

# Roots in Kentucky

*BLACK IS MY TRUE LOVE'S HAIR.* By Elizabeth Madox Roberts. New York: The Viking Press. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GLADYS GRAHAM

ONE recalls the huge canvases of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's earlier novels. "The Time of Man," "The Great Meadow"—even the titles have the sweep and swing of major work. In them man was placed against the broad background of time and space. He was the individual, but he exemplified some universal will or drive. Characters true each to his own nature, his own period and locale, they yet drew about them the habiliments of mankind. The clear authentic note in these novels was recognized at once. Critics, both here and in England, were almost unanimous in their appreciation, and the books were immediately translated into every important European language.

"My Heart and My Flesh" was an early novel, too, but it struck sharply into the personal, it probed instead of spreading, a psychic turbulence already obscured at times the meaning. Emotion, instead of flowing forth or breaking out, became congested; dark implications took the place of the fine explicitness of the major works.

In "He Sent Forth a Raven," three years ago, Elizabeth Madox Roberts forswore that simple knowing which marked the earlier work in order to pursue an urgent speculative attack which left too much to the activity of the reader. She no longer spoke directly. She chose to use tokens whose value was not sure, whose symbols were not agreed upon.

These two trends, the one outward toward the natural and the general, the other inward toward the subjective and the mystical, are both evident in "Black Is My True Love's Hair," but the baffling shadow of the latter falls too heavily across the clear pattern of the former. In the description of village life, a Kentucky village grown up and straggled out into the shape of the letter N, we find again the power to evoke sensuously the reality of a countryside, and in the simple, secondary characters we find again the men and women transcending their personal moment, yet living it fully with roots reaching down through the present deep into timelessness, tapping a racial whole. But the major characters, Dena Janes, Journeyman, and Langtry seem too slight for the portentous roles they have to fill. It is difficult to determine just what they stand for, or why their utterances should be so unfathomable. They, too, are of the Southern village, and yet their speech and thought might have come from some twilight of Orphic mystery.

The plot in outline is melodramatic. Telling of the year-long attempt of Dena

Janes to build herself back into normal life and happiness after a terrifying emotional experience, it depends for impetus upon events and motives not convincing in themselves. Suggestive as they are when seen through the distorting perspective of Dena's outlook, they become, once they are drawn out into full objective view, too crude, too tawdry, for the beauty that is woven around them.

The novel requires two readings: the first will be hurried, with a constant feel-

ing of uncertainty—just what has happened? Just what does this mean?—but with the second, when certain ultimate enigmas have been accepted, there will be the slow delight found in the mastery of words, and in scenes unforgettable in their radiant isolation.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts has taught us to expect complete magic from her deep, modulated prose. When less is offered, we cavi, perhaps ungraciously, because we have known fuller measure, but there is in everything she writes enough always to set it apart from the hasty stream of contemporary fiction. Perhaps we should simply take what she offers.

## Ballad of the Bride

BY JESSE STUART

*MY* bride don't like the mountain  
shack,  
She wants a house of stone;  
My Love has said she's going back  
To life that is her own.  
What shall I do for I can't lose  
My bride in gowns so fine  
Who walks in fifty-dollar shoes  
And loves her cakes and wine!

A bride can strut in gowns so fine  
And fifty-dollar shoes;  
A mountain man should always mind  
The kind of bride to choose.  
And you can have your big fine house  
And we will keep the shack,  
And when you get your city house  
Your heart will turn you back.

Your ways are dark and I shall take  
My bride unto the town  
Where lonesome mountain winds can't  
break  
The heart beneath her gown.  
I'll take her to the shining streets  
Away from paths of mud  
Where people wear good clothes she  
greets  
Among her people's blood.

The mountain blood in a mountain man,  
Sired where these waters run,  
Is always blood of a mountain man  
And thicker blood, my son.  
The mountain blood in a mountain girl  
Is your own kind, my son;  
It'll stand by you when your fine world  
Has quickly come undone.

I do not care for a mountain lass  
Who cannot wear her clothes;  
My Love, dear mother, must have class  
In any place she goes.  
Her dainty lips must sip the wine,  
Her swan-white bosom show,  
And on her fingers diamonds shine  
Like patches of the snow.

Your bride can drink the costly wine  
And eat the sweetest cake,  
And she can leave your oak and pine

And sounds your lone winds make.  
And she can wear her diamond ring  
That glistens like the snow,  
And she can be the dainty thing  
With swan-white breasts to show.

Remember, son, that mountain blood  
Is very slow to change,  
And you will long for paths of mud  
And mountains for a change.  
You'll long to hear your old fox horn,  
The crack of your shot-gun;  
You'll long to plow the newground corn  
And hear these waters run.

"My son can have his big fine house  
But we will keep the shack,  
And when he gets the big stone house  
He'll want the old logs back.  
His father sired him in the shack  
Where lonesome waters run,  
With the world's best cloth upon his back  
He will return—my son."

\* \* \* \*

Mother, I've been two years away  
In a mansion made of stone;  
I left my Love and ran away  
Back to these things I own.  
I could not buy her costly wine  
Nor fifty-dollar shoes,  
Nor diamonds like the stars that shine  
And gowns my Love would choose.

I want to hear the hunter's horn,  
I want to shoot my gun;  
I want to smell the growing corn  
And hear the waters run.  
I do not want the house of stone,  
I only want the shack,  
And eat the food that is my own  
And have my old bed back.

I want to sickle slopes of grain  
And walk on paths of mud,  
I want to live my life again  
And be my father's blood.  
My second bride, a mountain girl,  
My first true Love will be,  
Then I can sing and I can shout:  
The world belongs to me!

# Literary Triangle

**CLOUDY TROPHY:** *The Romance of Victor Hugo. By Léon Daudet. Translated by James Whitall. New York: William Morrow & Co. 1938. \$2.50.*

Reviewed by ERNEST BOYD

**L**AST year the indefatigable Léon Daudet found time, while lambasting the French republic and cheering for fascism and monarchy (a characteristic contradiction!), to add to the long list of his varied writings. This time it was "La Tragique Existence de Victor Hugo," a more or less romanticized life of his grandfather. Mr. Whitall has found an appropriate quotation from Keats to grace his English version, which is as lively as the original—and Daudet is nothing if not lively to the point of rambunctiousness—and spares the reader by judicious cutting of some of Daudet's polemical asides. Daudet has on many occasions expressed his contempt for Hugo, but his book is not vituperative. It is well worth reading.

From a certain point of view, Hugo, his wife, and Sainte-Beuve were contemptible characters, and it is of this trio, with the addition of the non-contemptible Juliette Drouet, that Daudet has compounded a narrative which brings together in brief compass the essential facts of a story familiar to all readers of French literature. Daudet's contempt has to do essentially with the fact that old Hugo was a perfervid champion of republicanism, which led to his banishment to Guernsey, via Belgium and Jersey. But, what will seem more contemptible to most people today is the behavior of the three chief parties to the Sainte-Beuve-Hugo scandal. Victor-Marie was an assiduous Don Juan all his life, his tastes ranging wherever opportunity offered, but chiefly in the direction of street-walkers, kitchen-maids, and actresses.

It was this man's destiny, at the age of twenty-nine, just at his rise to fame, to discover that the tables had been turned on him. His wife, Adèle, fell in love with his best friend, Sainte-Beuve, and the latter went so far as to glorify the fact, first in verse and then in prose. Hugo was young and handsome and famous, Sainte-Beuve was an ugly, bald, disgruntled critic, who was jealous of the rising author and had in Adèle his revenge. Amongst his other amours, Hugo picked up a girl who was to become his devoted slave and companion for life, Juliette Drouet. Daudet tells the story from the point where the Hugos agreed to disagree, but Adèle was not allowed to see Sainte-Beuve, whereas Juliette everywhere occupied the position of *maitresse en titre* of her adored Victor, whose infidelities to her continued to the end of his days.

Why Hugo was never divorced remains to this day inexplicable, for he mocked at the Catholicism of his mother as his father did—a fact indignantly admitted by Léon Daudet, who thinks he should have sought the consolations of religion in his tragic plight. At the same time his exuberant grandson seems almost to glory in Hugo's transgressions. Neither Adèle nor Juliette did, and a strange life was had by all three, while Juliette nursed and coddled her darling, interceded for his wife, and entertained his

friends and even his children. She was his inspiration, too, for Daudet points out, after her death, he never wrote again. His life was a ceaseless battle of hate against his wife and her seducer, of magnificent rhetorical writing, interspersed with some of the loveliest poetry in French, as finer minds than his reluctantly admit. With all this, he was an exile, the persistent opponent of Napoleon the Small, and the most popular figure of his day in Paris. When he returned in triumph in 1870, he was elected to the National Assembly. An impressive façade, a colossal success, but a tormented cuckold, he was indeed hung amongst the cloudy trophies of veiled Melancholy.

## The Drive of Life

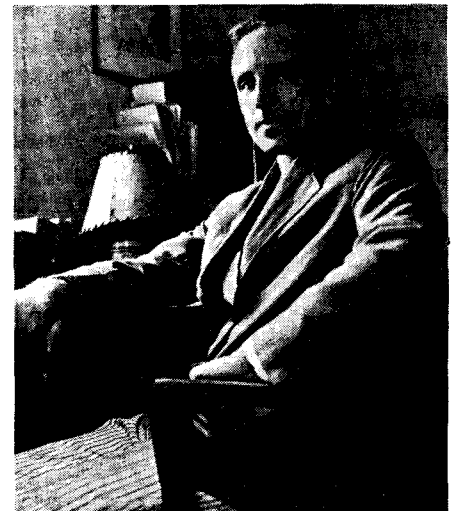
**PATTERNS OF SURVIVAL.** *An Anatomy of Life. By John Hodgdon Bradley. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1938. \$2.25.*

Reviewed by HOMER W. SMITH

**"I**F there is any meaning for mice or men in the restless drive of life, a million years of living should contain it. To search those years for that meaning will be the object of this book." The author is well prepared to undertake this task, for as a paleontologist he has cracked open many a rock and come upon many a puzzle in his study of earth's history. He has seen for himself the first faint evidences of primordial life in the algae, seaweeds, sponges, and worms of the Pre-Cambrian period; his, by profession, is the fossil record of that unbelievably fantastic pageant of creation, lasting a billion years and moving through worms and trilobites, crustacea, sharks, fishes, amphibia, reptiles, mammals, and birds, to the animals that now populate the earth. But this is no dry recitation of earth's history; it is a collection of deft essays on the nature of life itself, on the stresses and strains that have shaped it, on survival with and without struggle, on the mechanics of success and failure. Details are used as needed, but never allowed to distract attention from the broader view. The discussion, as one might hope, is concentrated in the last chapters on man himself, his sexuality and family life, his place in nature, whether he be god or beast. In content these are among the best in the book.

A number of the essays included in this volume have been published separately elsewhere, which accounts for a certain discontinuity in thought, but the whole hangs together admirably well, chiefly in consequence of Professor Bradley's style. His manner of writing is simple and straightforward, and marked by an exceptional gift for pithy generalization.

A great misfortune of most creatures who have thronged the earth for a bil-



John Hodgdon Bradley

lion years is that they were ever born. Their lives were blessed with no slightest hope of fulfillment, even when fulfillment consisted merely in eating and avoiding being eaten until reproduction had been achieved. . . . For two billion years [terrestrial] affairs have proceeded through conflict. Rivers, wind, and moving ice have worked to tear down the lands; volcanoes and subterranean upheavals have worked to build them up. Never have the titanic conflicts of these forces been much or for long disturbed by peace. . . .

Quotations may convey an idea of the style of the book, but a false impression of its contents. The factual knowledge, the maturity of thought, the philosophical penetration that recur in it page after page bespeak not merely a competent popularizer of paleontology but a paleontologist who has something to say in his own right as well as an unusual talent for saying it. His sure stroke falters only once: in few brief passages on emergent evolution (the Lloyd-Smiths doctrine that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) he has introduced an unexpected note. This single incongruity, however, will not mar the book for anyone.