SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO ---------- by Jay Little
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The professional drag queen is an artist paid to represent something that he is not; he may be a person of distinguished talents and remarkable vocal and dramatic abilities. On the other hand he may be, and often is, no more than a parlor-sized entertainer where his talents are concerned, ranking somewhere between talking dogs and Siamese twins - as Dr. Johnson has written of woman's preaching: "It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

The professional novelist is an artist paid to create an illusion; it may be the illusion of reality, sterner and stronger than we ordinarily experience, or, contrariwise, more unreal - elegant and haunting, fulfilling dreams undreamt and loves unlived. In the field of the novel and the homosexual it would appear that a work concerned with the female impersonator would be highly revelatory, consistently faceted, and endlessly vicarious in its entertainment. Unfortunately, Jay Little's SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO is not that work.

This is not to say that SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO is not an amusing book, or one without interest. While it is not so consistently enlightening as MAYBE TOMORROW, Mr. Little's first book, nor so continually startling (having once been shocked one is not tempted to turn away without courting a second shock) it is not without merit and its pin-pricks of excitement. He captures the exact speech pattern of a large segment of homosexual society with a remarkable ease and reports a kind of brief contact and passing fancy with an almost painful accuracy and wry humor. His tongue, however, is not in his cheek: Mr. Little is a very earnest young man.

In the expanding field of fiction and the homosexual we find the bibliography divided almost exactly in half. On the one shelf are such works as the great Proust novel, Radclyffe Hall's distinguished THE WELL OF LONELINESS, several works by Henry James, Marguerite Yourcenar's HADRIAN'S MEMOIRS and Angus Wilson's extraordinarily fine HEMLOCK AND AFTER. On the other we find works of such disparate quality and taste as range from Robert Scully's SCARLET PANSY of the first World War through THE HEART IN EXILE and QUATREFOIL. It is somewhere on this second shelf that Mr. Little's two novels stand.

There are many faults in Mr. Little's novel: characters enter and leave without purpose, people are moved around and shuffled without point. To a certain extent it would be hard to say exactly what SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO is about. Our hero, Terry Wallace, is unhappy and frustrated in the small town where he lives with his aunt. He has no idea who his parents are or were. The only honest expression of his feeling comes on the eve of his departure for the big city. He arrives in Hollywood, is picked up by the proverbial older man and is kept. He is unhappy until at a party he meets some female impersonators. He says this is what I want to do, dons drag and goes to work. He meets lots of people and beds down with some of them, noting along the way how many are married and fathers, whether they be his lovers or impersonators not mattering to him in the least. At the end, back at the scene of his first major success he meets a young man (the hero of MAYBE TOMORROW?) and soft smiles are smiled as the book ends. But, to a great extent, nothing has happened.

We admire Terry when he breaks a lover's heart so that the boy can go home and marry, but we cannot appreciate the act for we are never aware of Terry's psychology unless we are completely intuitive. We believe Mr. Little every time he tells us that this or that character returns to his wife between Dior's, but we don't know why the character has chosen either of his two paths.

In a sense Mr. Little's book is itself a drag number: it is an impersonation of a novel, and it is not what it appears to be. But it is a job of remark-

able honesty, an honesty that is verified by its failures and deeply felt sincerity. We shall look forward to Mr. Little's next book for with all his faults as artist, his virtues are not invisible. M.B.