

Special Books for Christmas: Feasting the Eye

By Anne Hollander

The revival of interest in the juicier aspects of the social and decorative arts of the nineteenth century has given picture books about this period a new and sensational scope. Detailed representative art has always been appealing to the lust of the eye, and never more so than when used to illustrate narratives. But until the last decade, modern taste tended to discredit the enormous output of this kind of art during the second half of the nineteenth century, despite its strong attractions, in favor of the work that followed the revolutionary pictorial modes invented in France. Now we may once more unashamedly admire Beardsley, Alma-Tadema, the English pre-Raphaelites, and their disciples; new books make them more seductive than ever. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* by Marina Henderson (St. Martin's Press, \$15.00) presents the works of this very influential painter-poet in juxtaposition with critical articles about them, reprinted from journals of his own and later days. The public response to these lush and fervent literary paintings is as fascinating as the pictures themselves—particularly when one remembers that, however quaint and musty they now seem, they once represented a modern and daring school. The poems written by Rossetti to match the paintings are printed with them, and a number of preliminary sketches is also reproduced, showing the essentially amateur Rossetti's struggles with what he called "somnolent models, ticklish draperies, and toppling lay figures." There is a succinct biographical essay by Susan Miller and some critical commentary by Marina Henderson.

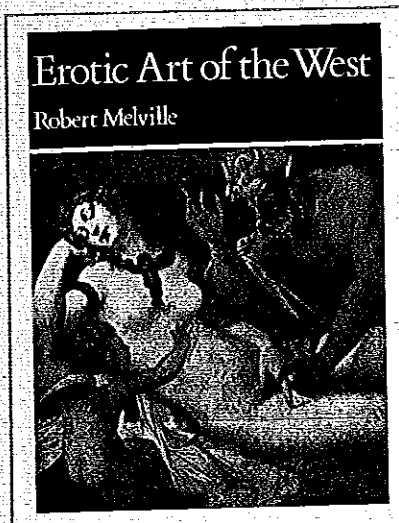
Another influential figure in the same school is explored in *Burne-Jones*, edited by Martin Hanson and Bill Waters (Putnam, \$25.00), a larger, more luxurious book, with a more thorough text than the Rossetti. This is a complete and respectful study in depth of the artist's life, work, and influence, which were consid-

Anne Hollander is at work on a book about the clothed form in art.

erably strengthened by his association with William Morris's work in illustration and the decorative arts. Burne-Jones had an international reputation and a long, extremely successful career; his work has a high degree of sophisticated finish, which Rossetti's never achieved. The distinctive Burne-Jones androgynous image, consisting of a sharp-chinned, hollow-cheeked face, wearing a look of chilled and drugged eroticism, on top of a slim, enervated body, has never lost its morbid charm. Today it has more fashionable appeal than ever, while Rossetti's luscious ladies look rather foolish. The book has a useful list of collections where the artist's work may be seen, and another list of the locations of his stained-glass windows.

Besides illustrative and narrative content, dreamlike and mysterious meaning in pictures was celebrated during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century by European artists whose talent seemed to flourish under the influence of Burne-Jones, rather than under that of the impressionists. *The Symbolists* by Philippe Jullian (Phaidon, \$29.50) brings together a number of these very different artists who had in common the desire to deal with the profound and disturbing visions conjured by the imagination rather than with the phenomena of visible nature. This art is born of other art, secreted from overlapping memories of reproductions and illustrations, and amplified by dreams. Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau, and Puvis de Chavannes are some of the more familiar names from this large and vivid book, which has a rather fanciful essay introducing and explaining the kinds of images captured by these painters and many reproductions of their various and haunting works.

One strong feature in an artistic tradition so dependent on the workings of the unconscious is a high level of erotic content. A book dealing with eroticism alone, not only in the nineteenth century but in the whole history of European art, is *Erotic Art of the West* by Robert Melville (Putnam, \$25.00). It begins with a historical essay by Simon Wilson, a lecturer at London's Tate Gallery, and then the material is grouped according to kinds of erotic subject: Pornography, or those works of art that intend only to arouse desire, is not the subject of this book, but rather the expression of the artists' subjective erotic feelings. Sections are given such titles as "Sexual



Readiness," "Varieties of Love," "Violence and Violation," and the essays under separate headings are provocative, interesting, and lighthearted, though flawed by such mistakes as the use of *alibi* to mean "excuse." Illustrations are grouped together at different points but are not in coordination with the text; marginal references send the annoyed reader flipping back and forth through the pages. But his style is witty, and some of his remarks have considerable resonance, such as his observation that a thin nude is associated with depravity and shame, while a plump one is related to comfortable and healthy pleasure, and therefore skinniness is automatically the sexier, because it embodies greater wickedness and a keener sense of the forbidden. Well, maybe.

Primitive Erotic Art, edited by Philip Rawson (Putnam, \$25.00), has a less personal message for the dirty-minded reader. The book has seven articles on different regions that have produced "primitive" societies, whose alien, though often attractive, sexual attitudes are expressed in a great variety of startling artifacts. Some of the objects reproduced in this book are not obviously sexual, and their symbolism must be explained, while others are sharply explicit. The raw power in all primitive works of art, arising from their role as metaphors of real things, is here strengthened by the addition of sexual power; and yet the complex sensibility is somehow insulated from their powerful effects. We seem to require representation rather than metaphor for the nourishment of our own erotic concepts, and these striking objects leave us respectful but uninvolved.

A familiar kind of primitive religion is explored in *Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Greece* by Edward E. Barthell, Jr. (University of Miami Press, \$25.00). This vast book is a complete outline and breakdown of Greek mythology, giving an account of every character with any divine mythological connections in the corpus of Greek legend. This is an encyclopedic reference work of tremendous value, not only to literary scholars and art historians but also to anyone fascinated by the complex interconnections of the Greek myths. Working from translations of all the original classical sources, the author has sorted out every character who bears the same name, and there are different kinds of charts and genealogical tables that delineate the links among the divine families of ancient Greece. There are no seductive pictures taking up space in this serious volume, except an austere neoclassic rendering of Hercules; but the book is beautifully designed, clearly organized, and a pleasure to consult.

Medieval pageantry is never more authentically experienced by modern folk than inside a great medieval cathedral. *Westminster Abbey* (The Annenberg School Press, \$50.00) is a huge tribute to the innumerable treasures of this vast church. Several authors have contributed four scholarly essays and some memoir and commentary, all accompanied by a variety of illustrative material, including diagrams, engravings, and brilliant photographs. The august, scholarly contributors include A. L. Rowse, writing about the abbey's significance in history, and John Pope-Hennessy, writing about the tombs and monuments. Further respectful remarks are made by John Betjeman and Kenneth Clark. Like its subject, this book is pretentious, dignified, reverent—and full of variety when observed at close range. The photographs allow one's attention to focus on small architectural details and decorative motifs as well as on grandiose vistas and dramatic statuary; and different artists' versions of past events in the abbey form an absorbing *mélange*.

The historical glories of aristocratic England and perhaps in particular her great families, both royal and noble, seem to remain perpetually attractive to the American imagination. In *The Cecils of Hatfield House* (Houghton Mifflin, \$12.95), Lord David Cecil has celebrated the more notable past members of his

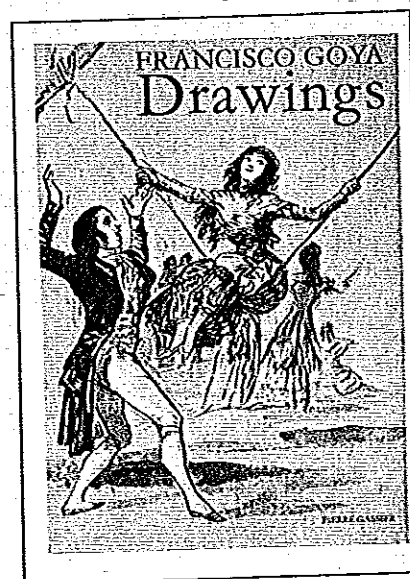
own family and their splendid house, where he spent his childhood. The first half of the book is a series of chatty historical portraits, beginning with Queen Elizabeth I, who lived at Hatfield as a young girl and was later responsible for founding the Cecil family fortunes. The second half of the book becomes a personal family memoir as the author portrays the individuals of his own extended memory—that is, the people remembered by the oldest people he remembers. According to this account, Elizabeth and Victoria had the services of the best Cecils; in between, they tended to be eccentric or uninteresting. There are genealogical tables and many beautiful pictures of the family and the house to delight the enthusiasts of British pomp and circumstance.

In sharp contrast to this gracious and mild treatment of Hatfield and its noble inhabitants, English pomp and circumstance are shown violently distorted and ridiculed in *The Cartoon History of Britain* by Michael Wynn Jones (Macmillan, \$17.50). This is an excellently organized political history of England seen through the eyes of graphic satirists from 1720, at the time of the South Sea Bubble, up to 1970. The book is divided into chronological sections, each beginning with a list of prime ministers, their dates in office and parties, and a corresponding list of the principal political issues and their exact dates in that period. There follows a brisk essay on each period and a selection of appropriate cartoons reflecting prevailing attitudes and graphic styles. British cartoonists evidently had an amount of freedom not granted to other kinds of political commentators, and they boast the longest unbroken (though not the oldest) tradition of graphic satire in Western art. These cartoons are attributed where possible and completely identified and dated in the excellent descriptive captions. A knowledge of British history probably helps but is not at all necessary for an appreciation of this special view of its last 250 years. There is an introductory essay by Michael Cummings, explaining how it feels to be a political cartoonist. And he advises that a political cartoonist must be "bloody-minded, slightly anarchistic, and hold no cows sacred—and have ideas in the worst possible taste."

A very different sort of view of English life was expressed in the late eighteenth century by the successful portrait

painters. *Reynolds* by Ellis Waterhouse (Phaidon, \$25.00) gives a beautiful selection of this painter's works, which were chiefly portraits in the intensely personal, but always elegant, mode originally invented and promulgated in England by Van Dyck 150 years before. Here is a procession of the relaxed rich, well-born, and famous (usually wearing carefully simple dress), punctuated by endearing self-portraits, some idealized scenes in fancy costume, and wonderful children. Among other things, this book demonstrates how much our modern view of a child's natural looks has been formed by Joshua Reynolds. These serious, dignified, and sometimes exalted small faces reflect those intense private worlds we have since come to acknowledge as the customary realm of childhood. No previous artist had so consistently respected their existence. The book has an illuminating critical essay by way of introduction, an interesting separate essay called "Procedure and Prices," and a splendid bibliography.

The generation after Reynolds produced an artist in another country and of a harsher mode who was also a painter of portraits, but he is better known for the fierce, demonic children of his imagination. *Francisco Goya Drawings: The Complete Albums* by Pierre Gassier (Praeger, \$39.95) reproduces all Goya's



drawings in breathtaking sequence, each group marked off by an introduction and a concluding list of critical captions. The drawings are given according to the original albums in which they were set

"Extraordinary...filled with wit, wonder and endless courage."

On July 20, 1971, Stewart Alsop was told he had leukemia, and probably had only a year to live. More than two years later, Alsop is still writing his much-read column for *Newsweek* and still playing a wily game of tennis. His book is a rich mixture of personal reminiscence, medical suspense, some rather low comedy—and spirited commentary on such diverse subjects as the collapse of the WASP elite, the strain of madness in American politics, living, and dying.

"An absolutely beautiful book. It's not only a book about life and death and being American; it's about the meaning of life, the tenderness that binds us to those we love and what we take from our fathers to pass on to our children."

—THEODORE H. WHITE

The Literary Guild January Selection. Illustrated with photographs. \$8.95

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STEWART ALSOP STAY OF EXECUTION a sort of memoir

Peter B. Young

—ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.

down and kept by the artist between 1796 and 1828, the year of his death. These are not sketches made to be reproduced as etchings; they are finished as they stand, done with tremendous force and immediacy, mostly in brush and wash. Some are unbearably harsh and frightening. High-quality reproduction brings them sharply alive and shows in the last group how Goya could handle the demands of crayon and chalk with different but equally strong effect. There is a scholarly essay about the history of these albums since Goya's death, a bibliography, and a useful glossary of Spanish terms to aid in the interpretation of Goya's well-known, but always inscrutable, captions for some of these pictures.

Oskar Kokoschka: Drawings 1906–1965, edited by Ernest Rathenau (University of Miami Press, \$17.50), shows how graphic expression can provide a highly differentiated outlet for an artist primarily concerned with paint. These are personal drawings, but they are the record of diffused and de-fused impulses rather than intensified images. Some are studies for paintings, some are quick drawings from life, and some are illustrations and sketches for posters. They vary in medium, style, and degree of finish, and their appeal depends on a previous interest in the painter's works. There is no text, except for a brief introduction by Kokoschka himself.

A kind of posthumous, multiple tribute has been prepared by a group of English and American art critics and scholars under the title *Picasso in Retrospect*, edited by Sir Roland Penrose and Dr. John Golding (Praeger, \$37.50). Articles by seven distinguished writers have been collected to illuminate Picasso's heroic achievement from different points of view and with emphasis on different aspects. There is an overall attempt to move in a sort of backstitch along the chronological course of Picasso's career. The first piece, by Theodore Reff, is called "Themes of Love and Death in Picasso's Early Work," and the next to last, by Jean Sunderlind Boggs, is entitled "The Last Thirty Years"; but they are not necessarily to be read in sequence. These serious and complex essays provide a well-knit example of the best kind of homage: careful judgment based on close, expert attention. There are more than 400 reproductions, some in color, and notes on all the chapters.

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Although they may be considered as limited in scope as Picasso was limitless, accomplished artists have devoted themselves to painting arrangements of flowers ever since classical times. *Great Flower Painters: Four Centuries of Floral Art* by Peter Mitchell (The Overlook Press, \$27.95) is a persuasive introduction to this genre, which is beautifully presented and explained. The most distinguished flower painters in the Western artistic tradition are listed in alphabetical order, with at least one reproduction, usually in black and white, for each artist. There are also magnificent examples in color, some by artists more often considered great when handling other subjects—Zurbarán, Chardin, Redon, and dozens of Dutchmen. This book offers an opportunity to discover what subtle differences exist among those many flower-obsessed painters of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Holland.

A different approach to the representation of flowers is taken in *The Book of Flowers* by Alice M. Coats (McGraw-Hill, \$30.00). In this large volume are reproduced 126 botanical illustrations, some for the first time since original publication. The pictures are of hand-colored copperplate engravings, etchings, and lithographs, which were designed to appear in books and which, in their careful delineation of detail, were wholly or partly scientific in intention. The imaginative delicacy of the rendering, however, makes these sober illustrations a delight to study for themselves, and they obviously represent a high degree of artistic achievement and accuracy. The plates are arranged chronologically and are accompanied by lengthy captions of historical explanation and descriptive comment as well as sources and dimensions.

The most famous single effort of a kind similar to botanical illustration is *The Birds of America* by John J. Audubon, edited by William Vogt (Macmillan, \$12.50), which has been reprinted once more in its entirety from the original elephant folio (39½"x 26½") published between 1827 and 1838. The impact of the huge originals is lessened by the reduction of their size. The immense flamingo and sooty albatross have less abstract power, although others, such as the barn owl perched against a black night sky with a helpless chipmunk in one fierce claw, remain unforgettable images



REMEDIOS GUANZON. FATHER DEAD. MOTHER BLIND.

REMEDIOS GUANZON. AGE 5. Father dead. TB. Mother blind. Earns a few pennies begging. Brother is a scavenger. Remedios guides blind mother's hands to spots on clothes that require particular scrubbing. Family lives in one small room. Must crawl through small opening to enter. Walls from material found at city dump. No facilities.

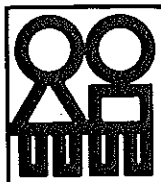
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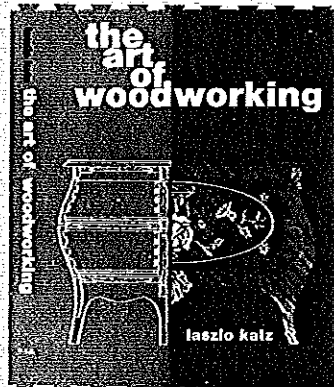
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Cats, unlike birds, have never had an Audubon, and their images in art are often less than satisfactory to true lovers of living cats. *Antique Cats for Collectors* by Katharine Morrison McClinton (Scribner's, \$10.00) affords a look at a selection of cat-objects in every possible medium, besides a review of famous cat images from China, Egypt, etc. In the display of ceramic, glass, wood, stone, and ivory figurines of cats from the course of world history, the noble Egyptian bronzes obviously continue to deserve first prize. Besides such simple statuettes, there have been cat banks, cat spoons, and cat squeak-toys; images of cats have adorned fans, sofa cushions, footstools, and wallpaper; and they have a long, and by no means finished, history of appearance on posters, advertisements, cartoons, and greeting cards. The author is an antiques expert, and to antique collectors this book may be valuable. But to a cat lover, it is far too lacking in any sense of fur and purr.

Domestic life may be enhanced not only by sleek pets and curious bric-a-brac but also by the traditional satisfactions of beautiful carpets. *Oriental Rugs in Color* by Preben Liebetrau (Macmillan, \$3.95) is a tiny, but extremely useful, handbook for a prospective rug owner or for anyone seeking succinct and clear information on the subject. The densely informative text has diagrams of weaves, knots, and characteristic pattern-motifs and offers one delightful formula for cleaning rugs. It consists of spreading your rug, pile downward, on top of new-fallen snow and patting it down into the snow. One then takes it up and shakes it off. Treatment is to be applied every two years (one is reminded that the book was first published in Denmark). Sixty-five colorplates are packed into this small volume, showing characteristic semi-antique rugs of the sort actually available, rather than remote museum pieces. This book is a bargain.

A whole range of beautiful artifacts from the East is displayed in *China, A History in Art* by Bradley Smith and Wan-go Weng (Harper & Row, \$25.00). The historical survey that forms the text of this book is necessarily very much simplified, since the space is devoted mostly to excellent photographs of every kind of art work; but so ignorant are



CHINA

A HISTORY IN ART



Bradley Smith & Wan-go Weng

most Westerners of the history of this ancient and exhaustively complex country that any orderly information is welcome. The pictures are all in color, giving a dazzling and somewhat indigestible panoramic view of statues large and small, scrolls, frescoes, houses, monuments, jewels, weapons. The dose is dizzying, but helpful charts connect this huge array of objects with the course of events extending over 3000 years. The ravishing beauty of the ancient scrolls makes the socialist-realist portraits of Chairman Mao look somewhat embarrassing; but, then, modern Greek sculpture does not much resemble the Hermes of Praxiteles.

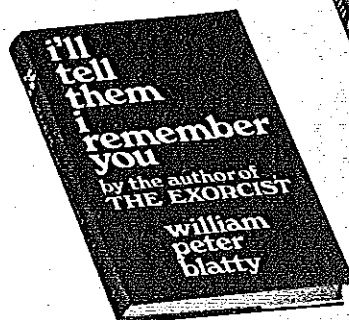
Another attempt at expressing historical truth through pictures of objects is made in *The American Revolution: Mirror of a People* by William Pierce Randel (Hammond, \$14.95). This is a book about what it felt like to be an American during the revolutionary period. A large number of the pictures are standard historical illustrations: portraits, documents, maps, and views of buildings. But with these is offered a refreshing array of beautifully photographed objects in suitably realistic period arrangements. Actual tools, furnishings, weapons, and garments have been photographed as if in current use, to provide a lifelike vision of important mundane facts. The book is a social and cultural study of colonial life, and it ends with the revolutionary war.

One aspect of American life that has certain romantic associations is examined in *Riding the Rails* by Michael Mathers (Gambit, \$9.95). The author,

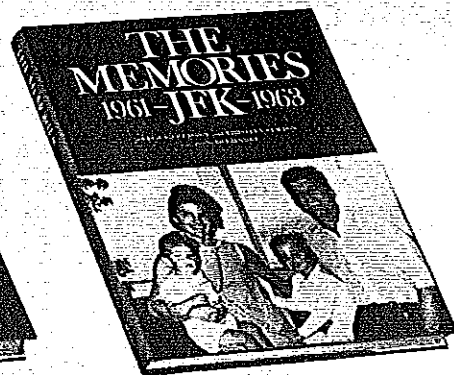
a Harvard graduate and a photographer, was inspired to begin his travels as a hitchhiker, he says, by Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Since then he has been a railroad tramp long enough to collect this group of taped interviews and photographs of the homeless men who live in boxcars or outdoor communities called jungles and take only intermittent, part-time jobs. The text is a memoir of his life among them, and the pictures are a vividly grubby visual record. Together they offer a privileged, if dispiriting, glimpse of this patch of America's seamy side.

The silk-and-velvet surface of American life during the past forty years has been vividly documented in *Happy Times* by Brendan Gill and Jerome Zerbe (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$25.00). Since Brendan Gill is a very good writer, this ostensible picture book has a wonderfully literate and witty text, which effectively deepens the interest of these essentially frivolous photographs of Beautiful People at play. Zerbe is a gentleman-photographer, as Raffles was a gentleman-thief; and all his candid pictures of the rich and famous make them look intensely human and likable. He is clearly a man of great sweetness. These views of "attractive people on delightful occasions" lack any hint of bitchery, condescension, or, indeed, flattery. Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly gazing raptly at each other at their engagement banquet and the Duke of Windsor looking sweetly awkward as he sits on the grass are charming examples of Zerbe's sympathetic choice of moments. The book has one grave fault, which is a failure to date the pictures. One may try to guess, but it is really not fair.

Alistair Cooke's America (Knopf, \$15.00) is an affectionate view of an adopted country, breezily and energetically described and further illuminated by distinguished illustrations. Witty, telling, and unusual, this book is an expansion of Mr. Cooke's thirteen-part television series on America. There is a comforting generosity of tone in all Mr. Cooke's severest judgments and a cordiality in his style, reflected from his television manner, which make one feel that America is safe under his urbane scrutiny. After gracefully scanning the whole scope of America's history, Mr. Cooke concludes that "the race is on between her decadence and her vitality." We all share his hopes about the outcome. □



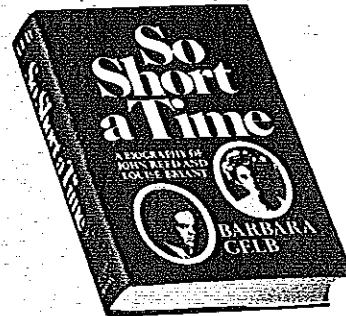
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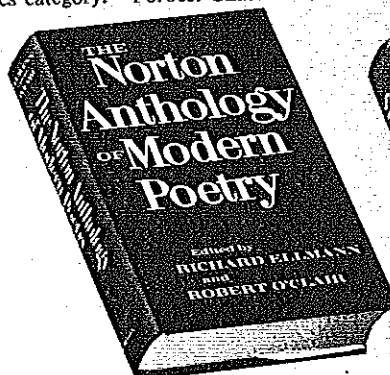
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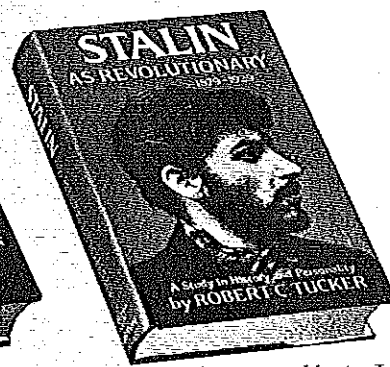
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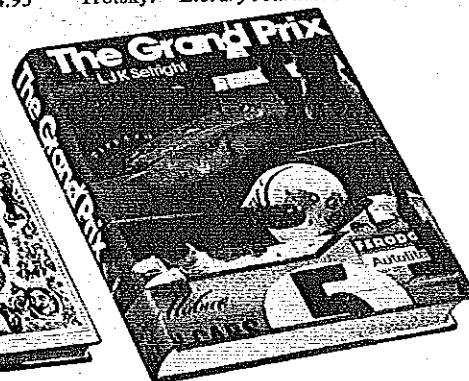
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