

Books of The Times

Good News!

By ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

ACCORDING to the aphorism, only bad news is news. Happily, there are exceptions. Today's news—book news, that is—is good news, which may be especially welcome considering the date—Jan. 2, or the morning following the day after the night before.

Part of the good news consists of the fact that more than one book will be published in 1967—which may be taken as a timely reminder or a little lesson in perspective. While we are waiting for whatever tidbits may remain in William Manchester's "The Death of a President" that haven't already been leaked or summarized in the press (the book is now scheduled for April publication; Look magazine's serialization starts next week, in case you spent the holidays asleep or otherwise blanked out), a great many other titles worth attention will be appearing. In fact, one cannot readily recall so promising a season in books as the one now beginning. And that's the other, and major, part of the good news.

What follows are some of the literary highlights—promises only, but they glitter—among the imaginative and critical books to be published during the winter and early spring of 1967. The offerings in fiction appear particularly rich, varied and enticing, ranging from Robert Murphy's evocative novel, "A Certain Island," about a boy and five species of birds threatened with extinction on a Pacific atoll, to David Lodge's spoof on human procreation and attendant theological conundrums, "The British Museum Is Falling Down," to Robert Shaw's "The Man in the Glass Booth," which will remind many of the trial of Adolf Eichmann.

Inspiration of Past Lives

Past events or lives serve as the inspirational basis of several forthcoming novels. Among them are Herbert Gold's autobiographical "Fathers"; Alvah Bessie's "The Symbol," about an actress who might have been named Marilyn Monroe; "The Archduke," Michael Arnold's fictional revisit to that apparently inexhaustible fount of romantic tragedy, Mayerling, and Vance Bourjaily's novel about some personal effects of the assassination, "The Man Who Knew Kennedy."

The espionage-fantasy, politics-world disaster craze is still with us (when wasn't it?), and the novels of the genre one may want to get cozy with this winter include: "One of Us Works for Them" (counterintelligence harbors a countercounterespionage) by Jack D. Hunter; "The Scorpions" (a psychiatrist on the hunt for the ultraviolet men) by Robert Kelly; "Taint of Innocence" (the C.I.A., Arabs, oil and ethics) by Marquis Childs; "The Ninth Directive" (the eighth, perhaps, was the Quiller memorandum) by Adam Hall; "An Expensive Place to Die" (how do we tell the Chinese about the bomb's terrible secret?) by Len Deighton; "The February Plan" (the superpatriots take over) by James Hall Roberts, and "Colossus" (the patriots fink out, so computers take over) by D. F. Jones.

What happens to spies when they get caught? If they are lucky, they go to prison. Prison (though not spies)—the prison life, what it is like, what it means—is the subject of three promising novels, one American,

"The Riot," by Frank Elli; one Italian, "The Transfer," by Silvano Ceccherini; and one French, "The Miracle of the Rose," by Jean Genet. And if one can consider a country that has known 30 years of dictatorship as comparable to a prison, the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo's collection of stories, "The Party's Over," may be added to the category.

Prison may also be the circumstances of being down and out; the imagination becomes the key to freedom, or to a new and nightmarish entrapment. The theme is explored in Genet's book; it is also explored in the late Louis-Ferdinand Céline's stylistically influential novel of the 1930's, "Death on the Installment Plan," which is being brought out in a new and unexpurgated translation by Ralph Manheim.

And There Are Others

This takes one only part way through the list of what's coming early this year that looks outstanding. In addition there is Philip Roth's long-awaited new novel, "When She Was Good"; Arthur A. Cohen's first novel, "The Carpenter Years," about the pains of religious conversion; Peter Israel's stylistically challenging "The Hen's House"; "Out of Hiding," William J. Weatherby's novel about an African who comes to a new understanding of America's and his own racial situation (another novel on the racial scene is Ann Fairbain's just-published "Five Smooth Stones," which seems already headed for best-sellerdom); Robert T. Crowley's "Not Soldiers All," which recalls World War II in Italy; Janice Elliott's (Virginia) Woolfian exploration of a woman's soul, "The Godmother," and James Salter's graphic bedroom report of a Franco-American misalliance, "A Sport and a Pastime," latest in The Paris Review series of books.

Enough? Well, there's more. There is a new collection of short stories by Richard McKenna, and there are novels by Geoffrey Household, John Masters, Stanley Ellin, Elia Kazan, David Garnett, Edna O'Brien and others. There are also at least three important books of poetry—"Near the Ocean" by Robert Lowell, "The Ikons, and Other Poems" by Lawrence Durrell and "Collected Poems of Kieth Douglas."

In literary essays, appraisals and autobiography (reconstructed and not), a highlight-sampling would include Thomas C. Chubb's "Dante and His World"; three volumes of "The Mark Twain Papers" edited by Henry Nash Smith and Walter Blair; "The Company She Kept" by Doris Grumbach ("she" is Mary McCarthy; the "company" is Miss McCarthy's fictional characters and/or real-life inspirations); "A critique of Agatha Christie" by G. C. Ramsey; Vladimir Nabokov's revised and augmented "Speak, Memory"; "Myself" by Sylvia Ashton-Warner; "The Cry of the Clown," a study of theater by Walter Kerr; "The Death of Tinker Bell: The American Theatre in the 20th Century" by Joseph Golden; "The Medium Is the Massage" (sic) by the oracular communications comedian Marshall McLuhan, with Quentin Fiore, and what is my own favorite sure-fire title so far of 1967, "The Big Swingers" by Robert Fenton, a study of Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan and the apes.

All of which adds up to quite a literary toot for a happy new year. As of now, anyway, it looks just fine.