

journal in the Venetian ghetto [*giudecca*], but rather in an "inconspicuous quarter"; the bordello to which Aretino assigns the nudity of the "Last Judgement" becomes a "place of debauchery.") After the highly charged interpretations of Marcel Brion, Romain Rolland, and the other biographers, this chastened presentation of Michelangelo's life is welcome. On one point, perhaps, Morgan is too cautious. Denying that Michelangelo had a sexual relationship with Tommaso Cavalieri (a denial now generally accepted), the Amherst professor shies away from the artist's ill-starred physical passion for Gherardo Perini, Febo di Poggio, and even the juvenile Francesco di Zanobi Bracci. He mentions none of these. Yet each of these brought anguish to the artist and affected his work, as a careful probing of Michelangelo's poetry and notes will attest. Morgan thus falls into the role of whitewasher which he himself assigned to the first editor of Michelangelo's poems. Surely Michelangelo's mores and sexual attitudes are an important factor in the understanding of his art.

This biography establishes with unusual clarity the effects upon Michelangelo's career of the historical forces of war, intrigue, acts of God, and the vicissitudes of such ruling families as the Medici and the Della Rovere. One understands now better than ever how social, political, and economic conditions continued to govern the artist's production. The book does not exploit all of the colorful testimony of the letters. One misses such wonderful outbursts as "Every day I am lapidated, as though I had crucified Christ!" or "I'd have done better in my youth to hire myself out to make sulphur matches!" One misses those tremendous mystical and confessional sonnets which rank with the greatest of Counter-Reformational verse. One misses certain of the dramatic moments recounted by his contemporaries: Michelangelo's decision to carve a Carrarese mountaintop into a colossus or his indecision whether to go to Constantinople and throw his lot in with the sultan. Yet all the essential facts are in this book of modest proportions. And there are sufficient mauve patches to prove again that one need not resort to fictionalized biography to restore this titan as a lifelike figure.

Mr. Morgan's biography can stand on its merits without the unfortunate blurb on the jacket hailing it as the "first major biography in nearly seventy years devoted to Michelangelo." Since a comparison is thus forced upon us, the late Papini's recent biography, more limited in its objectives, remains a more remarkable and original contribution.

Jungle Journal

"Devils in Waiting," by Mary Motley (Viking. 244 pp. \$4.50), dissects the colonial society that existed in Brazzaville more than two decades ago. Elspeth Huxley's last book was *"The Flame Trees of Thika"*; her next will be *"A New Earth."*

By Elspeth Huxley

A FRAGMENT for a keepsake" is Mary Motley's own description of her book. Anyone who took her at her word and sent it, with a lavender bag, to Aunt Agatha for a seventieth birthday present would have been misled. The flavor is tart and lightly seasoned with malice, the writing plain yet subtle, the setting exotic. At the age of eighteen Mary Motley—a descendant of Sheridan the playwright, daughter of Clare Sheridan the sculptor, and a cousin of Winston Churchill's—met the Comte Guy de Renéville, an officer "adored by his men, hated by his equals and feared by his superiors: the most likable lunatic in the French forces." The Comte, back at his colonial outpost, consulted a witch doctor, who buried Miss Motley's photograph at the full moon and then counseled the lieutenant to summon her across the Saharan sands from her Algerian home.

Investing a small legacy in a second-hand car, she drove romantically to the Niger and beyond, to find nothing. The Comte had vanished without leaving even a message. A year later they married. The Comte meanwhile had joined a secret cult of fetish, and his wedding present was a wooden imp that had only to be rubbed with palm-oil to avert domestic disorders.

Posted to Brazzaville, capital of what was then French Equatorial Africa, in the governor-general's suite, this restless, intelligent young couple, hungry for experience, found their lives swathed in protocol, sodden with dank heat. The French ladies were "legless wonders," rising late, spending afternoons in siesta, and paying calls, well gloved, before dinner. The governor-general's lady wore evening dress for luncheon, adored a pampered white dog, and indulged a passion for photographing a hideous bridge, symbol of Progress. Mme. de Renéville startled everyone by long early-morning walks through the bush with a gay, incompetent orderly.

The people she met were "undersized and pot-bellied, spindle-shanked, diseased, the broken and degenerate remains of defeated races, consumed with

fever and tuberculosis." They fed their dogs poisoned meat to immunize them, and a dog's bite meant instant death; even the pretty white flowers growing around their thatched huts were deadly poison.

"Africa was all round, pulsating, urgent. But I could not reach it. I was looking at a landscape from behind plate glass." Gradually the glass dissolved. There was Sergeant Khamis, a man of such innate goodness that leopards ate from his hand and pined to death when he himself was poisoned. The small boy Angelo hid eggs in Mary's work-basket to express his love. A small, epileptic girl crowed like a cock and one day vanished from the hospital, never to be heard of again. The Christian locomotive engineer killed first a half-brother, then a half-sister, and ate them, confessing to "the sin of gluttony."

The devils remain in waiting, just off-stage. Only Trechaut, the lonely old trader, his hut lined with superb ivory, would sometimes "make things clear without explaining them." Although all contacts with the ancient and enduring religion of Africa were indirect, "the vibrations come through," as Trechaut said. More lovable than most people were the pets: Niama the jackal, who one day "went for bush" wearing collar and bells; a gray parrot afraid only of snakes. Mary Motley's household staff filled her with that mixture of exasperation and affection known to all who have lived in Africa—lived in it, not merely existed. She felt Africa in her bones, hated and loved it, and she conveys its essence in her pages. Her people live. Nothing much seems to happen, but when you think back you see that they have served and suffered, died, begat, been bewitched, promoted and bereaved, almost casually. Small beer perhaps, but with a sharp, individual flavor that hints of heavier brews.

All this happened twenty years ago and more. There is nothing here of politics; the new nationalists, the young men in love with power, ritualists of the ballot-box, intent on building empires on a cracked base of tribalism, are absent from her pages. Certainly the Comte would not have been *sympathique*. Yet Africa has not changed much; only the colonial society has vanished. This Mary Motley dissects at times as if a new Jane Austen had married a Frenchman, lived in the Congo, and written home to her family; breaking from beneath the surface, like drumbeats mumbling from beyond a circle of safe lamplit houses, are deeper Brontean hints of blood and passion. But there is humor always, to make the gruesome tolerable, the tragic poignant, and the human beings real.

NYC

Men About Manhattan

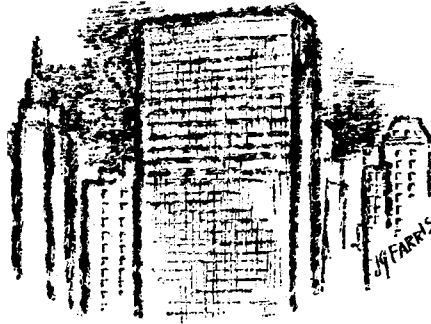
"Meyer Berger's New York," by Meyer Berger (Random House, 322 pp. \$4.95) and **"The Bottom of the Harbor,"** by Joseph Mitchell (Little, Brown, 243 pp. \$3.95), preserve for posterity articles about Gotham that have appeared, respectively, in *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. Richard Gehman, who is co-editor of *"Eddie Condon's Treasury of Jazz,"* often writes for SR.

By Richard Gehman

ONE NIGHT about fourteen years ago, when I was hungry enough, ambitious enough, ingenuous enough, and, finally, idiotic enough to attempt to draw older magazine writers into Discussions of the Form, I cornered St. Clair McKelway, one of my idols, at a party he obviously wished he weren't at, possibly because I was there, and got him to tell me, before he escaped to a less inquisitive atmosphere, that in his mind, "Andy" (I did not then know that by "Andy" he meant Andy, or E. B., White, for if I had I might have fainted) had said all there was to be said about this crushing craft: that the hardest thing about it was putting one word down after the other. Like E. B. White's statements on everything from world law to the behavior of pet dogs, this was deceptively bland, but its loaded significance has never been brought home to me so arrestingly as during my casual trips through these two fine books, each of which ultimately will be used by more than ordinarily astute professors in universities as models of modern prose style.

My trips have been casual because I have read most of this work before: Mitchell's in clipped-out pages from *The New Yorker*, and Berger's in his column in *The New York Times*. On each excursion, including the most recent ones, I have been struck by the clean, solid strength of their writing. Both books offer many proofs of the fact that factual reporting can be raised by highly skilled hands from craft to art, and that prose concerned with what at first appears commonplace materials can be made to sing like poetry.

Meyer Berger, a native-born New Yorker, died in February, 1959, as he



was approaching sixty-one. He had been on the staff of the *Times*, except for one year out to work on Mitchell's home magazine, from 1928 on. In 1953 he began anew a column about New York he had started writing some years before. Its subjects ranged from a man who grew orchids in his apartment to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade to landmarks to Mormons in the city to the marriage license clerk. Every-

thing about New York was interesting to Berger, and it was lucky for the rest of us that he was prolific enough to write of his many concerns and amusements.

Mitchell is not interested in many different things, but he is interested in everything about the ones that do attract him. Born in North Carolina, he went to New York in 1929, worked on both the *World* and the *Herald Tribune*, then settled on *The New Yorker* in 1938. He has been there ever since, exasperating his admiring readers, nearly all of whom believe he is the best writer of all the reporters, by producing articles at the rate of approximately one per year. There are six articles in this book, all connected in one way or another with the New York waterfront.

When I set aside these two books to write this, I could not help feeling sad for two reasons: first, of course, because Meyer Berger is dead; second, because Mitchell produces so little (one wishes he would step up his production to, say, well, one article every eight or nine months.) Between them, working the same territory in their own ways, they have produced a body of work that, in its own way, is classic.

Metropolitan Hurdy-Gurdy

"Carnival Crossroads: The Story of Times Square," by W. G. Rogers and Mildred Weston (Doubleday, 183 pp. \$3.50), mirrors the vital, garish intersection of New York's Broadway and 42nd Street. Jo Ranson is on the staff of *Radio-Television Daily*, located in the aorta of the Great White Way.

By Jo Ranson

SUPERCHARGED Times Square and its frenzied characters are captured in an urbane, distinctive fashion in "Carnival Crossroads: The Story of Times Square," by W. G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, a husband-and-wife team. This book is indeed a successful merger of talents, an effort that seldom creaks at the seam. The authors had an enormous amount of material at their disposal and they exercised excellent judgment in selection. The result is a discerning and frequently poetic profile of the crowded cement merry-go-round in the purlieu of Broadway and 42nd Street.

Both the sightseer from Sioux City and the sophisticate from Sutton Place will find much to hold their interest in the Rogers's compact literary parcel, which offers shrewd estimates of Giovanni da Verrazano, the first European to aim his compass in the direction of Times Square; Generals George Washington and Israel Putnam, who made personal appearances at the intersection; Oscar Hammerstein I, the flamboyant showman who fanfared his approach to Times Square when it was Longacre Square; Adolph S. Ochs of *The New York Times*, who had the sagacity to build the first skyscraper in the area; Jacob Starr of Artkraft-Straus and Douglas Leigh, both of whom turned the Square into a dazzling, eye-popping assortment of huffing, puffing, moving signs, and George Rector, who bragged that he found Broadway "a quiet little lane of ham and eggs in 1899 and . . . left it a full-blown avenue of lobsters, champagne and morning-afters."

Perhaps the richest chapters are those dealing with the clergy and the cops—particularly the latter, who patrol a rugged beat around the clock
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