

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA
12 JUNE 1948
(page 12)

NOVEL OF THE WEEK.

Our Superheated Yesterdays.

The Narrow Gate, by Reginald Kirby. London and Sydney: Collins.

I suppose, so long as there are novelists, there will be historical novelists—and people to read them.

For the instinct of a great number of human beings to escape, even temporarily, from the hard reality of their own times, the sterilized neutrality of their own lives and environments, is likely to persist until that far-off day when men and women become supermen and superwomen.

The historical novel, in the hands of someone who really likes writing this kind of story, is such a safety valve for the frustrated.

It can provide, for a few hours, color, adventure, and romance for those whose daily living is drab, uneventful, and prosaic, and who would refuse to believe that the age in which they exist could be anything but monotonous.

It allows the timid man to ruffle it—however briefly—as a bravo; the spinster to identify herself with the courtesan; the faithful husband to become a Restoration rake; and the housewife to see herself as a disdainful beauty waited on by maids and a blackboy, and courted by the most distinguished names in Debrett.

This is the nice side. The historical novel can also—since it deals with events far removed in time from the allegedly much more moral world of today—provide a field in which apparently civilized, restrained, law-abiding citizens can caper, committing all those crimes which, as themselves, they are inhibited from perpetrating.

Consciously or unconsciously, it is this potentiality of the historical novel that Mr. Reginald Kirby has exploited. Within the brief span of 256 pages, he provides incest, attempted rape, the Black Mass, a Witches' Sabbath, patricide, uncon-

trolled debauchery in 17th century Whitechapel, deaths galore, and murder—by the knife and by poison.

I doubt whether even a frustrated reincarnation of the late Alastair [*sic*] Crowley could ask more in vicarious self-fulfilment than this.

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