"The Butterfly," a novel by James M. Cain.
Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1947.

I HAVE NOT REREAD Cain's older books to confirm this impression, but offhand I would say that "The Butterfly" is second only to "The Postman Always Rings Twice," among his longer things, as an exhibition of his peculiar talents.

This work, whose scene resembles Harlan County, Kentucky, concerns itself with incest. Technically, no incest is committed, but a marriage is made and consummated between two people, one of whom supposes she is the other's daughter. Among the other adornments of the book are a smoldering feud, a brutal murder, and the concealment of the corpse in an abandoned mine. An added piquance is given the love affair by the fact that the love-nest is in this abandoned mine a few feet from the cave-in which conceals the corpse. The corpse was the actual father of the girl.

A bunch of us were sitting around the other evening talking about this book, and we had just about come to the gloomy conclusion that Mr. Cain's career was finished. He has disposed of theft, embezzlement, homosexuality, brutal murder, and now incest . . . What is left for him? Then someone came through with a suggestion that brightened us all up considerably: *Cannibalism.* There will be no charge for this suggestion.

The traditional apology for the introduction of violent or "unnatural" events or passions, is that by showing people under the extraordinary stresses thus set up, we can illuminate and explore the dark places of the human mind. I do not think any such analysis is necessary in this case. I think these materials are used for their own sweet sake—to shock and titillate the reader. I for one cheerfully admit that I am shocked and titillated. One of the minor pleasures of my life is to read a James M. Cain book, and then wash my teeth, have a hot bath, and eat a good dinner.

Note: This book will not be on the shelves for a week or two, so don't go looking for it right away. But keep your eyes peeled if you want it, for it will probably go like hotcakes.