

BOOK REVIEWS—cont.

police protection; and he appears to regard a police inspector's statement "In twenty-two years on the force, I have never witnessed an act of police brutality" as clearly incredible. All this is sobering and it is natural that by the side of it the crime seems less outrageous.

Judge Davidson says "The trial is over—but as far as the question of juvenile delinquency is concerned, the jury is still out". Though this does not mean anything it is expressive of Judge Davidson's deep concern, which was aroused by his experience of the trial. In an appendix he puts forward a plan to deal with what he calls "incipient juvenile delinquents"—boys from broken, poverty-stricken homes, of low IQ, with a record of truancy. His plan, for self-governing boys' communities, is now being studied by the New York State Youth Commission. Judges are as a rule most unimpressive when they talk about what should happen to people convicted in their courts. Judge Davidson is an exception; he has given his mind to a plan—"not a panacea: a start"—which might possibly save some from ever appearing before him.

A. PHILLIPS GRIFFITHS.

STREET WALKER

Anon

Bodley Head, 1959. pp.191. 12s. 6d.

"SCIENTIA non est individuorum". But the individual case can suggest scientific hypotheses. The author, we are told, is a young woman who for ten months was a prostitute in the West End of London; it seems that the book is essentially autobiographical, and that it is the lady's own work not the concoction

of ghost-writers. Before considering its scientific interest, therefore, it seems appropriate to look at the book's artistic merit. This is quite considerable. There is a clarity of prose style, a skilful invocation of atmosphere and near-poetic powers of observation. Presumably there has been some arrangement of material, and the result is a well-structured story—a traumatic experience with a client of unusual tastes drives her into the arms of a ponce, in complete reversal of her previous policy. The ponce's ill-treatment of her is itself traumatic, leading her to give up the game altogether, and incidentally to write this book. How much, if anything, of veracity has been sacrificed in the interests of literary streamlining or psychological self-defence we cannot, of course, know, and in any case it probably does not matter very much. In a book of this kind we are generally interested primarily in authenticity of atmosphere, and as has already been said, the writer's powers of invocation seem unusually high. Also very high are her powers of describing the various sub-groups which make up her underworld.

The book's chief merit is, in fact, the picture it gives of a certain segment of life as seen contemporarily through the eyes of a prostitute of quite unusual literacy. It has little or no value as a study of the causes of, or even factors associated with, prostitution. It is not even particularly illuminating as to why this individual became a prostitute: "From childhood, I had been a renegade, turning deliberately and callously away from everything my parents wanted me to do, and yet paradoxically suffering from an over-whelming feeling of guilt for so doing".

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It would almost do as a thumbnail sketch of the childhood of pretty well any neurotic or delinquent. The writer has apparently achieved only a superficial insight into her own mechanisms, or has preferred not to reveal the most enlightening data — a decision which she is perfectly entitled to make since she has not set out to write her own case-history. (Incidentally, one may wonder how much of her conventional upbringing still clings to her. One of the few over-written and melodramatic passages of the book describes her revulsion at performing what I would have thought to be two fairly common perversions—at least I suppose that is what this passage is about. There is an almost Victorian reluctance to be specific).

Most of us are interested in how prostitutes view their clients. The answer seems to be that they are seen eventually as an undifferentiated mass: "... complexions, features, hair lose their individuality, and one face becomes all faces, one body all bodies. . . . Occupation and class lost significance". I do not know if any will be shocked at this. The prostitute in this respect seems no better and no worse than all those people whose work is such as to bring them into contact with an endless succession of other people. One can also understand this: "Not, of course, that I stopped showing interest in clients as individuals—merely, I feign this interest now, and the imitation passes as genuine, so there is no loss on either side". This also will be familiar to those of us engaged in case and clinical work. Our work is undoubtedly made more interesting when we really are

interested in the client, but this is simply a private matter of our own job satisfaction. The important thing is that we should be felt by the client to be interested in him. If we are only good actors we shall do quite well so far as he is concerned. It seems that the prostitute takes the same sort of line.

Perhaps the real horror of the book, and its chief interest for the social scientist, lies in its description of a sub-culture more or less devoid of a social conscience as between its own members. The theme runs right through the book and because she has chosen to live in such a culture the writer feels keenly the loneliness of her independence: "It is strange to wake with affection for the person beside me". There is a scene in a gambling den where her ponce bullies her for the money she has not got. Everybody knows she is going to be brutally assaulted. The owner orders them out knowing what is in store for her as soon as they are off his premises: "I might be a total stranger to him, for all the feeling there is in his expression". As for the other people present: "No one softens. No one shows a friendly face". This is a society where passing by on the other side is not only the done thing, it is the socially acceptable norm. A gang of toughs may come into a club, bully, beat up and razor-slash, apparently with not the slightest interference or even disapproval. It must be stressed that we are seeing here a lack of social responsibility not towards members of the "respectable" outgroup, which would be intelligible, but towards members of the same in-group. The present reviewer, in a recent research on convicted prisoners, has obtained results which seem to show that

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the worse a criminal the more will he dislike other prisoners. Is this a manifestation of the same sort of thing? It has become fashionable to speak of the criminal sub-culture as though it were a group of psychiatrically normal individuals but with a different set of norms from the conventionally acceptable. But one may hypothesise from this book that these individuals *are* different quite apart from the norms they embrace, they are different in that the bonds of cohesion between them are much less strong than in the despised respectable society. It may be simply a matter of degree but where it comes to such qualities as heartlessness and selfishness matters of degree are important. At any rate, the writer suggests that prostitutes turn to pones, and perhaps to lesbianism, precisely because they live in a society where there is a paucity of adequate human relationships. One may well think from this book that the explanatory value of the concept of criminal sub-culture is somewhat overdone. The book suggests a useful hypothesis of a more psychological nature.

Perhaps the most serious fault of the book is the rather conventionalised attack on the conventional—the “are you all that much better than us” kind of argument. But it is notably free both from self-pity and self-castigation, and because this is so, the author’s determination to make a new life is the more impressive. The end of the book shows that her insights are still very limited, but we are moved because there are no facile and maudlin promises and because she shows such an intelligent awareness of the grim

difficulties in re-orientating herself.
BERNARD MARCUS.

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**THE LONELINESS OF THE
LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER**

Alan Sillitoe.

W. H. Allen. 1959. pp.176. 12s. 6d.

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER is, according to the publishers, “a minor masterpiece”. “An ambitious tale”, runs the blurb, “about a boy in Borstal who, set to run in a race, seizes a magnificent and foolproof opportunity to show his defiance of authority. It is perhaps as profound a study of the rebel mind as has ever been written”. It is to be hoped that this will not deter too many readers who may view the prospect of a profound study of the rebel mind somewhat dispiritedly. For the long title-story in this volume of short stories is worth more than most of the profound studies that have been written.

It does not matter that there is no such thing as the Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Club for Long Distance Running (All England); nor that “the Borstal Boys Brass Band in blue uniforms” is a non-existent company of musicians. Borstals like Gunthorpe, Hucknall and Aylesham with their sports masters and different coloured blazers may belong to the future of course. But however that may be the nameless hero of Alan Sillitoe’s story belongs very much to the present; and most of us pot-bellied, pop-eyed, chinless, stupid, tash-twitching characters—I borrow the epithets which the hero applies to his “doddering bastard of a governor”—most of us will recognise him. And although little that we are told about him will come to us with the force of a revelation it must