

Bill, and he has had a couple of stories published in little magazines. He is determined not to go home again, home being Terre Haute, and he looks for a job in New York City. By a stroke of fortune, he lands in an advertising agency, and he gets himself a girl. The girl, however, turns out to be neurotic, and in time she leaves him. The job goes sour, and he quits it to save his self-respect.

As he tells this story, Henry is also telling the more remarkable story of the McClures, a wealthy family with whose members he by chance becomes intimately acquainted. It is a family with problems: Miranda and Thomas, the mother and father, are separated; Anne, their daughter, has been paralyzed for the past six years as the result of a riding accident; Justin, her older brother, is harassed and self-destructive. As Henry comes to realize, each of the McClures—and also Hugh Worthing, Anne's fiancé—is possessed by a deep sense of guilt. Henry does not pry into their psyches, in the fashion of the Jamesian observer, but their secrets are one by one revealed to him.

It makes a rather pretty psychological drama, this progressive exposure of the skeletons that lurk behind skeletons in the McClure closets. As Winks sees the situation, the revelation of truth brings no relief; on the contrary, the McClures are still going their tortured ways at the end. That is why Henry breaks with them: their "heightened capacity for suffering" is too much for him.

**W**INKS adroitly manages his two stories. Henry is interesting both as a person and as a type, and his experiences are not overshadowed by the more intense experiences of the McClures. The New York City background, from the YMCA in which Henry first lives to the smart bars he later frequents, is portrayed with a nice feeling for the special qualities of the city scene. All in all, it is a readable novel, with moments of insight that one respects.

It is natural to speculate on the futures of these three young writers. Winks could, I think, become a successful slick writer, of the Sloan Wilson variety, if he chose to do so. On the other hand, he might do better than that if he wanted to try. It is hard to tell where Miss Lec is heading: she might move closer to the tradition of Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers, or she might go on with the problem novel. McFarland has taken a definite line, and, if he holds to it, the only question is whether he will develop the ability to express fully his dark vision of existence. If he does, he may become one of our important writers.

## CRIME AND CORRUPTION

# The Case of the National Con Game

**"The Operators,"** by Frank Gibney (Harper, 275 pp. \$3.95), catalogues the sins in what the author calls "The Genial Society." Howard S. Becker is a sociologist now engaged in studies of college life with Community Studies, Inc., of Kansas City, Missouri.

By Howard S. Becker

**T**HE RELATION between public and private morality is a fascinating subject of study. Society will allow substantial amounts of "immorality" to take place as long as they do not take place publicly. Once publicity's spotlight seeks out the immoral act, however, we begin to feel that something ought to be done about it, and generally something is done. Policemen make arrests, grand juries return indictments, juries convict, Congressional committees investigate; all the apparatus of law-making and law enforcement turns on the offender. But this happens only if there is publicity; if people do not publicly flout accepted moral codes, nothing happens.

The French sociologist Durkheim explained many years ago that violations of the moral code which become public must be punished if we wish to keep the code itself alive. Rules, once publicly violated, cease to be effective rules. Mr. Gibney contends, in his compendium of wrongdoing in America, that we are approaching some such state of disorganization. People publicly accept levels of crime and fraud so high that the distinction between them and moral behavior is disappearing. The "Operators" of his book's title are the vanguard of this quiet revolution, the men who have lost the sense of what is right and wrong and take illegal profit where and when they find it. The rest of us, who have not yet

reached "Operatorhood," stand by helpless and unconcerned, made impotent by our entanglement in the bland mess of pleasure and security-seeking that Gibney calls "The Genial Society."

Most of "The Operators" consists of a cataloguing of familiar sins. Advertisers lie about their products and prices. Salesmen use various devices to sell unsuspecting suburbanites cheap roofing and siding at exorbitant prices. Sales contracts for cars, homes, and appliances prove to have hidden gimmicks to trap the unwary. Unscrupulous promoters peddle drugs which are claimed to, but do not, cut your weight, cure your arthritis, reshape your bust. Stock swindlers milk millions of dollars in worthless stock by long distance telephone. Bogus real estate brokers take commissions for sales they never make. People pass bad checks and make fraudulent accident claims. Expense account cheating and income tax evasion provide the substance on which many an executive's way of life depends.

Unfortunately, "The Operators" does not go very far down either of the roads that might have made it a worth-while



"This is X-236. There's been a big revival of Bertolt Brecht among the liberal intelligentsia. Shall I claim he took Payola?"

contribution to the literature on such matters. It is not a serious consideration of the social and psychological conditions under which morality begins to decay. Such attempts at social analysis as are made are no more sophisticated than the textbooks which point out to college freshmen that a man may go piously to church on Sunday and cheat his business associates on Monday.

Nor is "The Operators" the kind of good reportage that is, after all, frequent in writing about crime and is to my mind one of the most enjoyable kinds of popular literature. Most of the cases discussed are familiar, and you will learn nothing more about them here than you already knew after reading your newspaper or listening to radio and television accounts. There is none of the careful detail that lets you see the operation from the criminal's perspective, then from the victim's perspec-

tive; we see things only from Mr. Gibney's perspective.

After reading David Maurer's description of the big con games, one felt equipped to go forth and do likewise. St. Clair McKelway's account of Mr. 880 provided a firm undergraduate training in monetary mischief. "The Operators" nowhere provides this kind of detailed knowledge and suffers thereby. Warned-over newspaper stories are not a substitute for careful research, intimate knowledge, and clear, explanatory prose.

The big questions involved in Mr. Gibney's subject matter—how various states of public morality come to be and how the public morality affects the life of the society—are not answered by this book. But answers to questions like that come hard. A more limited and just criticism is that the questions are barely raised.

## Hypotheses for Homicide

*"The Mind of the Murderer," by Manfred S. Guttmacher (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. 239 pp. \$4.50), and "A Study of Murder," by Stuart Palmer (Crowell. 239 pp. \$4.95), seem to agree that childhood frustration frequently leads later in life to violent crime. Ralph S. Banay, the author of "We Call Them Criminals," is medical director of the Civic Center Clinic, an institution for rehabilitation of offenders.*

By Ralph S. Banay

ARE WE living in a state of chronic emotional turmoil and fatigue? For a fillip in our feelings, do we require the tense, terrifying twist of homicide? Otherwise, why should we as a nation be so engrossed in the abstract idea of violent death?

Bookstores are gorged with mystery thrillers and other volumes dealing with the mystique of sudden extinction. An exciting murder case can actually eclipse international tensions in the news almost any day. Inside the prisons, among the convicts, murderers are regarded with deference, while in the outside world the life story of a killer makes sensational reading.

Murder is no more frequent now than in the time of Caligula, but there are more murderers. The circumstances of modern life give more people an op-

portunity to vent their emotions in an uninhibited manner and act out their hate. Of some 8,500 yearly homicides in this country the majority of the killers are juridically found not to be mentally ill. But can one reasonably assume that any murderer is a sound person?

Two recent books, one by a psychiatrist with long clinical experience, the other by a University of New Hampshire sociologist, appear to agree that early frustrations in the lives of children account for a large proportion of violent crime.

Dr. Guttmacher's "The Mind of the Murderer" is a good indicator of the usefulness of the scientific approach. As director of the Supreme Court's Clinic in Baltimore, he has provided psychiatric advice and guidance to the courts in their adjudication of criminal cases, and he has also served the broader interest of medical jurisprudence by accumulating knowledge of the circumstances of criminal behavior and by fostering therapeutic help for those offenders who may be rehabilitated.

"The Mind of the Murderer" consists mainly of Isaac Ray Lectures delivered at the University of Minnesota in 1958. The lecture format both enhances and detracts from the book's impact; its conversational style commends it to the general reader, but from the research standpoint the discussion becomes fragmentary. The illustrative cases, however, are vivid, providing capsule stories of murder in the raw that pale much comparable fiction. To these Dr.

Guttmacher appends his analysis and comments on their medical and social implications. Only about half of the book is devoted to murder. The rest consists of a survey of discussions of the forensic problems involved in medical testimony in criminal and civil cases and in the privileges and responsibilities of the doctor-patient relationship.

Of the 175 murderers considered by Dr. Guttmacher, seventy were classified as mentally ill or seriously abnormal persons. The 105 other defendants were declared to be legally sane. The author acknowledges reservations about drawing conclusions from his data; the nature of the cases strongly suggests regional characteristics that would vary from a more universal sampling. A further reservation seems necessary in view of his emphasis on the role of frustration in the psychogenesis of murder. He gives only scant attention to organic factors, an area that other clinicians are finding increasingly important.

In "A Study of Murder" Stuart Palmer uses the sociologist's statistically oriented approach in his endeavor to identify and analyze predominant factors in the lives of people who have killed. His study is based upon the cases of fifty-one men convicted of murder, with particular attention to their environmental setting and the family influences that contributed to the development of their personalities. However, the study's objectivity is modified by the fact that it was undertaken to test the hypothesis that there is a connection between frustrations suffered in childhood and murders committed in adolescence and adulthood. Mr. Palmer does examine and discuss other factors in the total situation, but he does so rather cursorily, leaving the impression that the frustration factor is dominant.

From interviews with the mothers of the convicted murderers Mr. Palmer adduces some significant data: that twenty-eight of the fifty-one mothers reported childbirth difficulties, implying a chain of negative circumstances in their relationships with their sons; that nineteen of the sons had undergone major surgery and many of them had had serious illnesses, including fourteen who gave evidence of epilepsy; that twenty-three of them had suffered serious accidents, usually involving head injuries. By setting up a comparative control group of the subjects' nearest brothers, he shows that these casualties of childhood were markedly more frequent among the murderers than among the others. However, the hypothesis that Mr. Palmer draws—as in his contention that the earlier in life a frustrating experience occurs, the more likely it is to lead to violent aggressive action later—may be vitiated by the regional