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FICTION

POINTERS:

*Books of uncommon
merit, interest, or
popular appeal.*

There's nothing like experience—as proven once again by three practiced, honed talents:

- ▲ Oakley Hall leaves his ski slopes and other contemporary locales to return to the feuds and fury of the Old West—and he has never sounded better than he does out in the Dakotas, on *THE BAD LANDS* (Atheneum).
- ▲ Gail Godwin has quietly been developing a cool but involving style (*The Odd Woman*)—and it seems the perfect tone for writing about *VIOLET CLAY* (Knopf), a painter who does the jackets for Gothics but knows that's not quite the thing for *The Young Woman as Artist*.
- ▲ And then there's Bernice Rubens, who wins prizes in England but is not exactly a household name over here. *I SENT A LETTER TO MY LOVE* (St. Martin's) should help to rectify the situation.

Avery, Ira
*THE MIRACLE OF
DOMMATINA*
Putnam \$7.95
5/23 SBN: 399-12006-8

One of those mild, chaste little tortois, heart-shaped and Woolworth sweet, set in a remote Italian village and fitted out with: the obligatory ornately expedient mayor; a good guy priest; slyly pragmatic townsfolk (with strained syntax); a crippled boy whose faith in miracles is tested; and an American coming-apart couple, Pete and Donna. The tiny village of Dommatina is about to celebrate its annual tribute to the legendary visit of St. Demetrio—who once caused a young boy to fly. There's feasting and fireworks ready and a squadron of youngsters flying on ropes. But a Bishop, on the prowl for archaic observances, orders the festival discontinued for lack of saint's-evidence. Townsfolk revolt. Mass excommunication. No miracle for wee cripple 'Gilio. But! Enter changes of heart—on the part of the clergy and then Pete and Donna, who have tuned in to larger verities than bad-mouthing Italy (Pete's specialty) and each other. All hands belly up to niceness, 'Gilio is headed for that sure-fire operation, and Dommatina's coffers fill with tourists' lira. Holy water, fingerbowl style—tepid but non-toxic.

Schiller, Craig
 THE (GUILTY)
 CONSCIENCE OF
 A CONSERVATIVE
 Arlington House \$8.95
 6/1 LC: 78-1297
 SBN: 87000-383-6

Prune away the flowery rhetoric, and you'll find a barren analysis of the Right. A short essay in *National Review* would have sufficed to convey Schiller's two unremarkable ideas that American "traditionalists" would fare better politically if they articulated their philosophy clearly and phrased it in positive, appealing terms. For example, do not say "We are anti-Communist." Say "Communism subordinates men to the state." And do not say "Welfare is bad." Say "The Western tradition of self-reliance and minimal government is good." If Schiller had done these things, his work would have some point; as it stands, the book is one long and obvious suggestion. For the historian of conservatism, the book does discuss the presidential bids of Landon, Taft, Goldwater, and Reagan; there is also a numbing dissection of the types of conservatism from the "metaphysical" variety, which defends the status quo because it is divinely-ordained, to the "historical" brand, which maintains that social structures which have been proven to work should not be cavalierly razed. Schiller's "drift" theory of postwar American conservatism is an interesting idea; he claims the 1978 conservative is ideologically identical to the 1958 liberal not out of conviction, but out of the necessity to drift leftward with the nation to maintain political relevance. But these are all obiter dicta. The book's main purpose, to unite the Right by articulating the conservative philosophy, is lost because Schiller achieves no such articulation.

Seligman, Joel with
 Lynne Bernabei
 THE HIGH CITADEL:
 On the Influence of
 Harvard Law School
 Houghton Mifflin \$10.95
 4/28 SBN: 395-26301-0

An overblown title and subtitle for what is essentially an intramural attack—and a perfectly sound one—on the curricula, admission policies, teaching methods, and underlying philosophy of Harvard Law School. Ralph Nader disciple Seligman first traces the history of Harvard's conservative, ivory-towerish, case-oriented, pure-reasoning-oriented style—spawned by the 19th century's C. C. Langdell and reinforced by the 20th century's Erwin Griswold, who left the "nation's most prestigious trade school" behind him when he retired in the mid-Sixties. Then Seligman takes on the current status quo in admissions ("a meritocracy of the few"), faculty (too many corporate types and Harvard grads, too few former D.A.'s), curricula (not enough clinical training, not enough broad intellectual and socio-economic enlightenment), grading, placement, etc. All well and good—if not particularly surprising. But what about that titular "influence"? Well, "it is the extent to which other law schools continue to emulate Harvard that constitutes the School's most significant influence." Seligman admits, however, that "the ameliorative efforts of any single school . . . in the long run are unlikely to be significant." Moreover, his basic drift—that changing the nature of law schools would alter the unfair nature of legal representation—seems a naive and backwards approach to the inequities of a capitalist system. Certainly he overestimates the "extraordinary capacity to influence law students' career decisions that law schools and their faculties possess." (Does he really believe that Harvard graduates go after big-money corporate jobs largely because they've "listened to their professors recount experiences at leading firms. . .") To make a convincing case that law schools *don't* (or shouldn't) simply provide the kind of lawyers that society is asking for, Seligman would have to study more than just one law school and would have to chart that law school "influence" with far more conviction than he does here.

Seligson, Marcia
 OPTIONS: A Personal
 Expedition Through
 the Sexual Frontier
 Random House \$8.95
 5/21 LC: 77-90292
 SBN: 394-42587-1

Research into the nature of alternative lifestyles by a writer whose preoccupation with polygamous sex has brought her (and in consequence, us) to this sorry pass: a trip to Sandstone, a California touchy-feely retreat, at which wall-to-wall mattresses and a commitment to "personal enrichment" (read: sex and voyeurism) lead to weekend orgies for a \$40 fee. Our author was shocked on her first visit. Some five years later, after much of the "research" for this grubby little volume had been completed, she returns, participates, and tells us all about it. In the