

1939

Book Reviews

University of New Mexico Press

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq>

Recommended Citation

University of New Mexico Press. "Book Reviews." *New Mexico Quarterly* 9, 4 (1939). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol9/iss4/19>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the University of New Mexico Press at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Quarterly by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Book Reviews

Mexico Reborn—Verna Carleton Millan—Houghton Mifflin Co., October 3, 1939—\$3.00.

Mexico Reborn is a pleasing combination of autobiography together with the economic and political history of Mexico of the twentieth century. Verna Millan intimately interprets the various modern trends by means of episodes taken from her private life. Mrs. Millan, an American who married a Mexican doctor, has been living in Mexico for the past six years. Because of her social position (her husband has served in government posts), the author has much inside information concerning many important figures and movements in present-day Mexico. Verna Millan frankly states her impressions on meeting and knowing such men as Diego Rivera, Portes Gil, Cárdenas, and others.

The chapter on "Anarchy in Art" contains interesting personal views on Mexican painting, literature, music, and the theatre. However, the statement that the Mexican theatre is completely Fascist is certainly open to argument. Could Cantinflas, who has been making the Mexican audiences laugh for all these years, be called a Fascist? Would the Fascists tolerate the existence of such democratic freedom in the use of political satire as is seen on the popular stage?

Mexico must and undoubtedly will be reborn; in fact the pains have been going on for some time. But the process can not be rushed as an emergency or Caesarean operation by surgeons, however sincere and skillful, from inside or outside that interesting country. The innate fatalism that exists in every Mexican (especially in the Indian) causes him to react less violently to outward stimuli. The following quotation from *Mexico Reborn* appears to be the reaction, caused by "rebirth," of a tortured, anguished, Anglo-Saxon soul rather than an entirely adequate picture of Mexico:

[253]

254] *The* NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY

Mexico is a tortured, anguished, violent country that seems unable ever to find peace. Everyone who is caught within its whirlpool must inevitably suffer as it suffers, sink with it or drift slowly to the surface. It is a country of maddening paradox; of erratic, strange genius that springs with meteoric swiftness from a dark sea of mediocrity; of men who quail before responsibility but face death with a calm, indifferent smile; it is a country so maddening in contrast, so infinitely rich in every variety and shade of emotion that one must have a very stable nervous system in order to survive there at all.

A. R. LOPES AND F. M. KERCHEVILLE.

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque, N. M.*

The Power House—Benjamin Appel—E. P. Dutton & Co., New York—\$2.75.

Benjamin Appel has the background to write such a novel as *Power House*. He was brought up in "Hell's Kitchen" of New York and he saw life at its worst. Many of his boyhood friends who belonged to the "gang" later became teachers, truck-drivers, and professional men, but there were others who became "cop-killers," "snitchers," or members of a mob-gang.

Bill Trent, the "Brain-Guy," collects a small group of "kids" who do small jobs in lower New York. Bill becomes the "yes-man" to a "big-shot" on the West Side who uses Bill and his gang to do his dirty work. When Bill finds out that he is only being advanced to be wiped out by another "big-shot" of the East Side, he pulls out of this business and goes into a new "racket" of strike-breaking. He thinks that he only needs one big job to become a *Power House* himself. The opportunity comes when he is called to a small steel town in Pennsylvania, but the union men of the steel company break him.

Throughout the story, Appel uses the language of the gangsters, the technique of the "Dead-End Kids," the set-

ting of "Hell's Kitchen," and minute details of all action. Appel writes his rough and rowdy actions much better than he writes a simple explanatory scene. Many of his characters tend to become tedious and tiresome. He uses a repetition of action in the story that becomes monotonous to the reader.

He tries to prove that one man can't become the head of all things, as shown by the following quotation:

"The secret generals! Christ, he might've known monopoly didn't end in a small town, in Wagener. Wagener was just a lieutenant in a small trench as Kerrigan was in New York. God Almighty; Was there any connection between the Power House that ran the Wageners and the industries of the country, and the Power House that ran the Kerrigans and the rackets? Nobody could beat the Power House! Only the damn workers had the gall to put up a fight."

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

DOROTHY MAE BOWER.

In the Shadow of History—Edited by J. Frank Dobie, Mody C. Boatright, Harry H. Ransom—Texas Folk-Lore Society Publications, Number XV—Texas Folk-Lore Society, 1939.

In the Shadow of History is an appealing volume in homespun format, the 1939 contribution of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, presenting further sources of that lore: new Alamo material and tales of the sheep industry. The introductory essay, "Folk-Lore and Tradition in a Growing Society," by Professor R. A. Tzanoff of Rice Institute, is a sturdy defense of folk-lore in our modern day, as being essential to real understanding of land and people, as a source of literature, and as a means of preserving regional character beneath a spreading cosmopolitan veneer.

There are several essays to delight those who cherish the story of the line that Travis drew on the Alamo floor, long regarded by sober history as apocryphal. Documentary proof of the existence of the supposedly mythical Louis Rose, only survivor of the Alamo, is presented by R. B. Blake

256] *The NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY*

of the Texas State Historical Association. His detective work is supplemented by the original Zuber narrative of Rose's escape and by J. Frank Dobie's and Edward G. Rohrbach's account of the Travis line and Jim Bowie's death.

Buried literary treasure of the sheep industry is mapped by Winifred Kupper in "Folk Characters of the Sheep Industry," as she elevates the philosophic sheepherder to parity with the more glamorous and widely-exploited cowboy. She sees Spanish sheep industry and English sheepmen meet on Southwest plains to produce real folk-lore personalities. Companion essays, Merrill Bishop's "The Ghost Sheep Dog," and Dan Storm's "The Pastor and the Serpent," affirm the wealth of unexplored legend and character in the sheep industry.

Other papers, such as J. Frank Dobie's account of the paisano, or road-runner, or the two anecdotes by Marcelle Lively Hamer and Charles F. Arrowood are pleasant inclusions in one of the most charming of the distinguished Texas Folk-Lore Society Series.

KATHERINE SIMONS

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

*William Wordsworth of Rydal Mount—Frederika Beatty—Dutton,
1939.*

This latest book on Wordsworth is "less concerned with William Wordsworth the poet than with 'William Wordsworth, Esquire, of Rydal Mount.'" The author is professedly gathering together the last literary remnants and biographical fragments of the greatest English poet of the nineteenth century. Since books have been written on *Shakespeare's Silences*—on what he did not say—and a poem has been written on Wordsworth's grave, the author has ample justification from the standpoint of scholarship in collecting these last glimpses and reminiscences of a great figure. From a purely literary standpoint, however, the book suffers the defects of its virtues. As a complete record

of Wordsworth's relations, domestic and social; in his last days, the work is comprehensive rather than selective. The author fails to show, as she proposes in her foreword, that the "difference between the older and the younger man was far less marked than is usually thought." Those of us who still are unable to read "The Prelude" without interest and excitement almost too great for comfort, and who follow Professor Legouis' *Early Life of Wordsworth* with rapt attention, feel ourselves nodding as Wordsworth nods during this last decade at Rydal Mount. It is pleasant to renew our friendship with Crabb Robinson and the English countryside, but it is agitating rather than moving to know the particulars of poor Dorothy Wordsworth's insanity. Dorothy Wordsworth was endowed at birth with the greatest delicacies of thought and the most acute powers of observation. Without her companionship and stimulus neither Wordsworth nor Coleridge could have fulfilled his function in the history of letters. Without Dorothy's tender care and sympathy the restorative powers of nature which Wordsworth experienced and joyously made available to his contemporaries and to us might never have been felt or recognized. In France in the nineties Wordsworth had found Annette Vallon, his one Byronic affinity, but he had also found

"France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again."

The personal disillusionment and despair which came over the poet when the French Revolution, conceived in idealism, turned into the Reign of Terror, realized in blood, was the curse of Wordsworth's whole generation. It was the chief source of the *mal du siècle*, that melancholy malady of the age, which tended to blight all hopes and curb all virtuous effort. Nature and Dorothy together, mostly Dorothy, restored Wordsworth to his own true self, and Wordsworth thereupon made available the solace of nature to his own and subsequent generations.

Coleridge, the other great initiator of English Romanticism, also owed a great debt to Dorothy, not only for her

258] *The NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY*

renovation of her brother William, but for her delightful companionship. Coleridge, thanks to his own weakness of will, and the importunities of his friend Southey, had taken unto himself as a wife and inspiration, Sara Fricker, milliner of Bath. "The vision and the faculty divine," which as companion or observer Sara utterly lacked, Dorothy Wordsworth possessed in large measure; and much of Coleridge's sensitivity of observation and finesse of aperçu came from his walks and conversations with this rare spirit. It, therefore, seems unfortunate that Miss Beatty, in composing her "Conversation Piece" covering the last years of Wordsworth should exhume Dorothy Wordsworth from the oblivion which settled over her so justly and mercifully at the loss of her faculties.

The new documentation which Miss Beatty brings together in this study proves that Dorothy's brother was clear-headed and healthy-minded to the last. But William Wordsworth of Rydal Mount emerges from this investigation of his last years deficient in significance of biographical detail, in fecundity of mind, and in geniality of temperament. The great light of poetical romanticism came from a rising and not a setting sun.

DANE FARNSWORTH SMITH.

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

Children of God—Vardis Fisher—Harper Brothers, 1939—\$3.00.

Whether you have ever written a novel or just tried to, set yourself the task of describing a great religious movement in world history with a cast of major and minor prophets, warriors and organizers, a laity learned and unlearned, and with scenes shifting across a continent in which Palestine would be lost a hundred times, and you have a brief statement of the prospect facing Vardis Fisher, the Idaho novelist who was awarded the Harper Prize for fiction in 1939-40. Then consider your audience, the people of America chiefly, some of them adherents of this religion and bred

to its sympathies and hostilities, and the rest outsiders just as filled with rumors and attitudes favorable and unfavorable toward any religious expression differing from their own. One thing is in the author's favor today. More people are able to view the sphere of faith and the supernatural with common sense and intelligence. Freud and Jung have seen to that. If everyone would read the *Old Testament* and *Children of God* with an eye to the results of religious hysteria, society might move toward religious humanism which is the best lesson to be drawn from both works.

There is no single figure central to the plot of Fisher's novel. Joseph Smith, the Messiah of Mormonism, dominates the first half of the book, and Brigham Young, the leader who established the church in Utah dominates the remainder. Numerous other characters hold the interest as they play central roles in various episodes of the Mormon people's history. Yet the book does not lack in unity. The reader is absorbed in the outcome of this experience, which he begins with the mystical visions of young Joe Smith in the backwoods of New York state and ends with a group of his disillusioned followers, seventy years later, heading south into Mexico to seek a new Zion where they may set up a religious kingdom more faithful to the prophet than the Mormonism left behind them. In the broad vital stream of his prose Fisher portrays Joseph preaching with a flow of words and imagery that compelled men to follow him; then Joseph in hiding from his enemies while the faithful prepared a Zion for him in Ohio; Joseph and the Saints stoned and tarred by mobs in the Middlewest, yet building first in Ohio, then Missouri, and then Illinois, beautiful temples with fine little cities around them, and leading orderly, constructive lives which malicious rumors painted as sordid and lecherous. Whatever one may think of Abraham and Solomon, whom Joseph Smith set out to emulate, they could not be accused of spreading social disorder. Nor could Joseph within his own religious kingdom. Yet the Mormons were attacked with arms and outlawry, by thugs and scoundrels both

260] *The* NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY

within and without the law. When these children of their God fled beyond the outposts of the inhospitable United States, it was only to find that the Mexican War had again put their empire under the rule of authority in Washington. The story of the Danites, a murderous band operating for vengeance upon the enemies of Mormonism, is a blood chilling chapter in the narrative; yet the provocation is stated, and the same fair-telling which characterized the whole is evident here. Vardis Fisher has been amazingly successful in understanding all the material he has to handle—not just the argument for the Mormons (and Fisher was born one), nor the charges against them, but the fully rounded life material which often rolls up sincerity and hypocrisy, spirituality and carnality, ideals and every day facts in the same bundle. The only difference between a saint and a sinner, a hero and a villain, is the matter of degree: one balances up more heavily this way or that—toward amiable and genial traits or harsh and the unkind. Sanctity is sometimes one of the most egregious forms of selfishness, and practically all godly souls have to fight the chief of moral failings, pride.

This novel is Vardis Fisher's greatest achievement. Not everyone will agree that it is superior to *In Tragic Life* or *Forgive Us Our Virtues*, or one of the other brilliant novels he has done and not found readers for. I don't agree. They are distinguished books, but this is narrowly near a great book. Certainly no Harper prize winner has had more power in interpreting pioneer society, more of panorama in seeing the land of America in a significant time, more of the gift of style bent to its purpose. Fisher has promised another historical novel. I, for one, insist that he write it. He may later do his greatest book, returning to something more analytic of character facing the America of this day and immediate experience. Yet he is climbing the right ladder of testing—first the materials that touch one's own heart and then the heartbreak of others. Vardis Fisher is a major American novelist. In his writing one notes resemblances

BOOK REVIEWS

[261

to both Thomas Wolfe and D. H. Lawrence. There may be something in literary reincarnation.

T. M. PEARCE

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

Hoppity Bunny's Hop—Elizabeth Willis DeHuff—The Caxton Printers. Ltd., 1939—\$2.00.

Many an Easterner feels strange when he first views the Southwest desert land with sage and tumbleweed, prickly-pear and rabbit-brush. An eastern bunny rabbit feels not only strange but terrified when an airplane ride drops him off in New Mexico, where big red ants chase him from their sand hill, and a rattlesnake thrusts its deadly fangs where Hoppity Bunny was before he jumped. Hoppity escapes from the kind children who had brought him along as a mascot, and he thinks he hasn't a friend in this strange terrible land, especially after he burns his tongue on a chile pod and sticks his nose into cactus spines. He was even running from four little prairie dogs, until they laughed at him, and befriended his sore nose by removing the cactus. Hoppity almost twists the head off Gray Owl's neck, by running in circles, until Bunny Cottontail stops him, and together they untwist Gray Owl by running the other way. The Indian rabbit hunters separate Hoppity Bunny from his friend Jack Rabbit, and Hoppity reacts to a desert sandstorm and cloudburst, finds out what a porcupine quill is like, and has other adventures before Jerry and Jean come along and return him to the Dragon Fly airplane.

Elizabeth Willis DeHuff is well known for her children's books. *Tay Tay's Tales* is a collection of Indian folk material, as is *Tay Tay's Memories*. *Hoppity Bunny's Hop* is the most amusing book Mrs. DeHuff has done. Mildred Lowry Hill has caught the spirit of fun in her drawings of Hoppity being comforted by prairie dogs or laughed at by Jack Rabbit. Caxton Printers have bound the book in green

262] *The* NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY

with wise-eyed Hoppity sitting philosophically in fern and clover just before his wild adventures in New Mexico. The book is issued just when Christmas gift hunters should find it perfect to entertain young readers, and the older ones, when they do the reading, as well.

T. M. PEARCE

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

You Get What You Ask For—Norman Macleod—Harrison-Hilton Books, 1939—\$2.50.

This is a first novel, by a young man who has written three books of poetry, edited half-a-dozen or more poetry magazines, served as free-lance writer on a score of periodicals in the United States, France, and Russia. Those who know Norman Macleod's life, know that he has been whisked by his own will and by circumstances over a considerable part of the globe, and that everywhere he has caught hold for a little while and then lost his grasp, seeking always full satisfaction for the mad currents in his brain. Mad currents there are: *You Get What You Ask For* supplies abundant evidence for the statement. Perhaps because of this restless, driving appetite for life, Norman Macleod matches in himself the whirling-dervish unrest of modern history. One would have to dance over the jittering night life of Harlem, the shell-craters in Spain, the fetid tenement life of Paris or Los Angeles, the art colonies of Greenwich Village or Taos to catch the rhythm of frustration beating in countless lives. Macleod's novel is a brilliant documentary of this side of the modern world, not a side to be dismissed or ignored because there are other more stable aspects of society, but on the contrary a side to be examined and pondered.

You Get What You Ask For is one of the most caustic pageants modern literature can provide of the wastefulness of human resources. From the moment the book begins, in a letter to Gordon Graham from a Communist worker in

BOOK REVIEWS

[263

Holland, to the defeat of Frank Klaber, a candy salesman who is beaten into idiocy by racketeers in the New York Bronx, the battle with malevolent destiny is pursued. That the narrative doesn't hold to more positive forces is no criticism of the point of view. The story has truth. Nowhere does it ring false. Others in these same whirling scenes would have found other footing and walked some other direction. The New Mexico episode gives reason for believing this. The autobiography of scenes in Santa Fe is thinly disguised for Macleod. Well known figures on the Writers' Project, artists engaged on the Gallup defense committee, even poetry and points of view expressed in this magazine are satirized, with malice toward some, but after all it's Macleod's book. He tells the truth from his point of view, and you can take sides for or against him.

There are three themes and sets of characters: Gordon Graham, his wife Sonja, and their story; the Klaber family (Sonja's grandparents, her parents, the Uncle Frank and his alter ego George) and their struggle; the John Patterson Henderson, Allan Beckwith, Salvador Santistevan group, brilliant warped young souls who are pushed to the fringe of lunacy or pulled from it by alcohol and sex. What makes for stability with such a group is difficult to fathom. Reverberating in the life episodes of the book is the war in Spain, "Peace" from the Heaven of Father Divine, the mobs fed by Coughlin, Trotsky, or the Dies Committee investigating un-American activities. A thin wraith of the poet in Norman Macleod glides into the text at the end of many episodes: "The slender dawn came up gray over Mt. Morris Park as the milk wagons ushered in the morning," or "Over a sandbag in front of a trench on the Estremadura front, José Xavier snaked the steel of his bayonet," or "The universe was tied together with rainbow madness. In Arizona the Navajos were dark brown sunlit amber. Bronze were the deep lines cut in the wind's countenance."

In spite of tawdry episodes, the book is distinguished. Its final line seems almost symbolic of the beauty, precision,

264] *The* NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY

and vagueness of modern destiny: "The golden beak of an airplane beat into the future."

T. M. PEARCE

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

Decision

By ELEANOR PESONEN

Tears being spent—fountains of the eyes being dry—
I will put aside the mind that believes the lie,
Accepts the malicious word, is willing to hear
Falsehood. How can I explain to a reluctant ear?

If it is not enough that my signature scrawled across my life
Is guileless and unaffected, let the knife
Sever the treasured friendship. Who does not know
Can never be persuaded. I will not beg for relief. Let it be so.