

1935

Book Reviews

University of New Mexico Press

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Recommended Citation

University of New Mexico Press. "Book Reviews." *New Mexico Quarterly* 5, 2 (1935). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol5/iss2/46>

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Book Reviews

Westering—Thomas Hornsby Ferrill—Yale University Press, New Haven—\$2.00.

Thomas Hornsby Ferrill is a poet with structure in his thinking. I know of no other poet who so apprehends, emotionally and intellectually, the going on of ordered processes through time—"the dark impounded order of this canyon."

It is a view that puts the moment into a pattern of ages, a geological time scheme. And it does it with none of the blurred wonder which so often accompanies the lay effort to think of geological time. Quite simply, quite profoundly, he considers the time of mountains. Indeed, "Time of Mountains," the title of the first poem in his volume, could well have been the title of the book:

"You know where the hills are going, you can feel them,
The far blue hills dissolving in luminous water,
The solvent mountains going home to the oceans. . .

I stop to rest but the order still keeps moving. . ."

Yet against this time of mountains, the individual, able to comprehend, does not lose dignity:

"But if I go before these mountains go,
I am unbewildered by the time of mountains,
I, who have followed life up from the sea
Into a black incision in this planet,
Can bring an end to stone infinitives.
I have held rivers to my eyes like lenses
And rearranged the mountains at my pleasure
As one might change the apples in a bowl,
And I have walked a dim unearthly prairie
From which these peaks have not yet blown away."

Nor against the cycles of time and slowly disappearing mountain ranges does the moment lose the sharpness of its identity. After riding "far and naked out of earth of time dismantled"

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"It's good to feel some dark weed clutch your stirrup,
The tall marsh elder dragging its pollen across
The starlight on the black arch of your boot."

The moment, however, falls into proportion; the moment real and moving in 1605,

"O soft, Coyote in the noon,
Oñate comes up the deep arroyo
Rides up the silver road of Spain. . ."

and no less real and moving in 1934, with

"a Model T
Stripped and forgotten in a sage arroyo."

Such a view strips his poetry of any tendency to romanticize or to sentimentalize. He protests sadly and satirically against the insincerities of those who would clothe the West in false colors of romance, or hold too tenaciously a passing culture:

"O, gourd vine in my fingers, yellow bloom,
You are not honest, gourd vine in my fingers. . .
Let rain dissolve the bowl, New Mexico,
And wash our hands! Come, let us walk together
Into the quiet sorrow of the greasewood. . ."

This kind of poetry has its strength in the stature of its ideas, and this is its sufficient beauty. But Ferril does not lack other kinds of poetic beauty. There is music in "Song for Aaron Burr," in "Fall Plowing," in "Elegy-New Mexico;" tragic music in "This Foreman." Yet the poetic quality of his lines lies less in music than in a certain luminous suspension, a light, that comes in phrase and movement and gives a mountain clarity in such poems as "Ghost Town" and "Magenta" to conifers and mineshafts and even a dressmaker's dummy on a dump.

Ferril is a poet with something to say. He says it with beauty and honesty. The rest of us will do well to listen to him; to see with him both the Model-T and also "the dim

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unearthly prairie from which these peaks have not yet blown away."

FRANCES GILMOR.

Tucson, Arizona.

The Proud Sheriff—Eugene Manlove Rhodes—Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston, 1935—\$2.00.

Stampede you lovers of the Real West, for Eugene Manlove Rhodes' last novel, *The Proud Sheriff*, is just off the press and it is in every way a masterpiece of realistic writing that should be classed as Western literature supreme.

The book is a delight in every detail from its artistic cover jacket by the distinguished artist W. H. D. Koerner; its illuminating, appreciative preamble concerning the high lights in Gene Rhodes' colorful life by Henry Herbert Knibbs; to one of the most startling and surprisingly ingenious climaxes found in any of his inimitable novels.

The plot concerns Otey Beach, "a slim, awkward, and freckled towhead of twenty," who is implicated in the brutal murder of two of the most prominent citizens of Hillsboro, New Mexico, a Southwest mining town lost, "halfway to heaven" in a tangle of wild red hills. The circumstantial evidence against Otey tests the detective powers of Spinal Maginnis, the Proud Sheriff of Sierra County, who has faith in the boy's innocence. The theme is developed in Eugene Rhodes' easy, original, sparkling, hilarious style which gives so much pleasure to his readers but which meant hours of painstaking labor on the part of both Gene Rhodes and his faithful wife, May D. Rhodes, rewriting, revising, correcting his manuscripts, in a lifelong partnership of accomplishment. In fact the author admitted a few months ago, "That last story nearly killed me." Once again he proved that he was the greatest writer of Western tales for he demonstrates beyond a doubt that he knew his country and its people and drew most of his characters from life and selected events in this fast moving action story which actually occurred. Old

time residents of Hillsboro, Lake Valley and other Sierra County towns mentioned in the story will enjoy reading his true to life descriptions and chuckle over his lifelike delineation of the picturesque character of the Proud Sheriff, who appeared to be a slow-spoken, yet keen-witted, resourceful Westerner of the old school.

Gene Rhodes has passed on but he is still very much in the picture out West; he has not lost his place in the story, for he is still loved and his memory cherished in the hearts of his loyal friends who feel that his Spirit—the man's real self—laughs courageously at you through the unusual words of his self-written epitaph:

EPITAPH

"Now hushed at last the murmur of his mirth,
Here he lies quiet in the quiet earth.
—When the last trumpet sounds on land and sea
He will arise then, chatting cheerfully,
And, blandly interrupting Gabriel,
He will go sauntering down the road to hell.
He will pause loitering at the infernal gate,
Advising Satan on affairs of state,
Complaining loudly that the roads are bad
And bragging what a jolly grave he had!"

CLAY VADEN.

Quemado, New Mexico.

Contemporary Legends—Sydney Salt—Caraval Press, Majorca, 1935
—\$1.00.

Sydney Salt is a careful, almost parsimonious, writer whose production is measured to present and, so far as is possible, to solve the personal problem of Sydney Salt. That problem is an unusual one in that Salt's life has been more than extraordinarily unfortunate. But it also is characteristic and contemporary in that it mirrors the confusion and unhappiness, loneliness and misery of the dispossessed writers of the present day.

Salt has no social nor regional, even (I might say) national, roots. Out of the eight short stories in this volume, six deal with love and Sydney Salt, his own prescience of loneliness or the stability or instability of power or terror in its various projected and subjective forms. The other two, consciously or unconsciously, are attempts to find roots in the tradition, or in the revolutionary projection, of America. The Indian piece is unauthentic. Salt cannot understand the Indian tradition, nor is he familiar with it. It is a foreign land. And in the last story in the book, where he deals with the problem of communist organizers in the South, he admits that he can be no communist. It is unhappiness everywhere. And when the attempt to organize the negroes there failed, "We were a funeral all the way to New York." So goes the last line in the book.

Salt is now in Majorca. I had been hoping some stories would have been included to indicate how Salt had adjusted himself to the life of an expatriate. But there is nothing. And it seems that Salt has found it more difficult to write in Majorca than it was for him even in New York.

(Aside: one of the stories was originally published in *Front*. Salt should have made an acknowledgement of this fact. It was unethical not to do.)

The language is unusual. It is genuine, but somehow not quite smooth: as if he had strained for something to be expressed out of his own awareness that was almost impossible to be stated. But the movement of the narrative is always swift, intense with an occasional flash of poetic beauty. I think Salt in his literary production is "muscle-bound"—if he only could limber up and get going, it would be better for him and his public.

—NORMAN MACLEOD.

New York City.

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sneezes, and that simple fact somehow is the fatal reason why the book was written!

The foregoing is unfortunate in that it is a dull catalogue of pages that are a delightful group of pictures. You are suddenly aware that the countryside has come alive, that fields are being plowed, planted and reaped; and that animals are living and dying near you. Tito is no longer a mongrel stray dog, but a personality, a unique being whose past is a mystery, but whose every act in the present is the graceful gesture of a thoroughbred. And by the time you hear of his sad death, you are as moved as though a brave and gallant friend had died. New Mexico has been transformed from mere landscape, to the strangely beautiful home of a mystical Black Panther.

I might quote any number of lovely phrases or passages from the volume, simply by opening it at random. And I could retell many amusing stories of people and animals that fill its pages; but one cannot describe a poem. It must be read.

The book is beautiful in format. It is attractively bound and printed, the type is clear and pleasing to the eye; and the illustrations are excellent photographs, mostly of landscape, by Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Ernest Knee and Carl Van Vechten.

—SPUD JOHNSON.

Taos, New Mexico.

Jornada—R. L. Duffus—Covici Friede, New York; the Van Rees Press, 1935—\$2.00.

Upon sighting the author's name, one feels immediately that the pages will be authentic and masterly in the treatment of Trail days and ways. The romance *Jornada* verifies this prediction. It moves rapidly, unfolds its history thrillingly, and will not be put aside by the reader until the last line on page 313. Many new readers will be interested in the complicated intrigue of 1846 as Mr. Duffus depicts it;

and even if one eliminated the romantic portions—which could not be done, however—this new Trail book would be worth reading and placing on the shelf of accurate, informative Southwestern literature of this year.

To New Mexicans the title suggests the dreary Jornada del Muerto of their own state. Duffus, however, is writing about that sinister “short-cut” between the Ford of the Arkansas River and the Cimarron River, see pages 70, 83 and 99 for descriptions that linger in the mind. In trail parlance of the Spanish and Mexican days, *una jornada* was a day’s trek; later it took the meaning of a difficult stretch of desert country. “It is a good name for a book, and the camp scenes, trail day talk, charming word pictures are splendidly done.

One feels a vague regret that the lovely bride of the American caravan captain sounds a bit sophisticated and plain-spoken for her race, age, and the times. She is the masculine idea of a romance-breathing señorita rather than the vivid, real girl of exclusive Spanish rearing and cultural training befitting her high social rank. Another note is that her maid is a negress! New Mexico history reflects in unmistakable terms the abhorrence of the Mexican and New Mexican for slavery. There might be, in the Southern husband’s entourage, a darky *cook-body*, but one cannot think the high strung Doña Mercedes would permit black hands near her delicate person one of the innumerable Indian slaves or peona class Mexican servants would be more in keeping!

These items are academic; they do not interfere with rush of the story. The men are excellently characterized, their talking is one of the chief charms of the book. Perhaps it is too much to ask of a busy, Chicago rail-roader to cope with the vagaries of a romantic bride of a century ago.

Jornada opens the eyes to the almost limitless possibilities for romantic as well as historic literature of this stirring period of American times. This novel is an American

story for American readers; one wonders if it is not high time for the American reader to hear about the Mexican War from the Mexican angle? Certainly for a really great novel of that period, a prime requisite must be a sympathetic understanding of Mexican personality, and the evaluation of the events of that difficult time in Mexican history, —one which can best be appreciated after the passage of time and the cooling of the blood of two passionate peoples.

A book like *Jornada* is a delightful event; but it does not show the best of either the Mexican or the American. This period has not been over done either romantically or historically. May Mr. Duffus take up his gracious pen and give us more.

MAUDE MCFIE BLOOM.

Albuquerque.

Pittsburgh Memoranda—Haniel Long—Limited Edition. Writers Editions, Santa Fe, New Mexico—The Rydal Press—\$2.50.

It is surprising to find so much sweetness and light coming out of smoky and murky Pittsburgh!

In a Prologue, eleven Episodes, and an Epilogue, Haniel Long has presented, through the medium of biographies, sketches, and pictures of Pittsburgh and its famous sons, our nation in microcosm. For, with these stories of influential people and events in Pittsburgh, beginning with the Homestead strike of 1892, and ending with just before the Great Depression, the economic, industrial, political, and social history of the whole country unrolls itself. In the particular we may read the universal.

Here I am in danger of giving a wrong impression of this notable book. It is not history nor biography, sociology nor economics, but *poetry*. Strong and glowing poetry, too, fused frequently into a white heat of passionate feeling, informed with vigorously expressed and noble thought.

The form of this book is of great interest. Starting with a finely poetic and moving prologue in free verse

rhythms, it proceeds with a beautifully cadenced prose, which is varied at times by a sort of loose-rhymed blank verse and powerful free verse.

The whole poem seems charged with an electric excitement. As is natural, however, certain parts appeal more than others. Of these, my favorites are the *Prologue*, *Homestead*, *Brashear*, *Mrs. Soffel*, *Westinghouse*, *Henry George*, *Two Memoranda*, *Frank Hogan* and *Fred Demmler*, *Bloom Forever*, *O Republic*, and the *Epilogue*. I find that I have mentioned most of them. Well, they are all worthy of mention, but I prefer these because they seem to me to contain more of passionate emotion and feeling, striking and original thought, and pure lyricism. Here are the towering figures connected with the industrial and artistic development of Pittsburgh, some of them stripped of their sham greatness, others exalted and made greater, all of them humanized; here is bitten in, as with acid, the tragic waste of the World War; and here is the Smoky City, its humanity and beauty triumphing finally over its grime and dust and conflict. To me it is a great and significant thing that, out of such material, the poet created beauty, and, greater and more significant still, the note of quiet optimism which is woven, like a thread of gold, through the entire pattern.

Space allows me to cite only a few fine passages:

For lyric beauty:

Our forefathers were pioneers.

So are we.

They came like shadows through the Alleghanies,
exploring and hoping.

Our forefathers went shadow-like
into beautiful valleys
of orioles and rhododendron
—and of death.

(The Prologue)

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Nothing can trick the eye of love—lovers
knowing their identity, infinitude:
and if the path of love be the path of death,
it cannot frighten them—lovers knowing
 what is true,
and death is a lie; knowing what really
 concerns them,
and death does not.

(Mrs. Soffel)

O blackbirds, sing forever in faraway Texas,
sing forever in Kew Gardens, and in the Congo—
 (Two Memoranda)

Stems of a living forest,
Pittsburgh men and women and children,
their roots laced together under the earth,
their branches tied and meshed against the sky—
I have seen those trunks and leaves against
 the smoking sunsets.

(Epilogue)

For powerful and epigrammatic thought:

. one wonders whether a nation
can develop without the men who at each stage of
their own development stand up for what they
consider justice

(Homestead)

The alternative would be for the republic to breed
up a race of men who could work together without
growing violent: men more interested in getting
somewhere than in haying their own way.

(Idem)

Maybe if we keep knifing one another we will get
sick of it finally. When a man sickens of violence
and self-assertion, sometimes a spirit flows into
him the way an ocean flows into an inlet.

(Idem)

The fine hopefulness:

And so you have come, dear son,
and you enter a world more beautiful, truly,
than musician or painter has seen it—

(Two Memoranda)

(On looking at Pittsburgh's smoke and fog):
Despite the horrors of my time, I knew
(and knew it with the greatest joy life gives),
that there were people in that hidden city
seeking the laws of life, mingling their knowledge,
suffering but finding peace in one another,
and learning more and more not to wish power
over anyone but themselves.

It was no dream,
those living people, minds and hearts and bodies.

(Epilogue)

No, this is no dream, and it is good to have a fine, sensitive poet like Haniel Long assert it with force and emphasis.

In format and printing, the book is a delight and a credit to the Rydal Press. It is a book to buy, to keep as one's own, to read and re-read, to cherish. We need such books in times like these.

GEORGE ST. CLAIR.

Albuquerque.

Errata Sheet for QUARTERLY, February, 1935; Vol. V, No. 1

p. 22, 1.5—*analogous* for *analagous*.

p. 24, 1.1 below table—*enormous* for *erroneous*.

p. 24, 1.22—*unforeseen* for *unforseen*.

p. 24, 1.25—*competitors'* for *competitor's*.

p. 46, 1.29—correct after the dash as follows: “—so long as they merely wish for a folk-renaissance. It will disappear as soon as they espouse a realistic programme, etc.”

p. 59, 1.12—*anecdotes* for *anecdotes*.

p. 64, 1.17—*unreadable eyes* for *readable eyes*.