



THE WHITE HOUSE IN JACKSON'S ADMINISTRATION

Nation's Hero, People's Friend

ANDREW JACKSON: PORTRAIT OF A PRESIDENT. By Marquis James. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1937. \$5.

Reviewed by E. DOUGLAS BRANCH

AS James's portrait of "Andrew Jackson: The Border Captain" was a Goya, so is this later portrait a Renoir. The brushwork is delicate and the tints mellowed. As the narrative begins Jackson is in retirement, puttering about the cotton-plants and the stables of the Hermitage, worried about his debts and his diarrhoea. Beguiled almost (but not quite!) against his will into the Presidency—an artful promotion which James relates in the light of hitherto undisclosed facts—and thrust into a new kind of warfare, Jackson is yet affectionately concerned with his scapegrace adopted son, and almost maudlin over the swarm of urchin Andrews and Rachels. His loyalty to his friends burns a wide swath through his politics. He hates Henry Clay's guts; and he dies regretful that he had not hung Calhoun. Jackson's loyalty to his departed Rachel shapes the course of a nation; and when a New England Sunday school teacher asks for the name of Abel's slayer, an innocent replies: "General Jackson."

But this portrait, unlike the one by Sully which affluent persons may find on twenty-dollar bills, does not conceal the firm lines of the Border Captain's character. Jackson was a nationalist: "Our Union: It must be preserved." He distrusted a moneyed aristocracy, not from an agrarian bias but because he set human rights (Indians excepted from humankind) above property rights. James contributes an unwelcome reminder to spellbinders: that Jackson regarded Jefferson as a feathery doctrinaire, while the third President looked on the seventh as a buckskin ruffian. The reader's final impression of Jackson may well be the slogan of the campaign of 1824: "Old

Hickory, the Nation's Hero and the People's Friend."

The author remarks disarmingly, "History has concerned me only as it touched Jackson, or as Jackson touched it." Even so, the background is disappointingly sketchy. It is no diminution of this noteworthy biography to comment that Bowers's "Party Battles of the Jackson Period" and Fish's "The Rise of the Common Man" are a needful easel for James's portrait. Accounts of Presidential campaigns which omit mention of the Liberty and Free Soil parties and dismiss the Antimasonic party as "a curious political sect" are hardly just to Jackson's own concerns. Amos Kendall's shift to Jackson is not explained, and the "Kitchen Cabinet" generally are dim shadows in the gaslight. The story of Van Buren's resignation from the Secretaryship of State is too elliptical to be understood. Of Jackson's own veerings, only his partial turn-about on the internal improvements question remains unilluminated. In other actions Jackson's motives are buttressed by James's documented insight, by clear writing mortised with the footnotes of seven years' gleaning. Into the corpus of Jacksoniana James has plumped a bottle-ful of "Matchless Sanative," a tonic compounded of patience, intelligence, imagination, and industry. His Jackson is alive, an "Old Hickory" of pulsing sap, a man who broke heads while shielding his own heartbreak. And this biography of a President who relinquished office a century ago last March has an arresting timeliness: perhaps, as the reader's convictions may have it, because Justice Story remarked with considerable truth, "Though we live under the form of a republic, we are in fact under the absolute rule of a single man"; or because Jackson was a man of property who became the man of the people.

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Melodrama with Social Trimmings

EUROPA IN LIMBO. By Robert Briffault. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1937. \$2.75.

Reviewed by GILBERT CHASE

IN continuing the story of Julian Bern and the Princess Zena through the years of the World War and the Russian Revolution, the author of "Europa" has again displayed his flair for vivid narration; but as a realistic novelist he has placed himself in an entirely untenable position. First, because his social thesis, apparently based on the assumption that the capitalistic order is responsible for the human depravity and corruption which he so gloatingly describes, prevents him from seeing life truthfully in terms of human character and human destiny. And secondly, because his desire to be impressively shocking at all costs, running through the book like an obsession, betrays him into such incongruous absurdities. Mr. Briffault tries to convey an impression of pseudo-sophisticated eroticism. The imparting of sensationally scandalous details about the morals of titled personages is a time-honored device to *épater le bourgeois*; but it has never been a means for winning the respect of discriminating readers.

If Mr. Briffault had confined himself consistently to the thesis that "life is a filthy business," he might have been able to make out a fairly convincing case in his portrayal of war-time demoralization, with its concomitants of greed, lust, cruelty, and selfishness. But in attributing this filthiness exclusively to members of a "capitalistic" society, he makes his bias so obvious that it completely spoils his case. Julian Bern's intellectual and moral superiority, presumably the result of his radical inclinations, remains as unconvincing as the crass ineptitude and immorality of the "bourgeois" characters. Nor does the relish with which Mr. Briffault depicts the atrocities perpetrated by the "White" officers in Russia free us from the suspicion that some excesses may also have been committed by the "Reds."

Shorn of its intellectual pretensions, the book emerges as melodrama, crude but effective. There is plenty of action, and plenty of excitement. There are perhaps too many characters and too many incidents; but the movement and atmosphere are well sustained. The central theme is the love of Julian and Zena, which has a tragic dénouement after they are finally united in the midst of the revolution in Russia. But the plot is thickened with an imbroglia of espionage and counter-espionage. If we place this novel on the plane of sheer melodrama, we need not smile at some of its lines. But then we will have little patience with its intellectual and moralistic posturings.

Hope for the Novelette

A CARGO OF PARROTS. By R. Hernekin Baptist. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1937. \$1.25.

LOVING MEMORY. By James Hill. The Same.

NIGHT AT HOGWALLOW. By Theodore Strauss. The same.

THIS MAN, JOE MURRAY. By William Corcoran. The same.

Reviewed by HOWARD MUMFORD JONES

THE four books under inspection, together with a prize-winning fifth by Wallace Stegner entitled "Remembering Laughter," are the five most publishable manuscripts submitted in a contest for the best novelette. In bringing out these books, Little, Brown and Company is making an important contribution to current fiction by reviving a form which, since James and Conrad, has not had many practitioners.

The novelette, halfway between the short-story and the novel, offers certain advantages and certain difficulties to the writer which might advance the art of fiction, could the form be cultivated. On the one hand, the novel as now being written has degenerated as an artistic form from what it was in the hands of Conrad and James. This does not mean that it has not gained in range of subject matter and even in certain technical resources, but it does mean that, judged mainly as works of art, contemporary novels have been too often satisfied to substitute immediacy or a meliorative urge for the artistic shaping in which James believed. Outlines have become blurred and purposes have gone awry; and in place of conceiving the novel as a long curve of experience, in Lubbock's phrase, writers tend to conceive it as a block or lump of matter in which bulk is quite as important as direction.

An analogous blurring of lines has taken place in the short story. Undoubtedly good work has been wrought; but the anxiety to avoid a merely mechanical treatment of episode has driven many writers to refuse the story—i.e., to avoid tension and climax in the cause of being "true to life." The pattern is, at it were, circular; given a central theme or episode, the "story" is something that merely revolves. But a "story" as such is usually something that extends from a beginning to an end, and the essential conflict between these two conceptions of what a short story is has seldom been satisfactorily resolved.

The novelette, however, cannot merely revolve. The mere necessity of filling out the required form demands that the author move from here to there. If it merely revolves for a hundred and fifty pages, it appears not as a novelette but as what in that case it truly becomes, an imagi-

nary diary, an essay, or something else essentially non-fictional. On the other hand, the relative compression of the novelette as compared with the novel tends to forbid the entrance of extraneous matter, since one usually cannot in the space at hand narrate a tale felt to have a certain weight and impetus and also go off on sociological sidelines. No literary form exists in pure perfection, of course, and in "Night at Hogwallow" Mr. Strauss has raised a problem of racial conflict slightly extraneous to his story, just as in "This Man, Joe Murray," Mr. Corcoran has insisted too much that he was not telling a "mere" love story. Yet it is generally true that the four novelettes here reviewed stick to their artistic aim, and fill out the necessities of the form to better purpose than most recent novels and many short stories.

Of the four Mr. Baptist's "A Cargo of Parrots" is an almost perfect example of the realization of form. Like Mr. Strauss, Mr. Baptist wants to illuminate racial differences, but with him the theme is, as it were, implicit in the story and not approached from the outside. In this admirable narrative one follows the line of a single human experience from its inevitable opening to its inevitable end; and it is a mark of Mr. Baptist's power as an artist that during the course of the story one accepts as part of the narrative one wildly improbable event. The slow rise of a sense of inevitable doom in this sea narrative is like the slow rise of

inevitable doom in Melville's imperfect "Benito Cereno."

Mr. Hill's "Loving Memory" is, next to the Baptist book, the best of the four novelettes. The theme once more is right for the form—the slow discovery by a widower of the actual little-mindedness of his deceased wife; and the treatment of the psychological change in question is properly conceived as a novelette. Where it does fail, it fails because of a certain nervous jumpiness; and also perhaps because Mr. Hill has tried to get too many persons into his story.

"Night at Hogwallow" is a powerful piece of writing, and I do not say that Mr. Strauss is wrong in making a novelette out of the material. Yet, despite the extended nature of the book, it seems to me that the narrative is really in the nature of a short story; fundamentally no character develops during the narrative, and what we rather have is the dramatic development of a set of potential social and psychological forces towards a given climax.

In "This Man, Joe Murray" Mr. Corcoran, on the other hand, seems to me to have made the opposite mistake—that of condensing a novel and calling the result a novelette. Joe Murray is a wanderer, who falls in love with a girl. The girl is horribly killed, and the rest of the tale consists in Murray's finding out what marriage truly is. Fully to depict all that Mr. Corcoran has compressed into his narrative would require a fuller canvas than the novelette allows; and of the four narratives it seems to me that his is the least successful in fitting material to form.

Here's How

ONE MORE MANHATTAN. By Phyllis McGinley. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1937. \$2.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

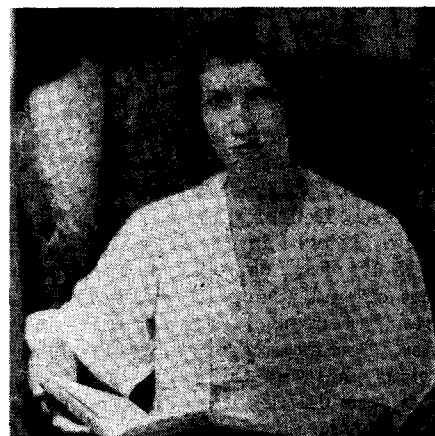
NOW, in my age, when the blood runs thinly,
I welcome verse that can rollick and race;
And that is why I like Phyllis McGinley,
Harcourt, Brace.

Serious poetry even when tropical
Often flutters mere paper flames.
But Miss McGinley excels at the topical,
Oliver Ames.

Wit she has that can deftly flatten
Shams of the city in which we fret.
See it gleam in "One More Manhattan,"
Two dollars net.

Yes, and when big-gun writers bore us,
Crisply comes a McGinley ditty;
Vide: her "Laboratory Chorus"
Or "Day in the City."

"Epithalamion" 's one of the honeys;
The Oliver poems great guile disclose;



Underwood & Underwood
PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

And, still and all, the one for my money's
On Major Bowes!

"Funk at Wagnalls" excels in levity,
And "Monologue from a Padded Cell,"
And here and there is a serious brevity
Handled well.

Altogether, the girl's a corker.
Purchase the volume and take a look!
Gal of the galaxy of the *New Yorker*—
Again in a book!