

Criminal Record

Fact

American Grotesque. By James Kirkwood. Simon & Schuster. \$11.95. Clay Shaw, a prominent New Orleans businessman, was charged by Jim Garrison, that city's district attorney, with conspiring to assassinate President John F. Kennedy. James Kirkwood went down South for the trial, which he recreates with an excellent reporter's eye for details large and small. Credit him with working like the devil to be objective throughout, but his admitted friendship for Clay Shaw robs the book of necessary impartiality.

Fiction

Passenger to Frankfurt. By Agatha Christie. Dodd, Mead. \$5.95. Two people meet at the Frankfurt airport. He is a British diplomat returning to London; she says her life depends on his loaning her his passport and his hooded cloak to conceal her sex. It makes a promising beginning, and the idea of an international plot for world control is worthy, but all it adds up to is talk, more talk, interminable talk. A major disappointment from this world-famous mystery writer.

The Curse of the Conculens. By Florence Stevenson. World. \$6.95. Lucinda Bellemore Ayers worships Jane Eyre and would like to emulate her. Her chance comes when she is engaged as governess at O'Hagan's Keep, where the Conculens live life as best they can while plagued by vampires, a banshee, and a curse. Needless to say, this is a spoof of the Gothic novel, and the author has done a nice, genteel job of poking fun. For true Gothic horror, however; take a look at the publisher's price for a novel that runs a mere 143 pages.

A Plague of Violence. By Hugh Pentecost. Dodd, Mead. \$4.50. The plague begins in Connecticut, with someone taking pot shots at visiting artist-detective John Jericho. The incident escalates into a police raid—and a death—at a hippie commune, followed by two murders that might be retaliatory. Jericho has to work fast to solve the killings before the countryside turns into a battlefield. Author Pentecost, who has constructed a knockout thriller, moves so swiftly that his ending, though satisfactory, seems a bit too pat.

The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes. Edited by Hugh Greene. Pantheon. \$6.95. Ar-

thur Conan Doyle may have been the big news from 1891 to 1914, but he was not the only man writing mysteries at the time. Herewith, a collection of thirteen stories (by such as Max Pemberton, Baroness Orczy, R. Austin Freeman, etc.) that do not deserve to disappear under the giant shadow cast by Sherlock Holmes. Vintage fun.

Do Not Fold, Spindle or Mutilate. By Doris Miles Disney. Doubleday. \$4.50. To amuse her bridge-club chums, a silly old maid invents a young lady for a computer-dating questionnaire, just to see what happens. What happens is that she gets herself knocked off by a psychopath who thought he had been rejected by the nonexistent girl. And then he discovers a woman who bears the name and answers to the description of the one who refuses to date him. Miss Disney has come up with a slight but pleasant evening's reading that should please her fans, but will make her highly unpopular with exponents of computer dating as the way to lasting happiness.

The Murderer Vine. By Shepard Rifkin. Dodd, Mead. \$5.95. A millionaire's son, along with two other civil rights workers, is believed to have been murdered in the Deep South. The father offers a private detective a fortune to obtain proof of murder and to kill the five men he thinks committed it. How the detective goes about his work (there are special problems connected with being a Yankee down South) and what results make for a fascinating novel.

Occasionally Shepard Rifkin can't resist showing off his erudition, which sidetracks the story for several paragraphs at a time, but this is a minor carp about an otherwise solidly plotted, thoroughly engrossing work.

It Never Rains in Los Angeles. By Charles Flowers. Coward-McCann. \$5.95. A black radical leader is found murdered in a Los Angeles high school. Racial tension runs high, and the school is marked for violence unless a white liberal journalism teacher catches the murderer quickly. The author's intent seems to be something more profound than mere murder mystery fare, and he obviously impressed the judges of the Thomas R. Coward Memorial Award, who gave him their \$15,000 prize for 1970. To this non-awardee, he sounds like just another honky trying to get with it, and the Flowers style ("The brown afternoon turned yellow in the stale urine of the air . . .") is occasionally so flowery as to turn off any reader, regardless of race, creed, or national origin.

Haskel Frankel