

The War After the War

A FRENCHMAN MUST DIE. By Kay Boyle. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1946. 213 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

GUY MITCHELL, the son of an American officer in the First World War by his French-born wife, and a student in Paris in 1939, has been as courageous and noble a *maquisard* as any Frenchman. When this novel opens, the French war has been over for about a year. "But nothing, nothing is over," as one of his F.F.I. comrades puts it to Mitchie, "perhaps this is just the beginning for those of us who are not too tired. For a while we believed that it was over when the liberation came. We were hungry, we were maimed, we wanted to believe it. . . ."

In other words, Miss Boyle's newest book deals with the dangerous remnants of Nazi rule in France: the Gestapo men and spies left behind by the enemy to sow social discord and nihilism, the disbanded streetcorner bullies of the Darnand militia, the still prosperous *collabos* bent on whitewashing their personal records or making compromising dossiers "vanish overnight," and the reactionary beneficiaries of France's plight who would go to any length to save their holdings and, if possible, put the clock back again. In this story, that many-headed hydra is represented by a Frenchman called Pliny; and the breathless, adventurous hunt of the *maquis* for him constitute Miss Boyle's plot. Mitchie gets him in the end, and with him his beautiful secretary, Danielle Monet—who, as experienced readers needn't be told, has throughout the occupation posed as a *collabo*, a vain effort to save the lives of her father and brother. Thus Danielle has an axe to grind herself with the monster who is one of those who "wear suede gloves and carry canes, and others do the killing for them." Criss-crossing the landscape in his pursuit of Pliny, Mitchie has run into the girl before, and she has caused him a lot of trouble. He is prepared to put up with some more.

For short stretches, Miss Boyle's fine writing makes you forget that you are reading what, if intended as such or not, is plain melodrama. Her descriptive passages are concise, well focused, and sometimes quite beautiful. Her characters are clear and speak to the point.

The publishers of "A Frenchman Must Die" inform us that Miss Boyle

gathered the background material for this book during a recent two months' stay on the continent. The one thing that is likely to astonish readers who lack similar first-hand experience is her tacit assumption that behind the activities of such Nazi sympathizers as Pliny there is more or less organized German leadership. Are we to believe that a leadership of that sort did survive the collapse of Hitler's machine? Miss Boyle shows Pliny and his unsavory crowd (some of them well enough groomed) merely from the outside. They play their

Last Days of the Warsaw Ghetto

THE GLORY OF ELSIE SILVER. By Louis Golding. New York: The Dial Press. 1946. 390 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

UNDER what is probably the season's most inept title, and diluted by a fictitious plot that is distinctly second-rate, this book has nevertheless for bedrock a great and thrilling story: the last-ditch battle of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. It is difficult not to be impatient with Mr. Golding for having so dissipated his materials. The Elsie Silver to whose glory he seems to dedicate his novel has figured elsewhere in his work, as one of the "Five Silver Daughters," as a friend of "Mr. Emmanuel," perhaps in other ways.

She appears here as the wife of one Nazi general, mistress of another, dodging about in fear of her life when her husband has been dispatched by the hated Himmler, and hiding at last in the cellars of the Warsaw Ghetto among the people of her own faith. Her character, as well as that of her lover, Oskar, is very thinly drawn, and not all of her hysterical and self-conscious monologues, nor her constant references to an already documented past in Magnolia Street and Oleander Street, or to the famous case

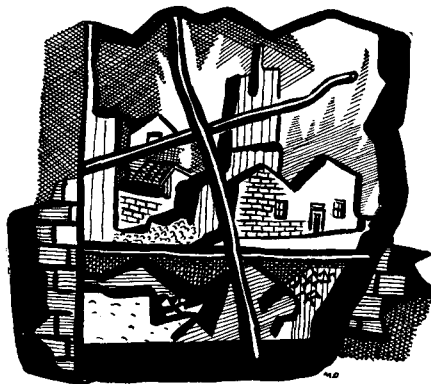
villainous part. Wouldn't the author have done well to let us also peep into the minds of these scoundrels in order to show us, as she apparently wants to do, the ugly nucleus of neo-Fascism? Or does that neo-Fascism reside not only among yesterday's criminals? In short, doesn't Miss Boyle fight the literary battle of the present war—there still is a war on, no doubt—with the weapons of the last one?

I'm just asking. And the fact that a reader is tempted to ask such questions goes to show that even in writing melodrama Miss Boyle cannot be lumped in with her competitors in that field.

of Mr. Emmanuel, can make her seem significant or assume the attributes of life. This Elsie Silver is a frothy concoction, made of a lot of contemporary tag-lines.

How different is that factual half of the book which depicts for us, day by day and hour by hour, almost as though from a correspondent's cable, the death struggle of the last remaining Jews in Warsaw, in April of 1943. The organization of the Ghetto; the strata of its inhabitants: Gestapo, Jewish police, Jewish workers, and underground; the history of their piecemeal, planned destruction; the growth of their despair, and its deepening into resolution; the plan for a suicidal, emblematic battle, for the sake of the note it would strike for the world to hear; and those few tragic and exultant days in April when the German tanks came in and were driven out, when the planes flew low and blasted the last defenders out and threw their walls down upon them; all of this makes a history as heroic as Dunkirk and with elements of sublimity that that did not possess. For when he deals with the Jews of Warsaw Mr. Golding's talents come out of their wraps, and we are given a set of faces and people and circumstances that are profoundly felt.

That is why it seems so disconcerting to remember that this book is about Elsie Silver, whose brief appearance in the Ghetto is for the sake of binding up the loose ends of a melodrama about her and her Oskar. This is one book where the grim voices of the chorus quite drown out the lines of the principals. Both, of course, are Mr. Golding's work; it is because he is so good with his history that his fiction seems so inadequate. He would have had to be a great novelist, indeed, to have made Elsie Silver worthy of the glory of Warsaw.



A Story of Local Big Shots

BRUTUS WAS AN HONORABLE MAN. By Walter Marquiss. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1946. 338 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by NANCY GROBERG

IN A novel with more social and political conscience than flesh and blood, Walter Marquiss sets up and examines that very controversial figure, the small-town big businessman, god of the community which attributes its economic growth to his enterprise, its importance to his importance, its public institutions to his philanthropy. Mr. Marquiss's examination, however, is an ironic one, and one which traces the history of a town and a country from 1899 to 1941, one which analyzes the various political trends and developments of those years, approves and condemns, and roots its theses in the lives of the individuals who move through the story and the community which he has created.

Mr. Marquiss's set-up is basically as clever as it is ironic: made up of a series of flashbacks, it begins by introducing the will of a citizen who has asked that a memorial be erected to the First Citizen of Great Bend, that is, "whoever has done the most good for the community." The choice is narrowed down to two people: A. J. Hubbard, the industrialist in the name of whose enterprises the town has grown, and Doc Quaile, his old friend and associate. A committee is set up to determine the choice, and the official report is left to a Major Whipple, an old newspaper man, who suggests that the will was made by the inscrutable Burr MacNeary (noted mainly for the phrases "Money stinks" and "All anybody cares about is money") because, in his words, "he thought it might be interesting—to have the bones of the gods examined."

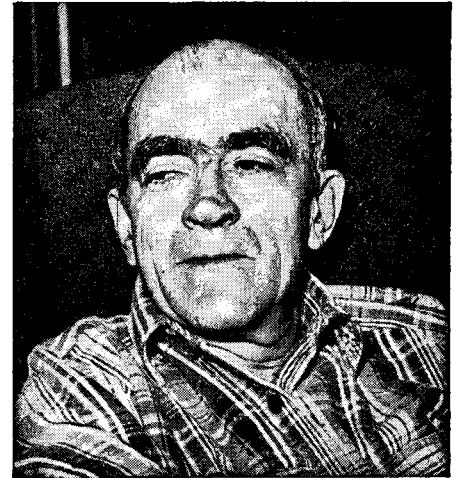
What follows is precisely that: an examination of the bones of the gods. As each phase of Whipple's poker-faced report is offered, as each debt to the industrialist and the doctor is cited, it is followed by the flashback which tells the inside story of their "philanthropy"—and in these flashbacks are revealed the hypocritical, reactionary, crassly materialistic instincts which guided the gods of Great Bend. They are ruthlessly exposed in the stories which Major Whipple knows, if not in his report (which, as the product of a journalist, offers only statistics and facts of which he is certain), and we learn

that behind each philanthropic deed was a man named Norfleet, obscure, uncredited, but a compassionate human being who, by virtue of a secret which he held as a club over the heads of these men, was able to force them into the acts for which they are worshipped.

Mr. Marquiss takes a sling at any number of aspects of the American political scene during the years of which he writes—at the industrialist who, by virtue of his control over local employment, is naively regarded as the benevolent savior, at the selfish, Mammon-worshipping attitudes of those who believe that money can control human relationships and solve human problems, at the insidious isolationist movement of pre-war years, the America Firsters—at all the narrow socio-political attitudes of familiar and despicable figures on the American scene. His book has a strong and fairly effective social conscience.

Yet for all the mistakes which he ironically underlines and deplors, for all the good intentions of his book, he is, as a novelist, essentially unsuccessful. His general failure may, I think, be attributed to a failure in characterization, for the numerous individuals who move through Mr. Marquiss's book are not individuals at all, but mere symbols, instruments of his theses, and hardly more than that.

Apparently quite unable to vitalize them through action and dialogue, he is forced time and time again to build them up through straight description; this is probably the weakest literary device employed in building up characters, and in Mr. Marquiss's



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case it proves fatal. Burr MacNeary, whose radical letters to the newspaper make him the most human and certainly the most interesting character of all, is, alas, too little known to be important.

In the case of the other characters they have not even the advantage of such letters to give them flesh and blood; they are portrayed mainly in the author's accounts of their attitudes, do not grow at all, but remain only as ironic pointers to his conclusions.

If Mr. Marquiss really intended to write a novel and not a thesis, he would have done well, I think, in the rather impressive job which he took upon himself, to narrow down the number of issues, narrow down the number of characters, and concentrate on coordinating characters and objects of satire into a story which, by its balance and scope, would have made his people as important and as real as the vital issues which they represented.

Old Phoenix

By Babette Deutsch

LIKE a mechanical quotidian surf
The trolleys' noise roars hoarsely, dims, and soars
To windows blank with cataract. A scurf
Of sleet offends the air. Turned out of doors,
The pinched heart freezes to a thing as brittle
As an icicle, or hardens to a mirror
That images this dirty world in little.
The old year ends in cold, in cruelty and error.

The new year will begin as cold, as cruel,
And dark with error as with winter, where
The few may find seldom, unhoped-for fuel.
But let eyes meet, looks marry, and the breast
Startles as though a fluttering fire played there,
To fold like wings, soft, soft, within that marveling nest.