

1939

Book Reviews

University of New Mexico Press

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Recommended Citation

University of New Mexico Press. "Book Reviews." *New Mexico Quarterly* 9, 1 (1939). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol9/iss1/16>

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Venezuela—Erna Fergusson—Alfred Knopf—1938—\$3.00.

My dear Miss Fergusson:

"This will never do, Miss Fergusson." (If I were sure that our friend, Matt Pearce, the editor of our *QUARTERLY*, would not publish this letter, I should write "My dear Erna," for we have known each other for a long time, and, as you know, I have long been an admirer, both of your work and of you. Perhaps some will say that this is a rather unconventional way of reviewing a book, but I am tired of conventions and old enough to discard them; and, after all, since the method of reviewing books by writing to dead authors is an established one, why should a reviewer not address a live writer?)

I wrote the first words quoted above as a note of warning. You have done too good a job in too many fields; you are bound to have detractors. You meet the tourist agency on its ground, the geographer on his, the historian on his, and the philosophic thinker on his. It is, perhaps, in this final respect that your book should command the most attention. The light which you throw upon political, economic, and social conditions in Venezuela, together with your profound speculations as to the means by which such conditions might be improved, make your book a necessity for all liberal thinkers in that country; nor would *our* sociologists fail to profit greatly by studying it.

What astonishes me is your evidently wide and varied knowledge of both country and people. You do not say in the book how long you stayed there, but certainly you have condensed or instilled into it the learning, wisdom, and wit of another writer's lifetime. How do you do it? I wish you would write a preface to your next book and explain your method. I might be able to make use of it, myself.

Yes, Miss Fergusson, you have written a fascinating book, one that will surely become a classic of travel. I think

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it is partly because you are a woman, with a woman's sympathies and intuitions, with a woman's flair for reading character, and a woman's love of color. Do you know what I regard as the most beautiful passage in the book? It is on page 232:

"For the first time I appreciated the values of green in every modulation from palest water clarity, through Nile and jade tints, the yellow greens of noxious slime, to sane leaf green of rush and palm and the strong chords of solitary saman and ceiba trees." And so on. A poet, a painter, and a musician are at work there. I don't believe a man could have written that.

Then, in contrast to such lines, are the quatrains you quote on page 214, in both Spanish and English. I should suggest, though, an emendation in the last line of the last one:

Diçe la sabia Teodora,
Volviéndose en su cama,
Mas vale el beso de un hombre
Que cien leguas de sabana.

You translate "sabana," and rightly so, by the word "savanna." Suppose, however, that you place an accent over the first "a" in sabana, making it mean "sheet" instead of "savanna." Would that not be more appropriate in Teodora's condition?

They tell me that your book has been banned in Venezuela. Is it true? I hope the government has not been so little regardful of your kindly humor, of your comprehension of the needs of the people, and of your sympathy with their aspirations, to do such a stupid thing. No, on second thought, I should withdraw that word. The government of Venezuela may be wiser than we think, knowing, as it must, what need there is that such an enlightened and enlightening book should be read, and that the surest way to get a book read is to ban it.

It vexes me to choose another guide, and she walked alone all her life, scorning even the hand of her sisters when she tottered with disease. In what dark nights she wrote *Wuthering Heights* it is not said, but somewhere in that horrible novel sound all the tempest and gritting fiber of her nature. That is surely the most withering book in English; and the marvel is that it was written by a girl who lived for at least seven years both a quiet and unknown sister in a most familial home.

For Mr. White has dispelled the mists of rumor that has swirled dankly about the Bronte home. He finds it a happy household, until death came in the 1840's; he finds that the moors were the great love, not the desolate mental graveyard, of the three surviving girls and their brother; he insists, and proves, that the father was ever kind and affectionate to his children, not grim and brutal as some have maintained. Nor were the Brontes especially poor.

In fact, he has dispelled almost too much. For there remains still, now made doubly mysterious, the brooding reticence of Emily Bronte. Mr. White suggests that she had loved, and the man she loved died, and she grieved within until she, too, died, not unwillingly. It may be; but the queer, silent nature of Emily Bronte is a question that will not down. Out of that nature she made her terrifying book and her poems, and the bustling Charlotte may have had a greater renown but the secret Emily has the greater wonder.

It was a household that only literary critics could consider strange. All the children had written, and when those who survived grew old enough to publish, their practice and their skill led them all to competent work. The passion that Charlotte felt toward her Belgian schoolmaster perhaps inspired *Jane Eyre*, but the humiliation and misery she felt as a governess dictated it. There was no wretchedness then in the household, nor was there when, in the same year, *Wuthering Heights* appeared, to face neglect. One mystery alone remains, but it is a mystery

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East, and a crude table made by one of the negro carpenters is unabashed by the silver service on the elegant highboy in the dining room. The trip to Galveston made by Cavin and his Georgia bride, Lucina Lyttleton, is one of the graphic episodes in the book; they land in Galveston at the start of reconstruction days when the port is overrun with negroes and an army of Northern officials enjoying the spoils of war. The Darcy family endures a second pioneering at Locust Hill Plantation when, like the other old Texas families, they recoup losses from the war. This is the important side of the book, its vivid and understanding pictures of Texas life, the eventfulness of everyday life. There are exciting happenings, raids and maraudings by unleashed bands of whites and darkies, personal tragedies through pride and misunderstanding. But plot is secondary—I found it at times hard to follow with interest. I do value the book highly for its gift of characters and their record in a life that was noble in moral tone and refined in works of the mind and spirit. On one point especially, it reassures us that the North did not fully understand the best in the South—its relations to the negro. Let one of Mrs. Krey's paragraphs describing Uncle Matt, a negro servant, show that what I say is true:

Matt, entering the dining-room at that moment, laid some pieces of fat kindling on the fire and drew a round table with a fluted edge directly in front of the hearth. On it he placed a small silver bowl containing several whole lemons boiled in thick sugary syrup the color of amber—a preparation always on hand in Philip's house. Then he set a bottle of rum on the table, a silver pitcher of hot water, a saucer of cloves, and two julep cups with long spoons in them. He had slipped on the white coat that always hung behind the kitchen door and stood, with a bootjack in hand, waiting for a pause in the conversation. Standing there, with his head thrown up, in a gesture reminiscent of Philip's own carriage, he chose his moment and then, kneeling before his

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How well your book has sold, I have no idea. You have probably read that much overrated collection of sorority-sophomore alleged wit called *With Malice Toward Some*. It is a best-seller. When I put it alongside your artistically designed, solidly constructed, and beautifully written book, I almost despair of my countryman's taste, but I console myself with the inspiring paragraph which ends your book:

"The whole world has so far to go to attain true civilization that I cannot believe young Venezuela, so inspired and so led, is far behind. In some curious but real way the spirit of Bolívar does live in these boys. Modern youth is as free as he was from the fetters of tradition, as capable of a great ideal, as courageous to fight for it, as intelligent, perhaps to realize it."

Your sincere admirer and friend,

GEORGE ST. CLAIR.

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

The Miracle of Haworth: a Bronte Study—W. Bertram White—E. P. Dutton and Company, 1939.

This is almost Charlotte's book. It is only logical that it should be, for of the six shy Bronte children, Charlotte lived longest, wrote most, and won the highest renown. When her *Jane Eyre* appeared in 1847, she became instantly famous, the successive books but continued that fame, and when she died even the common folk of Haworth mourned that so great a person had perished among them.

But a wraith slips in among the lines. It is Emily Bronte, younger by two years, dead at thirty of a tuberculosis she would allow no doctor to see. This is, in spite of all, Emily's book. For Emily shows herself one of the most mysterious and alluring characters in literary history and one of the most contained minds in human history. In one of her terse poems she had said:

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading;

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that, as the Haworth dwellers knew, cannot be ascribed to "bleakness," or "poverty," or any of the customary catch-words used to describe the land and the condition of the Brontes. One year Emily resolved to turn within, to live her life personally, to intrude on no one and to ask no intrusion. Thus she moved through her home tasks, sweeping the floor and dusting the furniture and pouring the tea; and then she would leave to watch the moors and to write. She left her family, though she lived with them.

This is almost Charlotte's book. But the eye sees the figure of Emily moving there, and asks unanswerable questions. There are no answers. Emily Bronte wished it so.

WILLIS JACOBS.

... *and Tell of Time*—Laura Krey—Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938—\$2.75.

After a trip to New York City, Frank Dobie once remarked to me, "I don't belong to all that, I'm a Texan." Since that time, I never get into Texas without wondering what the real spirit of the place is, what lingers there of the old unity of the Republic of Texas, what remains of the separatism of the South and of Texas apart from even the South and just of itself. . . . *and Tell of Time* gives the answer. Laura Krey, native of the state, reared on a plantation which was, Texas style, an echo of the family life of Virginia and Carolina, remembering a childhood when the stubborn fight for states' rights had been lost on the battlefield and won in the political skirmishes long after conclusion of the Civil War, is entitled to write these chapters of people and places so important to an understanding of the American past. Her pride and love for it all shows in the careful workmanship of her novel, in the gifted description of the routine life of her people. Cavin Darcy, the chief figure in the book, builds his home on the Brazos River and brings to it family possessions from Georgia. Here a plain pine rocking chair with sagging cowhide seat and calico cushion is neighbor to mahogany cabinet work from the

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master's outstretched feet, changed his boots to crocheted slippers.

"I told Jake I'd take keer o' you, too, Mas' Cavin," he said, turning to Cavin.

T. M. PEARCE.

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque

The Tales of Algernon Blackwood—E. P. Dutton and Company, 1939
—\$2.50.

The instincts in men to which uncanny appeals are always present are always induced by the same stimuli to produce the same chill up the spine. Therefore, the tales which Mr. Blackwood wrote from 1906-1910, just republished by Dutton, are not dated. Unlike many tales of horror there is no dependence upon mechanical devices or scenes which, once appalling in their fierceness, have been overshadowed by the more frightful every day death and destruction which we accept as normal in our present civilization.

Mr. Blackwood writes of the elemental forces of the universe, a power of evil so malign that it overwhelms men, possesses, tortures, and obliterates their souls. There is a range from the simple ghost story, "A Case of Evesdropping," to the more intricate "Physical Invasion," and the age old werewolf of "The Wendigo." The stories are realistic; they are, on the whole, convincing. One falls into the pseudo scientific attitude of Dr. Silence in reading them, and fortifies his statements with one's own. Why not? If time and space are relative, perhaps non-existent, if all psychic experiences, dreams, and clairvoyance can be referred to the fourth and fifth and sixth dimensions, why is anything impossible, why is anything inexplicable? With daily scientific shattering of reality as we know it, and a substitution of symbols for facts, with proof of lore discarded as superstitious ignorance, with old wives's tales assuming scientific basis, who can deny that a man may be possessed by unseen evil forces, that vile impulse lingers

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near its earthly consummation, felt and seen by a man more sensitive than the average? When we see the results of the invocation of the old Teutonic gods can we deny that unseen evil forces are awaiting their opportunity for destruction?

The Tales are well-written, vivid, and thrilling. We would enjoy more of the humor and characterization that Mr. Blackwood gave us in *Dudley and Gilderoy*; but after all that was another story, neither supernatural, uncanny, nor mysterious.

EDITH S. BLESSING.

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

Sir Walter Scott—Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson—Columbia University Press, 1938.

The latest biography of Sir Walter Scott is by Sir Herbert Grierson, that subtle mind of the north country that has penetrated and illuminated so many of the cran- nies and depths of English letters. The book is an out- growth of a series of essays given by Sir Herbert at Tor- onto University, in which he utilized hitherto unpublished letters and uncited facts bearing on the life of Scott. Pro- fessor Grierson has not made this study with any desire to rival Lockhart as Scott's great official biographer. Rather, he wishes to supplement Lockhart by adding to the record certain evidence regarding Sir Walter's traits of character and certain biographical facts which threw light on some of the personages in his novels. If Lockhart's life is a mas- terly portrait, Grierson's work, within the limits which Sir Herbert has set for himself in order to avoid twice-told tales, is a definitive study.

Professor Grierson dispels some of the mystery about Mrs. Scott's mother by proving that she fled from an an- cient and honorable husband for a quickly terminated romance with a younger and less scrupulous man. Scott's own love affair, his innocent ardor and wooing of a distant and aristocratic relation of his own aristocratic mother, is

traced from its very beginning to its distressing close. The results of this first love and of the hasty marriage which he made on the rebound show Scott to be a more violent and tempestuously temperamental character than Lockhart was willing to admit. Like Shakespeare, Scott's underlying motive in the exercise of his artistic genius was to win the social position which in Britain is so closely connected with an impressive landed estate. Scott's legal degree, qualifying him to be an advocate, was sought to establish his position amid the social aristocracy of Edinburgh. Later, the same eagerness for worldly eminence prompted his vast expenditures at Abbotsford while he was borrowing money on books that had not yet been started and drawing money out of his bankrupt publishing house.

Mr. Grierson has thoroughly investigated the letters and the accounts of Scott's partners in the publishing and bookselling business and has found that not the Ballantynes, as both Scott and Lockhart assumed, but Robert Cadell, a partner of Constable, was the man who lured Scott into assuming all sorts of unnecessary obligations for his ill-fated firm. Cadell also, by his unscrupulous cleverness, robbed Scott of the legitimate profit which might have accrued from the tremendous outburst of creative energy lasting from the time of his business failure to his decline and death. According to Professor Grierson, Cadell served as the taskmaster and slave-driver, who, for his own gain, drove Scott to such a point of exhaustion that the great writer suffered shock and death. Mr. Cadell's profits from exploiting Scott's strength and genius enabled the publisher to extricate himself from failure and to leave an estate of over 100,000 pounds.

Strangely enough, Sir Walter Scott, who was an unreasonable Tory in politics and an utter aristocrat at heart, was, according to Mr. Grierson, supreme in characterization only when he was portraying the poor and the humble. In fine, Scott's greatest gift to civilization was not in characterization or in philosophy or even in the novel where he

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started a world movement. His greatest contribution was in history; for he it was who first taught the historian and other students of the past the dramatic quality and the significance of the common man.

DANE FARNSWORTH SMITH.

*University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque.*

Indian Dance

By ETHEL B. CHENEY

Ageless
The beat of brown
Feet on brown sand. Primeval
Rhythm of ascending
Prayer.