



SHORT REVIEWS: BOOKS

by Phoebe Adams

SEXUAL SUICIDE by George F. Gilder. Quadrangle, \$7.95. It would be easy to poke fun at Mr. Gilder's dissertation on the nature of the sexes and women's proper role, for it is a freaky reversal of the Victorian claim that women are too delicate, too spiritual, to be subjected to contact with the mean realities of nondomestic life. Mr. Gilder argues that men are so inferior sexually, and so permanently terrified by the fact, that without the domesticating control and encouragement by women they would all collapse into suicide, madness, murder, and sloth. Therefore women should remain domestic. (He has, it seems, not noticed that his description of men, if taken seriously, indicates precisely the line of action that he fears: keep a few good studs for emergencies and incite the rest of the worthless creatures to exterminate each other. The superior sex, surviving, can be domestic or not, as they choose, but will not be obliged to spend their lives, willy-nilly, as caretakers to dangerous lunatics.) But in spite of some curious reasoning and a splendidly unrealistic view of economics, Mr. Gilder's book is interesting. He writes well. On some points he is very shrewd indeed. And at bottom he is propounding, however torturously, the sensible notion that men and women are equally valuable, both to each other and to a truly well-functioning society—a category in which he does not include the current patriarchal state of our affairs.

STRONG OPINIONS by Vladimir Nabokov. McGraw-Hill, \$7.95. Mr. Nabokov has collected his answers to interviewers' questions, letters to editors, and remarks on this and that, frequently testy. The items are often outrageous and the mixture is always a delight.

RIDING THE RAILS by Michael Mathers. Gambit, \$9.95. In 1964, Mr. Mathers, just out of high school, climbed aboard a railroad gondola partially loaded with metal

pipe. The cargo shifted and nearly scared the life out of him, but did not cure his itch to ride the rails. His book combines a self-effacing description of life on the road with his excellent photographs of hobos and selections from their gravelly conversation, tape-recorded with permission. An astonishing achievement, both for the quantity of the material and the piquant mingling of sordidness and romance.

THE MAN TO SEND RAIN CLOUDS edited by Kenneth Rosen. Viking, \$6.95. Mr. Rosen has hunted down short stories by American Indians, which he reports are not at all easy to find, and offers a collection of them. They are all interesting, if mostly somewhat melancholy. (Hardly surprising.) The subject matter ranges from murder described with icy detachment to an entanglement of nephew, uncle, and goat, where the comedy is slapstick and the sentiment delicate as a soap bubble. Illustrations by R. C. Gorman and Aaron Yava.

CONSTABLE by Basil Taylor. Phaidon, \$25.00. Anyone who considers Constable merely a placid painter of pretty landscapes is mistaken, as Mr. Taylor convincingly demonstrates. A handsome, readable, informative book with 30 color plates, black and whites, index, and notes.

CATHARINE BEECHER by Kathryn Kish Sklar. Yale University Press, \$12.50. As a pioneer in education for women, an inventive social philosopher, and a persistent tinkerer with Calvinist doctrine, Catharine Beecher was an influential contributor to American thought in the nineteenth century, and therefore to the development of ideas into our own time. Her story should be fascinating and would be if the author did not present it in a form that can be described, with a bit of charity, as excessively academic. Amusing material, no matter how relevant (and since Miss Beecher was something of a comedian, much of it is relevant) goes in the notes, which make better reading than the main text.

THE MAN WHO LIKED TO LOOK AT HIMSELF by K. C. Constantine. Saturday Review Press, \$5.95. Murder

in a small Pennsylvania town. The plot is satisfactory, but the book's distinction lies in slapdash police work and rasping colloquial dialogue.

THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS by Erich Fromm. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, \$10.95. The author describes his examination of "the lust to kill for killing's sake" as "written for the layman who wants to know what is going on in the world today, who is concerned about present-day destructiveness and what can be done about it, and who is interested in everything that concerns man—his development and his history." This is as accurate as a short description of a complicated work can be. One can only add that Dr. Fromm is an original thinker, that his analysis of the causes of destructiveness is unique, and that he has an enviable skill in the lucid presentation of intricate material.

A TOWN IS SAVED . . . by Marvin Mort and Charles E. Little. Sierra Club, \$19.95. Beautiful book, as usual from this source. Color photographs of the weeds and the wilderness still to be found in and around cities, by Mr. Mort. Text on the need to preserve these oases, by Mr. Little.

BRUEGEL by F. Grossmann. Phaidon, \$22.50. Revised edition, since new material has turned up, of a scholarly survey of all the surviving work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Notes, index of collections, half-tones, 32 color plates.

EARTHWATCH: Notes on a Restless Planet by Jean and Daniel Shepard. Doubleday, \$8.95. The Smithsonian Institution maintains an outfit called the Center for Short-Lived Phenomena, which keeps track of such matters as volcanic eruptions, butterfly migrations, alleged extraterrestrial visitors, vanishing species, and surviving stone age tribes, unexpectedly discovered. The book which the Shepards have put together from the Center's records is a hodgepodge of the terrifying, the puzzling, and the plain absurd. In the end it produces the impression that geological peace and quiet, when they occur, should be viewed as convenient abnormalities. Illustrations.