

lassos trying to round up the stampeding platitudes.' Anyone who likes the book most when most like a conventional novel must deplore the ending, a Golding-like trick which up-ends everything. A reviewer who gave it away would feel a spoil-sport, which suggests that, for all Miss Frame's talent, *Scented Gardens for the Blind* is rather a sport.

*Oh! To Be in England*, or meet Pop and Ma Larkin (for the fourth time), as busty and lusty as ever. It's an H. E. Bates back-slapping machine. Pop is a junk-dealer, 'paying no taxes and consequently living in splendid affluence' — that is the tone, and you will either groan or revel. Such story as there is hinges on the christening of the Larkins' seven children and the Rev. Mr Candy's lickerish blushes for the 14-year-old girl. There are jokes about chamberpots, and

good clean fun about breasts. Of course it pulls itself together sometimes. 'They're funny,' Pop said. 'People, I mean.' Only Teddy-boys are excluded from its capacious bosom; the book knows that what they need is 'a good horse-whipping'. In its way, it's a skilful compendium. I found it nauseating.

American university life yet again in Scott Sullivan's *The Shortest Gladdest Years*. 'Gladdest' was obviously going to be ironical, and unfortunately 'shortest' is too. Soon it all merges into undifferentiated sexy twaddle. There is a description, extended, of a drunk making love to a tiled floor — while the book righteously bridles at the disgusting watchers. Just the thing for anyone who still believes that the word 'crap' is the mark of a vigorous style.

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