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BOOKS

(continued from previous page)

man's magnificence. Nicholas took Anna back to his mid-middle-class England and they were married. But Anna, a Juno from Iceland with a strong and distressing taste for absolutes and perfections, found herself to be a foreigner, and her husband a rather ordinary man with a rather ordinary job. (Juno and the Pay-clerk would have served as one sort of title.) She retained, however, her belief in him, and in the grandeur they had found together in Greece—their Eternal Moment.

Mr Coates has two themes here that allow him to explore a great variety of human relationships and class conventions. He doesn't quite bring it off, but it would have taken someone of D. H. Lawrence's genius to do that; and it's certainly Mr Coates's best novel so far and a very brilliant near-miss that is worth all his other direct hits on smaller targets.

So Help Me God is at once a novel and a tract for our times. It might be read as a warning against thinking that McCarthyism died with the Senator. Spencer Donovan, a "controversial figure," anonymously informs against himself as Communist and Russian agent; draws down upon himself the hysterical attentions of the witch-hunters, in an attempt to show, by his own example, that an innocent man can be ruined, privately and professionally, by such a baseless and anonymous charge. It's a tonic novel; and there can be no doubt that its atmosphere is authentic. It is also well written and quite dramatically contrived.

This isn't true, unfortunately, of *Stay the Execution*, where Mr Nash, with what are undoubtedly genuine feelings about his subject, makes a rather lightweight novel out of what is a heavy-weight and very complex subject. For where the A.D.C. to the Governor of an island under martial law finds his loyalties divided between the rebels and the patrolling authorities, there we surely have a situation that can't be dealt with lightly; and when that A.D.C. is revealed to have sworn some rare oath of brotherhood with the man who is leader of the rebel organisation we see that this novel is confusing the splash of thriller writing with the rather less spectacular analysis of tension and indecision. *Stay the Execution* describes, and nowhere does it attempt the more difficult task of communicating, its emotions.

A Tale of Three Places is a long tale indeed; much too long. It's a tale of Trinidad, and Trinidadians abroad. But what the publishers call "a wealth of character and incidents" seems more a light squandering to little purpose. What all those women can have seen in prudish little Alf Desseau, it's hard to say; and why he should think it a virtue to say no and mean yes, is just as difficult to understand. And how, anyway, did he get the reputation of being prudish? It's a dull book, with beds everywhere; but this reader quite happily fell asleep in his chair.

—M.D.

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