Hedda and Louella

By George Eells.
$7.95.

The Show Business Nobody Knows

By Earl Wilson.
$6.95.

A State of Heat

By Sheila Graham.
244 pp. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
$6.95.

By NORA EPHRON

I suppose I should begin this with a few smartly-chosen words about gossip columnists and their decline (era waning... star-system dying... morality changing... newspapers folding... blah blah blah), but it is almost impossible to write a sentence that could be applied to all four of these gossip columnists. Sheila Graham's book doesn't even have anything to do with gossip columns; "A State of Heat," as it turns out, is about her sex life. And I probably should have sent it back to The Times to be included instead in the sex-manual roundup or the crazy-lady roundup or the garbage can, but it is such a weird and incredible book that I couldn't part with it. Earl Wilson is a Broadway columnist—a special, primarily male breed out of "Front Page" by Variety. Nightclubs. Making rounds. Bosoms. Blind Items. Whereas Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons were the most famous of the Hollywood columnists, gussied-up sob sisters in a long-running soap opera called "Love of Hollywood," and they dealt in behavior, manners, morals, divorce and marriage.

Like so many Hollywood children, I grew up knowing a great deal more about Hedda and Louella than was really necessary. Part of the ritual of being taken to the Brown Derby, for instance, was hearing the story of how Louella frequently dined there. I knew about Louella's husband, a perpetually-inebriated physician she called Docky, whom 20th Century Fox hired as studio doctor in order to gratify themselves with Louella. "Leave Docky alone," Louella said once, after her husband fell off a couch and passed out at a party. "He has to operate in the morning." I was told about Hedda and her 150 hats a year and her fanatical crusade against shoes with pointed toes and her aided anti-Communism. (She once took the trouble to assure her readers that the title of "The Red Badge of Courage" had "absolutely no Commie implications.")

I know all that, most of it fairly silly stuff, but I also knew that when Dorothy Parker became pregnant in 1935, the first person she called to tell the news was Louella Parsons. And in Louella's column, next day, was a picture of Miss Parker knitting booties. Dorothy Parker! I still find it hard to accept, but it happened, it really (Continued on Page 38)

Nora Ephron, now a New Yorker, grew up in Hollywood, where her parents were screenwriters.
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happened; and it shows, I think, how truly influential these columnists were if they could reach not just the vast columnists, but the mass public. They were able to affect public opinion, even in Hollywood back then but also people—New York people, New York-Algolguin-Round-Table type people, not just the well-liked-in-peculiar-places people—who were supposed to be smarter about such things.

Hedda and Louella were people who were, like, strong. They were a pair of tigress-like women with the strength of character that comes when two strong women bond together. They had a combined readership of 75 million. Their readers cared about what they thought and cared not at all that neither of them could write worth a damn. They needed to be interested in something; their subjects came to them and were literally granted audiences.

"Louella reclined on a floral chaise longue, her hands folded or clasped right arms of the tufted system, the enforcers of morals clauses in the days when morals mattered. They had a combined readership of 75 million. Their readers cared about what they thought and cared not at all that neither of them could write worth a damn. They needed to be interested in something; their subjects came to them and were literally granted audiences.

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dry-cleaning establishments to rectify matters.

Miss Graham's writing is as astonishing as the indiscriminate details she subjects us to. Some of her sentences could not be diagramed on a flat surface, to wit: "He took her home to her apartment, and while Patsy was not the promiscuous kind, they might have made love then and there, but her roommate was home." She uses adjectives like raisins, sprinkling them here and there: "I was cool but automatically charming to this fat, bewitched man." I could go on quoting all day, but here is my favorite sentence in the entire book: "As Swann said ruefully about Odette, he was not my type."

Miss Graham suffers from a lack of something a television producer I know calls a Selectivity Index: in addition to the sex, we get to hear her views on real estate, dieting and trains in Italy. There is an extraordinary section wherein Miss Graham confesses that she once lay down on the floor and put her breasts on a bathroom scale in an attempt to weigh them. "I would put them at ten pounds apiece," she concludes, after conceding the experiment did not work. "A State of Heat" also contains an answer from Miss Graham to Hemingway's remarks in "A Moveable Feast" concerning F. Scott Fitzgerald's fears about his masculinity. "Personally," Miss Graham writes, "given the choice between a donkey or a chipmunk, I might choose the latter."

I'm afraid that I may have made "A State of Heat" sound like one of those so-bad-it's-good things. I don't mean to. It's as close to being unpublishable as anything can be these days. Sheila Graham has been in on a pass for years as a result of her affair with Fitzgerald; it's about time it ran out.
Know another quote from The Lego Movie? Don't let people miss on a great quote from the "The Lego Movie" movie - add it here! Add a Quote. There's no people like show people They smile when they're low Even with a turkey that you know will fold You may be stranded out in the cold Still you wouldn't change it for a sack of gold Let's go on with the show. The costumes, the scenery, the makeup, the props The audience that lifts you when you're down The headaches, the heartaches, the backaches, the flops The sheriff that escorts you out of town The opening when your heart beats like a drum The closing when the customers won't come. There's no business like show business Like no business I know You g