



Lillian Smith: 1897-1966

By GEORGE P. BROCKWAY

LILLIAN SMITH was a great writer. She was a master of four genres—the novel, the parable, the essay, and the oration—and was a fascinating practitioner of several others, not the least of which was the personal letter.

Like all great artists she was inevitably ahead of her day. At the time of its publication *Strange Fruit* was attacked by some for its sensationalism and dismissed by others as merely a very good problem novel. Twenty-two years later, when the sensations have become commonplace and the problem at least recognized as worthy of solution, the novel stands forth for what it is—a tragedy that can speak to all men everywhere, a work of range and depth and power with few equals in contemporary literature.

Similarly, *Killers of the Dream*, thought in 1949 to be sensation-mongering because of its linkage to sin and sex and segregation, is today the acknowledged—or, often, the unacknowledged—source of much of our thinking about race relations. Without its perceptions the present posture of affairs could hardly be understood—and, it should be added, could not have been achieved.

Everything Lillian Smith wrote was informed by a profound psychological insight that was at the same time a profound moral insight. In *Killers of the Dream* she put it this way: "I began to understand slowly at first, but more clearly as the years passed, that the warped, distorted frame we have put around every Negro child from birth is around every white child also. Each is on a different side of the frame but each is pinioned there. And I knew that what cruelly shapes and cripples the person-

George Brockway is president of W. W. Norton Company, which publishes Lillian Smith.

"You Do It Because You Love Somebody"

ality of one is as cruelly shaping and crippling the personality of the other."

This is an extraordinarily powerful idea. She herself would not have said so; but it is nothing less than an extension, a clarification, a reinforcement, indeed (it is not too much to say) an authorization of the Golden Rule. No longer a sort of balance between competing self-interests, the Rule comes to read: What I do to others, I do to myself. The Golden Rule permits one to hope that one's fellow man may not be able to return a disfavor; as restated it is inexorable: If I diminish my neighbor, I diminish myself; we are both pinioned to the same frame.

Lillian Smith came at this idea from many directions—from literature, from psychoanalysis, from history, from travel, from the religion in which she was raised. Not least did she come at it from her experience of living. In *Killers of the Dream* she wrote that "the mainstream of art has always involved itself with the profound experiences of its age and men's commitment to them." This she deeply believed and resolutely acted upon, often at great risk, always at great cost in the limited time and energy that she had for writing.

In a letter to her publisher she said: "You do what you must do, what seems right, what would make you despise yourself if you didn't do. Or you do it because you love somebody, or a lot of people, so much that you just have to do it. Then when things happen, you stay as steady as you can and that's that."

For fourteen years Lillian Smith fought cancer. Her life was a round of operations, cobalt treatments, hormone treatments. She never gave up. It was perhaps in tribute to her fight that the Atlanta hospital where she died announced that the cause of death was "cardiac arrest."

During those fourteen years she suffered another blow that would have defeated almost anyone else. Her home was destroyed by fire. One completed novel was lost, along with substantial parts of others and her voluminous correspondence.

Yet after that disaster she published four new books, new editions of two others, and wrote enough articles and

speeches to make a pile of manuscript three or four thousand pages high. "One wants to yowl, sometimes," she wrote a friend, "at this never-ending struggle. It has to be; God, I wish I were as courageous as my friends think I am. But when I can work I am happy and content."

Another time she wrote: "But life opened for me, too. . . . The experience of facing my awesome anxiety, then the things you go through again and again (not too painful, remember; painful, yes, but not unendurably so); then death, learning not to fear it really, any more; learning that pain can actually be forgotten especially when one is writing or concerned about others; learning that there is a strange energy inside one that pulls pulls pulls. . . . Yesterday I felt for several hours that I am not going to make it much longer; and the old sadness (but not terror) swept over me; it is really nearly over, I felt. Yet I got up, moved around, messed around with Christmas. . . . I was able to throw off the false or true premonition."

She made it for nine, almost ten, months longer; but she is gone now. She is mourned.

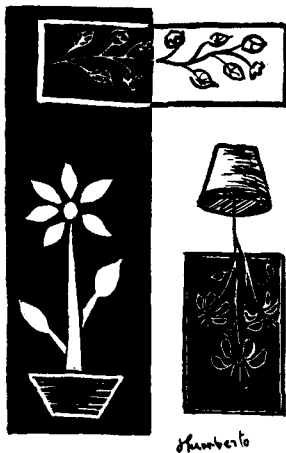
AT HER REQUEST, passages from Lillian Smith's *The Journey* were read at the memorial service for her on September 30. The following is the last passage of the ceremony, and of the book:

"A century from now, men may think it strange that we so long spoke of our times as the age of anxiety; that we let the greed of ordinary men and the power-lust of dictators and demagogues get out of bounds even for a brief span of years; for parallel with the anxiety and the terror and the inquisitors and exploiters and the awful poverty and ignorance there is another way of life building firmly, steadily, swiftly on scientific facts and technics and on men's newly discovered humility and dignity and on their concern for each other. . . .

"I believe future generations will think of our times as the age of wholeness: when the walls began to fall; when the fragments began to be related to each other; when man learned finally

to esteem tenderness and reason and awareness and the word which set him apart forever from other living creatures: when he learned to realize his brokenness and his great talent for creating ties that bind him together again; when he learned to accept his own childhood and in the acceptance to become capable of maturity; when he began to realize his infinite possibilities even as he sees more clearly his limitations; when he began to see that sameness and normality are not relevant to human beings but to machines and animals; when he learned never to let any power or dictator cut his ties to the great reservoir of knowledge and wisdom without which he would quickly lose his human status; when he learned to live a bit more comfortably with time and space; when he learned to accept his need of God and the law that he cannot use Him, to accept his need of his fellow men and the law that he cannot use them, either; when he learned that 'what is impenetrable to us really exists,' and always there will be need of the dream, the belief, the wonder, the faith.

"To believe in something not yet proved and to underwrite it with our lives; it is the only way we can leave the future open. Man, surrounded by facts, permitting himself no surmise, no intuitive flash, no great hypothesis, no risk is in a locked cell. Ignorance cannot seal the mind and imagination more surely. To find the point where hypothesis and fact meet; the delicate equilibrium between dream and reality; the place where fantasy and earthy things are metamorphosed into a work of art; the hour when faith in the future becomes knowledge of the past; to lay down one's powers for others in need; to shake off the old ordeal and get ready for the new; to question, knowing that never can the full answer be found; to accept uncertainties quietly, even our incomplete knowledge of God: this is what man's journey is about, I think."



Humberto

Review of the Presidential Record

Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power, by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak (New American Library, 597 pp. \$7.95), and **The Johnson Eclipse: A President's Vice Presidency**, by Leonard Baker (Macmillan, 280 pp. \$5.95), comprise respectively a scrutiny of LBJ's political tactics and an account of his thousand days in the nation's second highest office. Donald Young, an editor for *American Heritage*, wrote "American Roulette: The History and Dilemma of the Vice Presidency."

By DONALD YOUNG

ON JULY 14, 1960, in Tokyo, Japanese Premier Nobusuke Kishi was stabbed by a would-be assassin during a political meeting at which Kishi's successor was being chosen. On the same day, in Los Angeles, John Kennedy asked Lyndon Johnson to be his running mate on the Democratic national ticket.

During a lull at the 1960 convention, NBC's David Brinkley and another television reporter pondered the two events. They concluded that, for all its faults, the system by which power changes hands in the United States is superior to the violence seen so often in some other countries. Faults there are, in the means by which we nominate and elect candidates and in the means by which those who are elected manipulate the levers of power once in office. As for violence. . . . The death of President Kennedy accounts for the publication of both of the books under consideration here.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, authors of a nationally syndicated newspaper column, have written in *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power* a political biography that outstrips by far the previous examinations of the President's public career. Leonard Baker, a Washington correspondent since 1958, has a more specific subject in *The Johnson Eclipse*: the thousand days of Johnson's Vice Presidency.

Evans and Novak allot no space to Johnson's youth, family life, and business affairs, which—despite the sometimes labored efforts of other writers—contain few elements either very unusual or very interesting. However,

through the pages of this long book stream the names of almost every prominent Washington figure of our time. But readers who fancy that careers are made and broken and legislation passed or rejected at Washington cocktail parties will find little to support their views. Instead, the authors direct their attention to the Senate floor and offices and to the White House. Much of the material is familiar, and much has appeared in the Evans-Novak columns, but it is drawn together into a smooth narrative.

The techniques by which Johnson gained and retained leadership were and are unique, though subject to certain limitations which Johnson himself has discovered in recent years, to his chagrin. His attempts to establish himself as a national leader were handicapped not merely because he was a Southerner, but more particularly because he was from Texas, where the brawling, fractious Democratic Party was unable to provide any Texan with a secure power base. Every move that Johnson made in the Senate was in some degree governed by political considerations back home. Johnson was elected assistant Democratic leader of the Senate in 1951, but he and the majority leader, Ernest McFarland, had less authority than Senator Richard Russell, the real leader of the Democrats. Johnson avoided overplaying his hand, but added to his store of information about the Senate and noted mentally how he might someday improve its operation. After succeeding McFarland in 1953, he gradually displaced Russell as the most important Senate Democrat.

With Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican, in the White House, Johnson proved that divided government could work. He supported the President when he could, but helped write a legislative record for the Democrats when opportunities arose. The familiar wheeling and dealing and the excruciating refinements of the Johnson "Treatment" that marked so many legislative battles have never been documented better. Johnson fought constantly to steer the Senate between McCarthyite reactionaries on the one hand and fire-breathing liberals on the other. He assiduously cultivated allies, and they became, collectively, the "Johnson Network," which spread across party, ideological, and geographical lines. These were the Senators who could be counted on to deliver the key votes. Their ranks included the ultraconservative George Malone ("the chamber's