



—By Claire Leighton from "Southern Harvest."

North Carolina Potpourri

JULIA GWYNN. By Robert K. Marshall. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce. 228 pp. \$3.

BY VICTOR P. HASS

BACK in 1949, Robert K. Marshall published an extraordinary folktale called "Little Squire Jim." It was the first panel in his spiritual homecoming to the hills of North Carolina. Now, in "Julia Gwynn," he has published a second panel and, if anything, it is a more astonishing performance than the first. It marks the ripening of a rich and powerful talent.

In "Little Squire Jim" Mr. Marshall wove a sturdy fabric out of the lives of the half-Elizabethan hill people in the remote valleys above Tateboro, North Carolina. It was a loving portrait of "natural man" in one of his last redoubts. "Julia Gwynn" is centered upon the microcosm that is Tateboro and again there is the attention to telling detail that brings his people to vibrant life. Again, too, the core of the story is anchored to a celebrated murder trial. Indeed, most of the immediate action of "Julia Gwynn" is concurrent with that of "Little Squire Jim"; in the first novel you are inside the courtroom much of the time, in the second you are outside.

Mr. Marshall tells Julia Gwynn's story in flashbacks as skilful as any John P. Marquand ever contrived. Thirty-five years before the story opens she had entertained at a musicale to mark her entry into Tateboro society. A wealthy Baltimorean, she had married big, handsome, brutal, spoiled Joseph Huger Gwynn and he had brought her to fabulous Gwynn

Place. After an entry that had her guests by the ears, Julia had begun to sing. At the peak of her recital Gwynn, potted to the hairline, had rudely passed in front of her and left the great hall.

Tateboro saw little of Julia after that while a legend of beatings and screams drifted out of tightly-barred Gwynn Place. And then, thirty-five years later, with the murder trial of her nephew, Jim Boyden, about over, Julia, then eighty-two, had ridden into Tateboro in her barouche, the flaming red hair of her wig flying, to announce that she had killed her husband. Only a few days later the grand dame of Tateboro sat in the same court in which Little Squire Jim had answered a jury of his peers.

That is the bare outline of the plot and it does no justice to Mr. Marshall's consummate skill in creating the people of a town. It neglects Hallie, who maintained a fiction throughout a life of determined invalidism; Rosa, her daughter, who wasted a life on her hare-brained mother; Cathcart, the merchant, who saved a bolt of jade brocade for Julia for thirty-five years; Waldo, Julia's misshapen retainer; Lucette, Gwynn's incomparably lovely mistress; and most of all it neglects the stunning portrait of Julia herself. She may be held together with wigs and what-nots, but what a woman she is!

It is only fair to point out that Mr. Marshall makes no provision in "Julia Gwynn" for the reader who missed his first novel. He blandly assumes a foreknowledge of Jim Boyden's story, which makes it a little rough on those who do not have that knowledge. But this is a minor flaw in an otherwise brilliant novel.

Writer in Flight

THE EYE OF THE KITE. By Fleming MacLiesh. New York: Random House. 243 pp. \$3.

BY OLIVER LA FARGE

SO far that new element of man's journeying, the air, has hardly even begun to produce the literature that has developed around sea, desert, and mountains. Its Melvilles and its Homers are yet to come. Thousands of years of seafaring over the earth have produced only a moderately numerous succession of men who were both seamen and poets; the airman-poet combination that gave us "Wind, Sand, and Stars," for instance, has simply not had time and numbers to happen often. Mr. MacLiesh seems to have more than a little of that combination. A large part of "The Eye of the Kite" is made up of passages dealing with flight, all of them fine.

Unhappily "The Eye of the Kite" treats of much more than flying. A flight in which almost everything happens, including the final and lamentably foreseeable crash, is used as the thread of action for another story, which is not really a story but a string of descriptions, characterizations, and bizarre incidents intended, apparently, as an excoriating essay on the depravity of our times.

The characters are not convincing. The principal one, other than the co-pilot who tells the story, is the stock-type tycoon Koenig. We have had him many times in fiction, but we do not encounter him whole in real life. The unreality of the characterization can be illustrated by one item: Koenig is a pilot himself; he is a brilliant, practical, master of the fine detail as well as the grand sweep; he plans to cross the continent the next day and he knows that there will be dirty weather near the end of the flight. With all this it is his whim to drag his pilot and co-pilot with him on an all-night debauch of a thorough kind. The author thinks this shows ruthlessness; it shows idiocy.

The co-pilot is the narrator and we get more of him than of anyone else. We get his observations of people, his memories, his essays on totalitarianism. All of the characters speak out of character at times, making speeches for the author.

"The Eye of the Kite" is overwritten. It is on the lush side. It contains some excellent scenes and some really startling ones. It is not a good novel, but the story of a flight which is woven through it and forms a sort of separate unit of its own is splendid.

Cypriote Fun

FRIENDS AND VAGUE LOVERS. By Jack Dunphy. New York: Farrar, Straus & Young. 237 pp. \$3.

By HARRISON SMITH

THE cities and the seacoast of Italy are providing an exotic setting for novels of a strange breed of American voyagers who, unlike the birds of passage, have no course they are pursuing or any destined end to their flight. They may light for a time in Rome, like Tennessee Williams's aging actress Mrs. Stone, who surrendered herself to youthful gigolos, or flock to Capri or Cyprus, presumably the island where Jack Dunphy's coterie of homosexuals exhibit their inane and melancholy lives in his second novel, "Friends and Vague Lovers." They are incapable of passion, though their chatter, their emotional instability, and small jealousies give them the appearance of momentary vitality and exoticism which can be as depressing to the observer as the madcap erotic games they play with each other.

Another ingredient must be added to give coherence and dramatic value to these recent products of American civilization. Mr. Dunphy has found his amalgam in his portrait of Alice Markham, a rich divorced woman of uncertain age who had never loved her husband and who had embraced her son in the coils of maternal possessiveness. When her son was a small child she had carried him in a sack on her back and then she had strangled his manhood until one day he had shot himself when he was about to fly once more from her. She had found peace in the island pension where she spent her days sleeping and reading, half way between life and death. She awoke suddenly, though not to passion, of which she was incapable, when she fell in love with a pale young man, and it is not recorded that she was shocked to discover that Sheridan had been her dead son's lover. Her obsession is in part incestuous, an emotion that is almost inevitably a part of novels of this nature.

Nevertheless, whatever are her limitations, she had withdrawn from the shadow of nothingness, escaped from the company of the living dead. Sheridan, who lived on the bounty of an older writer in Rome, had joined on the island a fugitive colony of his own kind where "he was as much hated as loved," writes Mr. Dunphy, "and frequently by the same kind of person." He seemed to have come from nowhere, for he claimed at times half

of the American states as his birthplace. He had an enormous capacity for sleep. After one feverish night which had culminated in the erotic joy of chaining his wrists in silver handcuffs, he stayed in bed for days while Mrs. Markham read to him. None of his friends came to see him, neither Cooper, the only one he loved, nor the painter Haller, who was sharing a house with Billy Helion, nor the lean and beautiful boy known only as Crystal, who was shared by several, nor Mrs. Christophe, who did not object to a young student's love for her husband. There was only Mrs. Markham, reading to him while he slept. She had wrapped the tentacles around him that had killed her son. In a week they were broken when his exasperated attempt to make love to her exposed his impotence.

Sherry ran away with the golden boy Crystal, though where he was headed he did not know. Characteristically, he had left his belongings in Cyprus, and when his flight was broken and he returned, Alice Markham's tentacles were waiting for him. They left together for Rome or somewhere in the far North, providing it was away from the sea.

Without the embroidery of a style that is sensitive, decorative, and precise this story of the emotional escapades of men and women who have retreated from everything that gives life meaning or passion might be unbearably trivial or depressing. Mr. Dunphy has succeeded in presenting his vague lovers as both comic and tragic figures. Readers who are not inured to the common theme of homosexuality in contemporary writing may experience a revulsion against these exotic creatures, but there can be no doubt that "Friends and Vague Lovers" is entertaining and that his characters are drawn from some approximation to life.



Wiles & Whims

SON OF A TINKER. By Maurice Walsh. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 245 pp. \$3.

By THOMAS SUGRUE

WHEN you have been reading the stories of Maurice Walsh for a while you get into the notion that there is no trouble at all in the world that cannot be solved by the love of a lass whether Irish or Scottish or Spanish or even American—if only the pig-headed, self-centered, honor-bound lug of a lad will stop his everlasting interfering and let her have her own way. There is nothing at all like the sense of a woman, particularly when she has the eye of her heart fixed on a target; the fact that Ireland's men are the most obtuse in the world when it comes to the business of love-making forms a continuous problem for ladies whose affections have the misfortune to become glued to Gaels. You can find out all about these poor females in almost any of Mr. Walsh's books. The current volume contains nine stories, five long and four short, and in between the woman-stuff there is the usual man-stuff—fishing and fighting and drinking. But whatever a man seems to be up to, in a Walsh story he is actually only waiting around to be claimed by the girl who has marked him out for her own. He is not an unwilling quarry, but almost invariably he has decided that she belongs to somebody else, and in decency therefore cannot be courted by him. In the end he is caught, bound, and led happily captive.

The opening tale tells of a young tinker who decides to abandon the free and roaming life of his people, the itinerant peddlers of Ireland, and join the modern fashion of selling by samples and delivering by van. The obstacle to his girl is his employer, who is the young woman's father; the old man thinks little of tinkers and has to be shown that they are steady enough fellows to take in as sons-in-law. The next long story is about a bonesetter; the obstacle facing him is not only the bad hip of his beloved, but her husband and a potential lover. In "Not My Story" the hero is badly confused by two rivals for the heroine's hand, both of whose cases he is asked to present. This is a John Alden plot and will not startle Americans, who know that propinquity is the mother of involvement. In "My Fey Lady" the labor set before the hero is almost hercu-

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