

Time 2/19/66
Heavenly Bogeys

FLYING SAUCERS—SERIOUS BUSINESS
 by Frank Edwards. 319 pages. Lyle Stuart.
 \$5.95.

INCIDENT AT EXETER—UNIDENTIFIED
 FLYING OBJECTS OVER AMERICA NOW
 by John G. Fuller. 251 pages. Putnam.
 \$5.95.

Unlikely as it seems, Unidentified Flying Objects (unlikely as they are) may well have resolved the conflict between religion and science.

Religion, by one Webster definition, is the object of a pursuit arousing "religious convictions and feelings such as great faith, devotion, or fervor," and science, by another Webster definition, is "accumulated and accepted knowledge which has been systematized." The two come together in the field of the UFO, where writers on the subject certainly show great faith, devotion and fervor in their efforts to have the objects regarded as part of accepted and accumulated knowledge.

Frank Edwards, a sometime radio commentator, is perhaps the most fervently devout believer in UFOs, not as mere meteoric oddities or psychic phenomena but as the creations of technically superior beings from parts unknown. His evangelistic style is homiletic, catechetical and religious in tone (the promise of an unprecedented revelation to the merely human race has the strangest effect on the nonbeliever). At any rate, the mixture of science and religion is curious, as if Billy Sunday had undertaken a sermon on the subject of the binomial theorem.

"The day of the denouement cannot be far away," Edwards warns. But before the reader is quite prepared to meet this day, he must accept a weird record of incidents in which hundreds of people at different times and in different parts of the world have seen *something* buzzing about in the sky, silently or with a low humming, shining by day or glowing by night, scorching the earth or disturbing the water under its burnished bottom, sometimes plunging into the sea or a river, but mostly zooming off, presumably back to where it came from.

Sleight of Hand. Only the most bigoted proponents of the doctrine of common sense will dismiss these "sightings" as illusory. On the other hand, only those unusually gifted with credulity will accept the Edwards account of them, which offers an explanation more unlikely than the phenomena. For example: "Why were there virtually no UFO sightings from 1926 to 1946?" Obviously "they" (the occupants of the UFOs) were improving the design, which seems to beg the question of whether the UFOs had occupants and were designed at all.

Edwards not only undertakes to ex-

plain UFOs as the work of extraterrestrial beings but, by a singular logical sleight of hand, uses UFOs to explain extraterrestrial beings. Thus UFOs can explain parts of the *Book of Genesis*, which admittedly takes some explaining. Those "angels" in *Genesis 19* were "not necessarily of celestial origin" but were some kind of space men, and the "giants in the earth in those days" who mated with women (*Genesis 6:4*) clearly refer to beings from out yonder.

With its wild notions of what constitutes evidence, Edwards' book compounds one mystery by creating others. Nor does it help his case for an imminent apocalypse to explain flaws in the brief by making the U.S. Air Force the villain of a conspiracy to suppress the truth; he believes that the Pentagon's reassuring statements about UFOs are designed to hoodwink the public into supposing that they are psychological, meteoric, or astral in origin. Nor is sinister Air Force activity confined to the U.S. "What," he asks, "was the mysterious substance that dribbled from a crippled disk over Brazil in 1954?" The Brazilian air force gathered it up and hid it away. (It may have been tin.) The Australian, French, and Indian air forces are also in cahoots with the U.S. Even the Kremlin is involved in a secret pact with the infidel against the UFOs.

Little Men. *Incident at Exeter*, by John G. Fuller, a columnist for the *Saturday Review*, is another saucer of flying fish. It simply records his interviews with witnesses at Exeter, N.H., after a glowing red object appeared over Route 150 at 2:24 a.m. on Sept. 3, 1965. Subsequently, Fuller himself

saw such a UFO outside the town, and his report is that of a believer, or rather a convert. He writes in documentary style, following the grammar and non sequiturs of his tape recorder, and his work has the police-blotter awkwardness of one who wishes to convince by sincerity rather than to persuade by fine writing.

The ontological status of UFOs is not much furthered by either Edwards or Fuller. The ghostly visitations over that swamp near Ann Arbor, Mich., last March happened too recently to have been included in either book, but sincere testimony to the miracles of the space age abound like grace. Samples: Intrepid small boys with .22 rifles near Rio Vista, Calif., last December got in some shots at a UFO hanging about the town water tower and extorted a satisfactory *twang* and an angry red glow from the visitor. Some Italian farmers pelted a UFO near Milan in October 1954 with rotten oranges, scoring, they claimed, some hits. They did not hit any of the little men, who were about 4 ft. high, wore light-colored pants, helmets and other equipment, and were "scurrying" about. UFOs were bigger and "hideous" in the sighting that was vouchsafed to Farmer Alexander Hamilton, of LeRoy, Kans., in April 1897. The hideous humanoids stole his heifer, hauled it aboard their "airship," and, "jabbering together," sailed away. "I don't want anything more to do with them," concluded Hamilton's affidavit. Most people would echo Hamilton's heartfelt prayer in the spirit of those who do not believe in ghosts and hope never to see one.

As it happens, the Air Force, which feels pretty much the same way, is playing it safe and plans to award a \$300,000 grant to a university for



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"I SAY IF THEY KEEP TOSsing HARDWARE UP HERE, WE KEEP BUZZING THEIR SWAMPS"

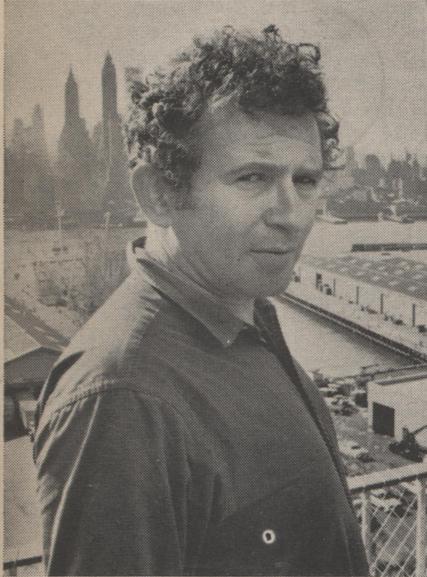
further UFO studies. But until UFOs decide to show up, stay, and give some account of themselves, the majority of mankind, who, like Hamlet, think that they can tell a hawk from a handsaw when the wind is right, can be pardoned for withholding judgment.

Feeling the Truth

CANNIBALS AND CHRISTIANS by Norman Mailer. [redacted] pages. Dial. \$5.95.

Norman Mailer writes so obsessively, and says so many silly things, that the crowds he draws have learned to come with their pockets full of ripe eggs. He makes an irresistible target, like a Hyde Park orator who seems to ask for, if

HENRY GROSSMAN



NORMAN MAILER
[redacted] of the men's room.

not necessarily to deserve, just what he gets. It is worth noting, however, that he always gets a crowd.

The literary firing line will probably pepper his latest book, which presents targets in gratifying profusion. *Cannibals and Christians* is mostly warmed-over Mailer: a scatter of pseudo poems (he calls them "short hairs"), essays, dialectic, sermonizing, book reviews, literary criticism and political reportage. The principal new material is some italicized mortar troweled in to support the notion that this pile of used bricks rose and took form from a blueprint, which of course it did not.

His short hairs are best ignored. His excursions into philosophy, all taken in Jean-Paul Sartre's second-class compartment, begin at the level of the college bull session and follow a descending route. "*Coitus interruptus* is evil," announces Mailer in the course of a *Playboy* magazine panel discussion on sex. Food has a soul, he writes; fresh food has more soul than canned food. Terminal cancer cases can be arrested by reading William Burroughs: "Bet money on that." The now-notorious Mailer sense of smell, which got such a bloodhound workout in his last novel, *An*

American Dream, now concentrates on the bowel: man's nature, he says, can be divined in "the color, the shape, the odor and the movement" of his stool.

The reader must wade through yards and yards of such silly stuff to find anything really worth rereading: a devastatingly unchivalrous—and perceptive—examination of Mary McCarthy's *The Group*, an equally perceptive report on the 1964 Republican National Convention, a quick survey of contemporary fiction that should rank Mailer among the better critics today.

If he is also self-indulgent ("Some of the best prose in America is *graffiti* found on men's-room walls"), it is probably because, as he says, "I feel the truth of the thing first and discover the explanations later." Such candor is hard to ignore.

The Author as Character

WRITER BY TRADE: A PORTRAIT OF ARNOLD BENNETT by Dudley Barker. 260 pages. Atheneum. \$6.50.

At the time of his death at 63 in 1931, Arnold Bennett was the ruler of Britain's literary roost. He was not only the author of 70-odd volumes of novels, plays and other assorted pieces, but the one literary critic in London whose Olympian deliberations (in the *London Evening Standard*) were regarded as absolute gospel.

Whether Bennett himself was a good or bad writer was a judgment that his sometimes awed, often contemptuous contemporaries were never able to make. Partly it was because his physical presence was so overwhelming. He was a strutting cockatoo of a man, resplendently tailored, grey hair swept up into a crest, wit as sharp as a honed spur, manner as crude as a clod. Fascinated by the combination of the baroque and the bumptious of the man, Rebecca West once wondered if it would not be better to judge Bennett as a character rather than an author. "He could not be compared properly with Fielding, or Dickens, or Balzac," she said, "but he could be compared with Squire Western, or Mr. Micawber, or Lucien de Rubempré." The posthumous publication of parts of his own remarkable million-word *Journal*, moreover, only added to the popular caricature of him as a fop, a snob, and a frightened little poseur hiding behind bombast and a vulgar cocksureness.

Slum Child. But the author of *Anna of the Five Towns*, *The Old Wives' Tale*, the *Clayhanger* trilogy and *Riceman Steps* was also a superb storyteller and a literary innovator, a Dickens shorn of romanticism. By imposing on the sentimental Edwardian fabric the realistic techniques he had absorbed from such French masters as Goncourt, Flaubert, Maupassant and Turgenev (whom he insisted on calling French because it was in that language that he read him), Bennett became the first popular novelist of his time to tell of the

actual lives of recognizable people in words that ordinary readers could understand. This was not a happy accident. Beneath the fop, as British biographer Dudley Barker shows, was a dedicated and gifted literary craftsman. He wanted to write good books, and make money—in that order—and he forever respected and tried to improve his art. As a young writer, he set himself the task of producing 1,000 words a day, and for most of his 40 productive years he somehow managed to maintain that rate.

Bennett was a child of the Midland slums, the son of a domineering and ambitious pawnbroker father who eventually became a fairly prosperous solicitor. Handicapped by a stammer that in



ARNOLD BENNETT
Cockatoo can do.

childhood made him jerk epileptically and bite the air, he grew up painfully shy and covered his shyness with the show-off's mantle. He was as frugal as a ragpicker, carefully kept a record of each shilling tip, constantly worried about money.

Master Nagger. Although he married at 39, and lived with his wife for 15 years, Bennett was neither a happy husband nor a good one. Compulsively punctual, always suffering torments from a variety of ailments from neuralgia to colic, he begrudged every moment spent away from his work. He was a master nagger; once, when his wife moved the piano in the living room by a few inches, he wrote her a four-page letter of reprimand.

Eventually, Bennett and his wife separated. During the last eight years of his life he lived with a young actress named Dorothy Cheston, who bore him a daughter. Although he seemed to find a special glory in the notoriety of having a mistress, his life with her was otherwise as proper and well-regulated as any conventional marriage. Dorothy was with Bennett as he lay dying in his London flat. Clasp her hand, he muttered, "Everything's going wrong."