracked back to a single point in time, and this is the point that the mind, in its backward pictures, pursues. A meticulous emphasis on detail gives these moments a disturbing force - drowned arms thrust through the iron bedstead that sank the ferry boat; the planned, significant courses of a dinner; the clothes worn on a crocodile hunt. *Nobody knows what the other is thinking* might be the central motto of *Friday's Footprint*, but it is applied to more than domestic settings. Or, it may be that the domestic setting is an image for something larger, as in *A Thing of the Past*, a finely told tale about a family lingering on in Cairo after the upheaval. But it is hard to choose one above the next in this rich book.

In *Gold and Sand*, an often brilliant collection, James Aldridge demonstrates his uncommon facility for by-passing the expected without ever losing the main track. His tales, unlike some others in this list, are clear of ghosts, eccentrics, dreams, or even holidays, those idle sessions when the business of life seems suspended. If there are lovers and husbands, these roles are only in the incidental background. What he doesn't keep back, for all his sharp dry surface, is compassion. Though he has a journalist's range of scene (Egypt, Australia, wartime Finland) he observes with something more than the

journalist's quick selective eye. These stories show to a high degree the Kiplingesque trick of deliberate *factual* detail: the price per foot of a film, the workings of a gun or plane, the words of a Christmas service in hospital, yet these details turn out to be absolute necessities of the story. The service brutally drowns the dying noise of a prisoner. And an injured man has to direct his ten-year-old son, almost a stranger to him, how to fly the plane to base. An underwater photographer, mauled by a shark, weighs up the cost of losing the film against the waiting boy's fear on the beach.

If Mr Aldridge seems to write almost wilfully as a man, the author of *Blackberry Wilderness* is, no less evidently, a woman. It is not usually necessary to make this distinction: but here it makes itself. Miss Berkman writes very skilfully, though in that curiously *learned* way that seems in itself a national mark of Americans. Atmosphere is her commodity - rain in Paris, autumn in Rome, the grief of spring; all forms of solitude - the deserted wife, the weak husband, the student alone in a foreign city, the invalid, the misunderstood. This does hint at a fairly dangerous ancestor, genetically speaking - Katherine Mansfield. There are differences, however. Miss Berkman is (as befits her time) at once more obscure, more complex and more tough. Dreams, too, provide a considerable part of her machinery. This is not unusual in a world - she is, as I said, an American - so occupied with its own unconscious. But one feels as well that these dreams provide an extra dimension of landscape for the foiled descriptive writer obedient to the discipline of the tale. (Matthew Arnold did much the same thing with the lengthy, beautiful, irrelevant images in *Sohrab and Rustum*.) Miss Berkman is well aware of her manner,

its charm, its limitations, its perplexities, and in the title-story quaintly offers the reader a key. Here, a prim, elderly teacher recalls the sensitive child who later became a writer, and whose stories she does not understand. 'I've never before had a glimpse into the immediate raw substance a writer draws upon,' reflects this lady. 'It makes you ponder the whole nature of truth.'

Her stories trouble me; I find them very strange. The atmosphere is often effective, and certain passages are excellent; but she gives the reader nothing actual to grasp - they seem all mood . . . She seems to be diving under the knowledge that she has, and she expects the reader to go down under with her too.

Very well put. 'All mood', however - that useful phrase might, in a very different way, be used for Mr Criswell's volume *Nobody Knows What the Stork Will Bring*. Really, this is a much better book than it seems. The tricky air of the blurb suggests that its author is not only a verbal Charles Addams but a funny man as well. The stories are grim enough, to be sure, but heartbreakingly so, if readers had hearts to break; only one of those cinema-hyenas who screech at unlikely moments would find a laugh in them. Most have a family setting: mother and son, brother and sister. A ghost appears in one; madness and death are never far away. But in a sharp sort of fashion these tales have distinction; sometimes the shade of Saki might be hovering. He too condensed his effects, gave prominence to lonely little boys, had a bitter trust of older female relatives. The most effective tales are certainly those about children. The appalling title-story relates how a girl finds a way of discovering what the adults refuse to tell her. Another tells of the painful jealousy felt by a boy for the atten-

tion given to his retarded brother. Most frightful, perhaps, is *The Hobby*, in which the mother, with awful innocence, hands on the dead father's room, his 'den', to the boy. It is filled with pornographic books. 'The den's his now. Ed was always so funny about that little old room . . .'

Mr H. E. Bates can turn out a high-grade story so often and so easily that he is quite a marvel. If we did not know what he was hiding out of sight in the hedgerows - all those old men and ripe wenches - we might possibly marvel less. I suppose he still keeps too close to his people to be comfortable: they have to be touched and smelt, all blemishes looked at hard, but after all, he is not alone in that. *An Aspidistra in Babylon* shows him, indeed, in one of his more acceptable manners. It is made up of four novellas, as he calls them. A girl in a garrison town falls in love with a slick, fortynish Captain on the make, and is saved from a double disaster by the jolly Batesian maid. Another is a comedy of courtship, very well done, between a middle-aged English couple in Italy. A third deals with a victim husband, a fruit farmer, ready, twenty years later, to make the same mistake; the fourth is a Gauguin melodrama - white man, native girl in Tahiti. On the whole, a little more Babylon than aspidistra, but the aspidistra wins. Every time.

NAOMI LEWIS

Old and Low

Aristophanes: Ladies' Day. Translated by DUDLEY FITTS. *Faber*. 15s.

Fantastic, sexy, satirical, the Old Comedy is more like an *avant-garde* musical than any-