

## Violence on a Southern farm and in New York City

By MEL WATKINS

### The Trapper's Last Shot

By John Yount.  
236 pp. New York: Random House. \$6.95.

John Yount's second novel, like its predecessor "Wolf at the Door," is set in the South; the scene is Sharaw, a small town in Coker County, Georgia, approximately a decade ago. It is an account of Dan and Beau Jim Early, brothers pursuing their separate dreams and struggling against the barren red clay earth, impoverished rural economy and the narrow perspectives of the Coker County inhabitants. After a six-year hitch in the Army Beau Jim returns to his brother's farm intending to enroll at a nearby college on the G.I. Bill and "make something of himself." Dan—stoic, illiterate, completely baffled by anything beyond the immediate world of his daily chores—ploddingly works his destitute farm, sensing that it is his only hope and convinced that no piece of land could be so poor that it was past reclaiming.

Their stories are unwound in straightforward, unadorned prose, but Yount has managed to instill remarkable depth into this tale. The slow pace of the narrative, scene after scene of vividly depicted but ordinary experiences in the lives of Beau Jim and Dan or Dan's wife, Charlene, creates an almost tangible sense of the ambience of rural Southern life—one begins actually to feel the hushed, heavy-aired and incredibly explosive atmosphere into which they have been thrust. And almost all of Yount's characters convey not only the sense of verity recognizable when we feel that, yes, we may have met them before; but demonstrate the rarer fictional feat of then revealing that, though we may well have met them, there is still something new and fascinating to be illuminated and understood. Yount knows the scene and characters well, and he has presented both skillfully; his novel is a quietly effective portrait of rural Southerners wrestling with their personal ambitions and frustrations and the threat posed to their way of life by the civil-rights movement of the sixties.

But, even if it were not as

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sure-handedly written, "The Trapper's Last Shot" would be worth reading simply for its characterization of Dan Early. He is one of the most memorable fictional characters I've run across in some time and represents the most fully drawn and effective portrait of a Southern redneck that I've seen. He is both vile and sensitive, evil and touching; most important, Yount is able to make one feel empathy for him, even near the culmination of the novel at the moment of his most crazed act—this is no mean task.

### Operation Burning Candle

By Blyden Jackson.  
220 pp. New York: The Third Press. \$6.95.

Militant black groups attempting political assassinations or takeovers of sections of large cities—by now, a familiar theme in both movies and literature. But typically the movies have been grade-B thrillers and the novels, with the possible exception of Sam Greenlee's "The Spook Who Sat by the Door," have been mere potboilers. Blyden Jackson's "Operation Burning Candle" is a definite exception. Smoothly written and logically plotted throughout, it works as both a fast-moving psychological thriller and, on another level, as an arresting piece of serious fiction.

Aaron Rogers, a brilliant psychology student working with America's most renowned psychoanalyst, suddenly gives up his studies and enlists to fight in Vietnam. There he puts together a crack group of black experts in the various martial arts and in fields such as electronics and communications.

Switching identities with soldiers killed in action, they return to the United States as escorts for the bodies bearing their names and congregate in New York City. Their plan, based on Aaron's theory of creative violence, is first to demonstrate their ability to create massive transit shutdowns and blackouts and announce their intention of carrying out an even more disruptive act by commandeering a radio station, and then to assassinate the most confirmed racists in the Senate (the heads of various powerful Congressional committees) at the Democratic National Convention in Madison Square Garden.

The plot may seem even more fantastic than those of some of the earlier works in this genre, but Jackson has worked it out with geometric precision. His knowledge of police tactics, the military (he was a marine) and weaponry is crucial in establishing the plausibility of this tale. But just as significant is the fictional technique he employs. It is cinematic, alternately flashing from Aaron Rogers's group of incendiaries to the New York City Police's Special Operation Unit and then to Aaron's family in Harlem or to the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of the Southern Senators who are trying to sabotage the nomination effort of a liberal New England Senator. Its effect is to give the story a fast-paced thrust-riposte development and to provide depth beyond the central plot. It works.

It is finally Aaron Rogers and Dan Roberts (a special unit police officer), however, who move this novel out of the pot-boiler category. They command as much attention as people as they do as cogs in Jackson's smoothly synchronized plot, and they are developed without slowing down the action. An engrossing story, natively handled—one looks with anticipation to Blyden Jackson's second novel. ■

