

Three Tales of "Madness"

THE DANCE OF GENGHIS COHN.
By Romain Gary. World Publishing Co. 244 pp. \$5.

LILO'S DIARY. By Richard Elman. Scribner's. 155 pp. \$4.95.

THE SUICIDE ACADEMY. By Daniel Stern. McGraw-Hill. 173 pp. \$5.95.

Reviewed by
JACK RIEMER

"I have a plan to go mad." This

the point of view of the heroine.

Lilo is no starry-eyed romantic. She is an intense and complex young girl undergoing the turmoil of becoming a woman in the midst of a world gone mad. The book is written in the form of a diary into which Lilo pours out her innermost thoughts and feelings. The reader is constantly aware of the contrasts between her concerns and the realities of her plight. She is busy speculating about the qualities of her future husband and wondering about what it means to be a grown-up while doom draws nearer and those she trusts prepare to betray her.

The book is an outcry from a man who knows that his contemporaries are the dead children of Europe past, and of Asia present.

DANIEL STERN'S *The Suicide Academy* is a fantasy. It deals with fantastic realities that a "factual" novel could not convey. The Academy is an institution of the world of tomorrow: part research plant, part business, part assembly line and part brothel, it is The Terminal. Here would-be suicides can come for a day of education and training after which they must choose whether they wish to return to the world or to die.

The director of the Academy is Wolf Walker, a competent and efficient manager who has improved the curriculum, expanded the facilities and made good use of the newest scientific methods. However, he finds himself accused by his assistant and hailed before the Board of Directors. The charge is that he has committed treason against the basic premise of the Academy. As a Jew, the accusation runs, Walker cannot help but be secretly on the side of life.

In the end, after a day of bewildering events, the director finds that the accusation is right: everything he is as a Jew is against neutrality, indifference and death. In a moving encounter with the Negro anti-Semite who is his accuser, Walker affirms that we are here to let the mystery happen, to sanctify the ground in case there is no God, to sanctify the ground for each other and ourselves at least once before we disappear underneath it. The Suicide Academy burns to the ground and Walker goes off, as the book ends, to return to life and to relationships with people again.

RICHARD ELMAN'S *Lilo's Diary* has a different tone, but it depicts the same madness. Here Elman has performed a literary feat of the first magnitude. He is an American male living in 1968 and yet he has succeeded in projecting himself into the psyche of a European girl coming

H has a different tone, but it depicts the same madness. Here Elman has performed a literary feat of the first magnitude. He is an American male living in 1968 and yet he has succeeded in projecting himself into the psyche of a European girl growing up and dying in the mid-1940s, and he has made her words and feelings wholly believable.

To fully appreciate this novel, one must first read Elman's *The 28th Day of Elul*, published last year. There he tells the story of the holocaust from the point of view of Alex Yagoda, a bitter, jaded, weary man who now lives out a dull and guilt-ridden existence in Israel, and who is forced to look back and to confront the fact that he let his parents trade their ward and his fiancée, Lilo, in exchange for their freedom. Now in this novel he retells the same story, but this time from

the point of view of the heroine.

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DANIEL STERN'S *The Suicide*