

FICTION

Death of a Child

By ANTHONY QUINTON

A MEANINGLESS and agonising sacrifice, the cruelly delayed death of an 11-year-old girl from leukemia...

Because he was brought up in the crudely Calvinistic piety of Dutch immigrants, he cannot, for all his subsequently acquired enlightenment...

Wanderhope's passion is incoherent, but it is real and it is dignified by the honesty with which the central fact of the narrative is described.

Victorian sentimentality made the deaths of children ridiculous. Repelled by those pale, composed little faces, moralising away loquaciously till their final breaths and relaxing, at the moment of extinction...

Peter de Vries has brought it back in this extremely moving book in a way which, it is praise enough to say, is adequate to the subject.

THERE are things to question: Wanderhope does seem to be almost too magnetic to misfortune, for his loved elder brother dies young, and his father and the wife he was tricked into marrying go painfully mad before they die. Also, the message of understanding from his daughter that he has after her death on his tape-recorder, although it could happen, seems a little too apt.

But the central horror is made significant, even if it cannot be redeemed, by the order he has imposed on it. We are spared nothing, but there is no emotional lingering over the cruel details—they are allowed to speak for themselves.

Although Mr. de Vries is best known as a sophisticated verbal joker, and is still one here, this book is continuous with his earlier novels. In his first books there was a pervading sadness about the passage of time, the extinction of hopes and the dissolution of friendships. In "The Mackerel Plaza" the themes of grief at bereavement and the loss of faith were introduced. In this unforgettable book the frail defensiveness of his wit comes out into the open.

The supreme quality of Frank Tuohy's writing is its fastidiousness. The stories in The Admiral and the Nuns are not poetic, but words are used in them with a poet's scrupulousness. His technique is broadly Isherwoodian, and he has Mr. Isherwood's fondness for the disengaged, pestered but observant narrator, a youngish educated Englishman dumped in outlandish parts, susceptible to embarrassment but seemingly without positive desires of his own.

In one story a version of him

- PETER DE VRIES, The Blood of the Lamb. Gollancz, 18s.
FRANK TUOHY, The Admiral and the Nuns. Macmillan, 18s.
H. E. BATES, The Golden Oriole. Michael Joseph, 16s.
FREDERIC RAPHAEL, The Graduate Wife. Cassell, 13s. 6d.
DJUNA BARNES, Spillway. Faber, 15s.
DOROTHY DUNNETT, The Game of Kings. Cassell, 21s.

is seen briefly from outside. Binsley, a lecturer, equipped with some undifferentiated goodwill and some rather fatuous beliefs about the Polish people's democracy, is obscurely persecuted by a young Pole.

HORRIBLE young ladies from Kensington and the Home Counties are at once an obsession, and a peculiar strength. They are encountered primly exercising dogs in Poland, in Lesbian complicity in the English countryside and most impressively in the brilliant title story.

Strident, amorphous Barbara is an admiral's daughter and convent trainee. Cast away in Brazil with a hopelessly rudimentary husband she oscillates pitifully between a despairing sense that everything is lost and an indestructible faith in the Army and Navy Stores view of the world.

It is hard to repress sympathetic blushes as Mr. Tuohy records her fearful utterances: "I want to drink lots and lots. I don't care if I get quite blotted. Up the Navy!" His firm dedication to the ideals of Flaubert restores confidence in the art of fiction.

There is neither accident nor injustice in the small space left for the other four books. The Golden Oriole is H. E. Bates's 37th work of fiction, if the list opposite the title-page is complete. It consists of five longish

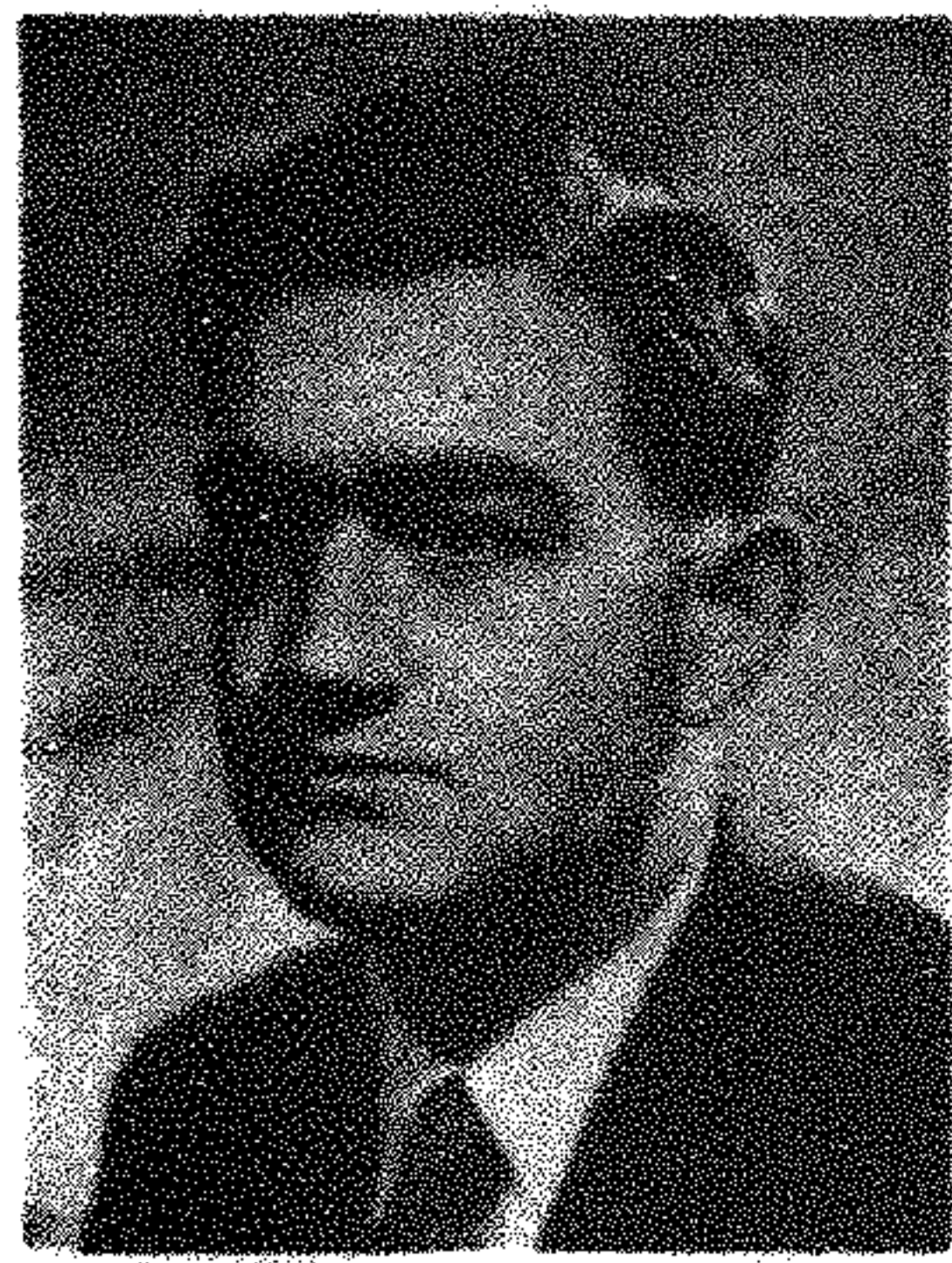
stories, written with his usual economy and skill, which are mostly about members of the lower middle class living in small country towns.

In every one of them large-breasted women at some point take a man or men into their motherly arms. The world Mr. Bates portrays here is a well-chosen one: its members are not often written about, and they have the splendid property of not being the sort of people who would ever think of writing novels about themselves.

But there is a certain monotony about these endless pectoral unleasings: though a weary sadness takes the place here of the animal glee of the Larkin family, their defecation of the female bosom persists.

FREDERIC RAPHAEL'S The Graduate Wife is a curious little book about a dominating young married woman and the circle of self-congratulating nonentities she has accumulated round her. She is emotionally dishonest, jealous and odiously conceited. Yet her creator grudgingly admires her and allows her to perform a small act of courage before the end of her story.

Joyce and her set do not really add up to a novel, for they are told little about her and hardly anything about them. This book is like one of those uncomfortable



Frank Tuohy: fortunes of an Admiral's daughter in Brazil.

archaeological finds which can only be labelled "utensil of uncertain use."

The decision by the publishers to reissue in Spillway ten very short stories by Diana Barnes which first came out in 1923 is not easy to explain. T. S. Eliot is known to have admired "Night-wood," but these literary equivalents of paper doilies are not likely to induce their readers to look into their author's other work.

With their booted baronesses, doomed girls, patially cosmopolitan trappings, and resonantly meaningless dialogue they are arty in the most jaded way imaginable. They are just the sort of thing that Sir Richard Hannay would expect Bohemians to write.

Dorothy Dunnett took five years to construct The Game of Kings, a story of mixed 16th century Scotland, of a laughing but ambiguous cavalier whose hidden services to the throne of Mary Queen of Scots are at last recognised after much misunderstanding.

It is a very large and somewhat confusing book in which the characters, and particularly the hero, speak in a densely cryptic and allusive manner, as well as colourfully and at great length. A fairly standard article on the whole, illuminated with gallantry and rhetoric.

Sticky Situations

By ANTHONY CURTIS

- J. B. PRIESTLEY, The Shapes of Sleep. Heinemann, 18s.
BRIAN ALDISS, Hothouse. Faber, 16s.

IN his new thriller—his fourth book in under a year—J. B. Priestley goes, typically enough, into Europe. All that South American and Australian sunshine preying upon the flesh in "Saturn Over The Water" now goes down in favour of a steady local drizzle muddying the opulent image of the executive-suite-expense-account circuit in London and Hamburg.

Sterndale, as a freelance bachelor reporter, is open to offers and vulnerable, but basically he is a good chap with a passion for getting the facts and prepared to forego his fee if he feels something is morally wrong as it certainly is in The Shapes of Sleep.

A married friend, once a free man like him but now a chalk-striped smoothie in a Mayfair advertising agency, sets him off on a trail that begins conventionally with a diving referee stampede in St. John's Wood and a patsy German pianist in a nightclub, but opens out intriguingly into the booming international business world of Western Germany, and ends very near the east-west frontier in the university town of Göttingen.

A missing professor of experimental psychology and his American niece who has studied socio-

logy at Cambridge stir up a hornet's nest of agents and counter-agents who buzz around him busily; and there is one brilliant scene in a beer-garden where a British public school old girl, now working in intelligence,



Brian Aldiss: when the foliage took over.

emphatically switches on the sex-appeal to get him to incriminate himself as a Communist.

Sterndale whizzes around Adenauer's republic by train and taxi in search of a secret combination of colours capable of inducing sleep, but these are such a bare-faced pretext that by the end we hardly know more about them

than that they possess subliminal powers.

Mr. Priestley's Buchananish point seems to be that organisations can be defeated only by anti-organisations, and he leaves us with an international philanthropic club of good men and true called the "antians," to which all sinister characters turn out to belong, while the kind graft British major is really a—but I won't spoil it.

What will Mr. Priestley give us next—a straight piece of S.F.? He could do worse than to take as a model Brian Aldiss, whose Hothouse depicts barely human creatures aeons hence battling for existence in a green jungle where the vegetation has a mindless malevolence. Life here is infinitely expendable, natural hazard infinitely various.

Mr. Aldiss lets his fertile ingenuity and wit play among the dense foliage upon the plight of one of the last remaining human groups struggling to sustain its mastery, and in particular of one separate individual who with his mate goes astray from the others and becomes slave to a parasitic fungus that has evolved to a point where it possesses consciousness.

The primitive instincts are aroused with a horrible genius and they linger in the mind in all their frightfulness rather longer than Mr. Priestley's wise-cracking compassion.

Hitherto the conscript's position had been better than the serf's. Put into the army at his master's whim, whether married or not, if he ever returned to his village—and the normal length of military service was 25 years—he would probably find his wife remarried, his home broken up, and that he was expected to live out the remainder of his days in a pig-sty on scraps of village charity, generally indistinguishable from refuse. Alexander restored to the soldier, as to the serf, his basic human rights.

All of these measures were less effective than they might have been because of the difficulty, in so immense a country, of seeing they were properly carried out, and because of the slow-changing Russian attitude, particularly to war. Hating war, Alexander was twice

involved in it. He came to the throne in the middle of the Crimean War, and in 1877 he was unable to restrain the war fever against Turkey.

Most surprisingly for a campaigner which started with the Tsar telling his troops: "Most profoundly do I regret having to send you on such a business," it was successful and led to the break-up of the

division in his family provided a handhold for the many who disliked his policies, and it destroyed much of his happiness.

In spite of E. M. Almedingen's careful and conscientious study, Alexander does not properly come to life in her hands. But although she fails with his person, she succeeds admirably with his background, into which her own family connections and documents give her particular insight.

The last phase of Alexander's life was lived under the menace of terrorism—there were at least six attempts to murder him before the one that succeeded—and this part of Miss Almedingen's work has the cumulative compulsive force of inescapable tragedy.

Probably it was already too late to check the race towards revolution, but by their act of senseless fanaticism the terrorists removed the one Russian ruler in the 19th century who had tried his best to do so.

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Any Cheers for Max?

By BAMBER GASCOIGNE

The Incomparable Max edited by S. C. ROBERTS. Heinemann, 36s.

AUTHOR of "Zuleika Dobson," artist of many delightful caricatures, a memorable broadcaster, and one of the chief butts of Dr. Leavis's assault on the now defunct fashion of belles lettres: such is the present public image of Max Beerbohm.

If his ten or more books of essays, short stories and dramatic criticism are not much read now, this selection from them is intended to redress the balance. It is edited by his friend Sir Sydney Roberts—who, incidentally, wrote the sequel to "Zuleika Dobson," tracing her visit to Cambridge after she had annihilated the youth of Oxford.

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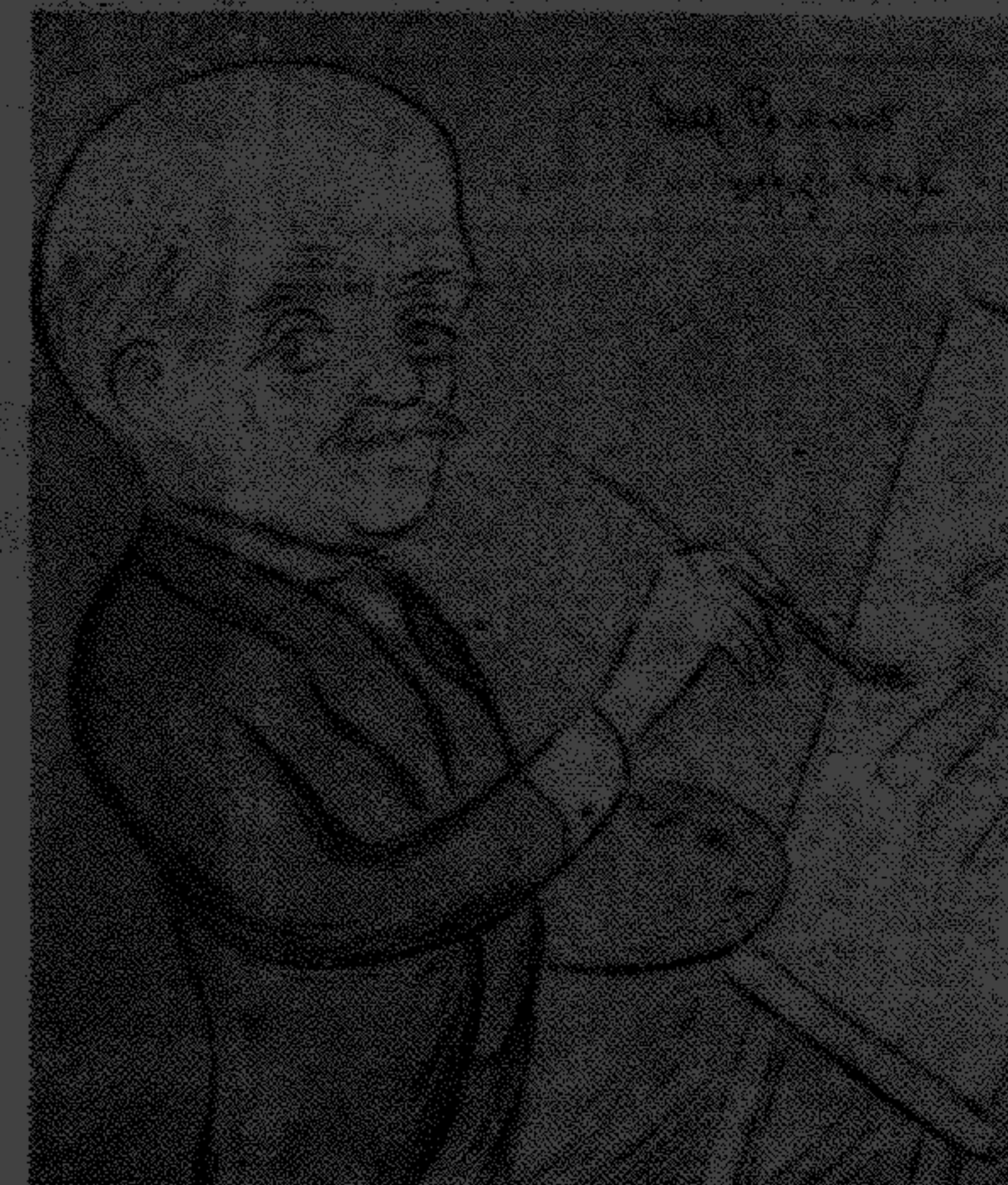
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