

Fiction. Now that Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize novel, *"All the King's Men,"* has been effectively dramatized and its movie version is in preparation, his new collection of short stories and novelettes, may, besides proving his productivity, establish him as one of our few major writers. He is, on the whole, writing about the social and political conflicts in the South, with Negro poverty and the sharecroppers as major themes. Also reviewed in this issue is the dramatic novel of a crusading Mississippi editor, Hodding Carter. He has substituted as his major character his arch-enemy, old Bilbo, for Warren's Huey Long in *"All the King's Men."* For relief from our own present troubles you will find entertainment in Raoul Faure's *"Lady Godiva and Master Tom."* This old legend has something to do with economics, too, since the lady rode bare-back through Coventry to relieve the people's tax burden.

Psychoanalyzing a Risqué Legend

LADY GODIVA AND MASTER TOM.
By Raoul C. Faure. New York:
Harper & Bros. 1948. 243 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ROBERT PICK

"MY TASK which I am trying to achieve," Joseph Conrad once said, "is, by the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, above all, to make you see." There have been few passages in present-day fiction I've come across that as vividly recalled to my mind that statement as the sixty-odd pages in this novel which give an account of Lady Godiva's famous ride in the nude through the deserted streets of eleventh-century Coventry. You really see the medieval city with its ivy-grown walls and turrets, towered over by cathedral and castle, its cobbled alleys and squares, its fountains and public washboards, its framework guild houses, and the shuttered homes of its burghers. And while you seem to see the scene with your own eyes, you also watch it as if through the eyes of Godiva's old nurse—who, in this version, is the one to catch Peeping Tom—and with the somewhat wilful eyes of the woman herself whose strange and admittedly risqué story Mr. Faure has ventured to lift out of the realm of pious legend.

This is a bold and curious undertaking; and the fact that the author makes two of his protagonists—Lady Godiva's husband and his Jewish-Italian treasurer and confidant—discuss in the closing pages the working of legend and myth makes it no less curious, if less bold. Add to this Mr. Faure's evident preoccupation with psychoanalysis and his well-nigh dislike of the Saxon lady, and you may have an inkling of how puzzling a book has come from the pen of this rightly admired Frenchman whose

beautiful, urbane English has very few equals among writers born to this language.

As you may have guessed, his Godiva is not forced into her ride. True, as the original countess, she beseeches her husband to lessen the tax burden of the common people. But Mr. Faure's Leofric yields to his wife's request with a minimum of ado, only to be confronted by her with the idea of combining the publication of his ordinance with a personal proof of her "penitence"—a feeling about whose highly questionable nature Godiva's latter-day chronicler leaves no doubt. She is a frustrated woman in his story, and detests her spouse. Subsequently she takes Tom as her lover, and in a paroxysm of moral insanity plots with him to have her husband killed by a Norman baron (an intrigue which she hopes will further her career). That the cuckold remains alive and still very much in love with his wife gives a final and—to me—incomprehensible twist to the tale.



The debunking of legends is always a dangerous enterprise, unless it is done through plain burlesque—the way, for instance, Mr. Faure's countrymen Meilhac and Halevy did it in writing Offenbach's lyrics—it runs the risk of coming close to the kind of satire which, instead of humanizing the stained-glass window figures of tradition, merely distorts them. I must confess that the new Godiva's toyful perversity is beyond me. Not that women of her kind may not exist. But the idea of putting one of them in the place of the old Godiva makes no sense to me—despite all the Freudian wisdom dropping from the lips of Messer Ezra, the above-mentioned Jew, and even in spite of the enchanting qualities of Mr. Faure's style. What—to my mind, again—remains of the story is what has always been in it: the picture of a beautiful naked woman, half-wrapped in her long golden hair, riding on a white charger through her awe-stricken city.

Proustian Exploration

CIRCUS IN THE ATTIC AND OTHER STORIES. By Robert Penn Warren. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1948. 276 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by HENRY NASH SMITH

THE NOVELTIES and short stories collected in Mr. Warren's new book, displaying his development over a period of seventeen years, show how his imagination has nourished itself upon Proustian exploration of a remembered world of childhood in Northwestern Tennessee. The chronological line is not neat and simple, but it is nevertheless clear that he has moved from isolated moments of recapturing the past toward a fuller and fuller imaginative grasp of the society within which he grew up. This tendency culminates in the vivid political awareness of *"All the King's Men."*

The most prominent theme of the earlier stories is the integral relation between a rural folk and the land, and the normal source of conflict or disaster is the violation of this organic pattern by some outside force. The stranger in *"Blackberry Winter"* is potentially such a force, although the menace he embodies is kept at the edge of a child's consciousness. Luke Goodwood, the hunter and baseball player, is fatally shattered when he is drawn away from the land to attempt a career in professional baseball. Jeff York kills himself when his wife forces him to sell his farm so she may buy a hamburger stand in town. The divisive and tragic im-

pulses at work in the novelette "Prime Leaf" originate in the meaningless fluctuations of tobacco prices in distant markets.

But the outside forces could not affect the society if they did not encounter some answering evil within it. This is often a kind of irrational compulsion, as in the two companion stories about Elsie Barton and her daughter. Benjamin Beaumont the tobacco buyer and Frank Barber the railroad detective and bootlegger, both felt as alien and sinister, are the immediate sources of evil, but here the attention is fixed rather on the dark currents of motivation in the two women. If Mr. Warren finds in his characters compulsions that recall Faulkner, his treatment of them is quite different, for he analyzes them with clinical thoroughness and brings to the surface matters that Faulkner ordinarily keeps buried and mysterious.

Despite the occasional triumphs of these earlier pieces, none of them, is an entirely satisfactory thing-in-itself. They suggest, in fact, that Mr. Warren is a novelist rather than a short-story writer. The awareness of society as a complex structure of individuals and classes can hardly be rendered in a brief flash. This is even more certainly true of the concern with the relation between past and present which is so central in Mr. Warren's work. The psychological basis of this interest is perhaps the very process of childhood reminiscence, which revives the past within a present from which it is irretrievably separated by time. The Tennessee folk whom Mr. Warren depicts so well and whose vernacular speech he puts to such remarkable use are themselves, a product of time, of long residence in a given environment. Indeed, the whole character of Southern society as it appears derives from its traditional quality, which confers upon every aspect of life a ceremonial order. These matters are not adapted to the quick intensity of the short story.

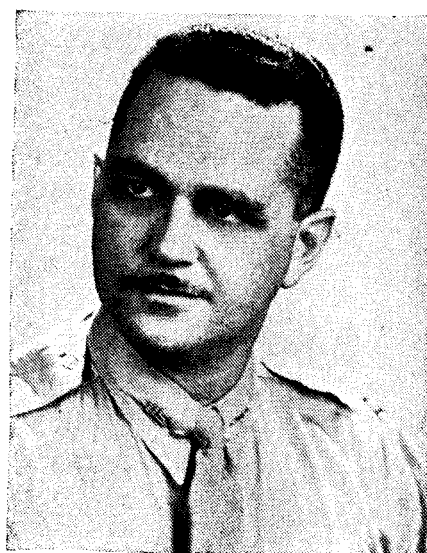
But Mr. Warren needs only a slightly greater space to manage them perfectly. The newly published novelette which is the title piece of "The Circus in the Attic" manages to pack into sixty pages an historical perspective stretching back a century and a half, an accurate diagram of social relationships in a Tennessee town, an analytical biography of the central character, and adequate portraits of half a dozen others. Bolton Lovehart, the hero, is imprisoned by his mother's cannibalistic fixation on him. After several desperate and pathetic efforts to escape, which he himself only dimly understands, he finds in the secret hobby of carving a toy circus from



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"Sex, lusty and definitely unsubtle, seems to crowd Hodding Carter's message into the background."

wood compensation for the actual life she has forbidden him to lead. By the time his mother dies at eighty-seven he is past fifty and no longer able to take advantage of his freedom. These themes and various subordinate ones, such as the impact of the Second World War on the community, are managed with an autocratic precision that could hardly have been predicted on the basis of the work preceding "All the King's Men." "The Circus in the Attic" confirms the impression left by that novel, that within the past couple of years Mr. Warren has raised himself to a new command over his materials and by that fact has entered the first rank of American writers.

The Satanic Ticket

FLOOD CREST. By Hodding Carter.
New York: Rinehart & Co. 1947. 278 pp. \$2.75.

Reviewed by PAUL FLOWERS

DURING the summer of 1946, Hodding Carter, Pulitzer Prize winning editor-publisher of the Greenville, Miss., *Delta Democrat-Times*, and Theodore G. Bilbo exchanged a series of body blows, while The Man was making his last campaign for a seat in the United States Senate.

For once in his political career, Bilbo found himself arrayed against a fighter who could match him in tactics, and the battle developed into a vicious and vitriolic exchange . . . nothing new for either principal, for Bilbo had been assailed heartily many times before, and Hodding Carter had measured swords with the late Huey Long in Louisiana.

During that 1946 campaign, Hodding Carter had reviewed Bilbo's political record, becoming the second Greenville man of letters to pay respects to The Man in denunciations both passionate and bitter. Years earlier, William Alexander Percy, in the chapter "Bottom Rail on Top" from "Lanterns on the Levee," had written on the then ascending Bilbo, without calling him by name:

The man responsible for tearing father's reputation to shreds and saddening three lives was a pert little monster, glib and shameless, with that sort of cunning common to criminals which passes for intelligence. The people loved him. They loved him not because they were deceived in him, but because they understood him thoroughly; they said of him proudly, "He's a slick little bastard." He was one of them and had risen from obscurity to glittering infamy . . . it was as if they

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