

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

BERRY FLEMING: A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

Berry Fleming is a "middle of the road Southern novelist"<sup>1</sup> who has shown literary skill and a very real talent in his writings. There is a wide diversity of themes in his nine novels. The steady, quiet quality of his work and a strong Southern flavor give his books a clean warmth that makes them distinctive. Because of a personal interest in his works and their contribution to a better understanding of the South, the writer has undertaken this study of Mr. Fleming's life and his works. It also seemed advantageous to bring together in one place the biographical and bibliographical material on Mr. Fleming.

The first chapter presents the life of Berry Fleming. Born in 1899, he is a contemporary author who has written three consecutive novels dealing with politics and social life in Georgia. Although the novels are localized they have a universal appeal. In his biographical sketch it will be noted that his early life spent in the South, his formal education in New England, and his wide travels combine to give an objectivity and perspective to his writings about

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<sup>1</sup>Earl F. Waldrige, "Berry Fleming," Wilson Library Bulletin, XXVII (February, 1953), 414.

the South. Attention will also be focused on his influence in the political reforms in his native Augusta, Georgia.

The standard biographical tools were used in the preparation of Chapter I. Two personal interviews were held with Mr. Fleming, during which he was most gracious and helpful in supplying additional information.

The second chapter presents a chronological arrangement of his novels, with descriptive annotations and a summary of the critical opinions of the reviewers.

Following the summary, a bibliography gives a complete list of Mr. Fleming's books and short stories plus the sources used in compiling this paper.



## CHAPTER I

### THE LIFE OF BERRY FLEMING

In 1790 the great-great-grandfather of Jiles Berry Fleming brought his family to Georgia from Virginia to settle near the Savannah River about twenty miles northwest of Augusta. His grandfather, Porter, was a cotton factor in Augusta. Berry's father, after the death of the grandfather, carried on the family business.

Jiles Berry Fleming was born March 19, 1899, in Augusta, Georgia, the son of Porter Fleming and Daisy Belden (Berry) Fleming. He was given the maiden name of his mother, which has been so often mistakenly called Barry.<sup>1</sup>

The love of good literature and a flair for writing were evident in his family as early as the eighteenth century.

The Moragnes, maternal ancestors of Mr. Fleming, came to the American Colonies from France in 1760, settling in Charleston, South Carolina. This was during the Huguenot exodus from France. Since Charleston, populated by the English, tended to be inhospitable to the Huguenots, they

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<sup>1</sup>Earl F. Waldrige, "Berry Fleming," Wilson Library Bulletin, XXVII (February, 1953), 414.

settled farther up in South Carolina, near New Bordeaux.

My great aunt, Mary Elizabeth Moragne, wrote a novel, The British Partizan, that was published serially in the Augusta Mirror about 1840 and subsequently published in book form. During the next two or three years she wrote a number of stories that were published in the Mirror and the Penfield Orion. Her poetry was published as Lays from the Summer Lands. She was living then in the New Bordeaux-Abbeville section of South Carolina near the Savannah River.<sup>1</sup>

The British Partizan, now in the Library of Congress, is a love story of the Revolutionary period in South Carolina. It is stated in the preface of the book that her style approaches more nearly the style and genius of Sir Walter Scott than any other novel that had yet been written this side of the Atlantic.

Whether Miss Moragne showed literary promise or not, her pen was stilled when she married a minister who objected to her writing "those lies" as he called her fictional works.

The Savannah River, a cloudy red ribbon twisting through a rich cotton belt and forming a natural boundary between South Carolina and Georgia, forms an historical link between the gentlewoman of the early 1800's, who laid aside her pen for the love of her husband, and her descendant, a twentieth century author whose sensitive, earnest writings have brought him deserved recognition.

Mr. Fleming's childhood was that of any Southern

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Berry Fleming, February 21, 1958.

boy of well-to-do parents. His interests were varied, but by the time he entered the Academy of Richmond County he had strong leanings toward the field of literature. Scott, Stevenson, Cooper, Poe filled his leisure hours with adventure. It is interesting to note that his very first novel was an exciting sea story of a daring buccaneer.

He was content to attend the local public schools, but since a cousin of his was attending Middlesex School, at Concord, Massachusetts, his parents decided to enroll Berry there too. He was not unhappy at leaving Augusta, nor was he particularly elated to be going.

There were mental and emotional adjustments to be made, changing so suddenly to such a different environment, but I liked it. At Richmond Academy in those days you didn't go round admitting you might be reading The Gold Bug or The Master of Ballantrae, but at Middlesex it seemed quite a normal thing to do.<sup>1</sup>

An average student, Berry graduated from Middlesex in June, 1918; then following a summer at camp with the Harvard ROTC, he enlisted in the Army. He was at Fort Monroe in Officers Training School when the Armistice was signed in November. He completed the course, and, was commissioned a second Lieutenant in February.

As is often true, instructors can stimulate and inspire interest in their subject-matter. Mr. Fleming now enrolled in Harvard, found encouragement in creative writing from

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Berry Fleming, February 3, 1958.

the English professors. The study of history seemed to hold little interest for him at the time, though many of his novels are rich in historical background.

While at Harvard, Mr. Fleming affiliated himself with a group of students interested in art and painting. As he became more deeply interested, he began to entertain the idea of following painting as a career. In addition to his painting, he drew cartoons and wrote articles for the college papers. He was an editor of the Lampoon and of the Advocate. During this time Mr. Fleming wrote a number of articles about the college and college life that were printed in the New York Evening Post.

After graduating from Harvard in 1922, Mr. Fleming returned to Augusta and began writing for the daily paper, the Augusta Chronicle. Painting was still the first interest in his life, however, and writing was merely a pleasant pastime. When a friend from Boston, a former Harvard classmate, wrote that he was going to New York to live, he and Mr. Fleming decided to take an apartment together.

I left Augusta with the intention of studying at the Art Students League and setting the world on fire as a painter. Unfortunately--or fortunately, how can you tell?--my classmate had a friend who was a real painter, real enough to need a free lodging when he visited New York, and he took no pains to disguise the dim view he held of my canvases. It was thirty-five years before I dared present myself to the Art Students League.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Berry Fleming, February 21, 1958.

During the time that Mr. Fleming was working in Augusta, he had written about half of his first novel The Conqueror's Stone. He was far enough along on his novel to arouse the interest of a publisher. He pushed his easel and brushes into a corner and, quieting his desire to paint, turned full interest on his writing. In addition to the work on his novel, he contributed articles to Life, which was then a magazine somewhat like the New Yorker today, and to the British publication, Punch.

While visiting friends one evening he met Anne Shirley Molloy, a young Southern girl from Lexington, Kentucky. Miss Molloy, a graduate of Smith College, was then working at King's Features Syndicate. In addition to being fellow-Southerners, they soon discovered that they had many interests in common. From that evening on they began to see each other often; and on August 12, 1925, the two were married. Returning to New York after a month in England, they rented an apartment on Eleventh Street.

Mr. Fleming's father died in 1926 before Berry's first novel was published. His father may have wanted Berry to remain at home and take over the family business, as had been done for two generations; if such, however, were his yearnings, he never voiced them. His philosophy was a sound one: the only way to get satisfaction out of life is for each person to do what most appeals to him.

Since Mr. Fleming's sister was living in Augusta

and their mother would not be alone, the young couple returned to New York, leaving soon for a two years stay in Europe. Once there, they bought a small car and drove everywhere -- storing for future use the continental atmosphere of remembered impressions, scenes, characters, experiences. These later produced the material for his second novel, Visa to France. His travels contributed to the unusual perspective that enhances all of Mr. Fleming's work.

Upon their return to New York, Mr. Fleming rented a small one-room office on Fifty-ninth Street. "A miserable place," his memory tells him; but perhaps its very drabness gave wings to his fancy, since it was there he wrote The Square Root of Valentine, a philosophical, fanciful novel.

After the book was published, Mr. and Mrs. Fleming made a change from the brisk pace of glittering New York to the slow, easy gait of his home town. Returning to Augusta in 1932, they rented a home near his Mother. The warm, heady sweetness of the Southern summer was conducive to the writing of his next novel, appropriately entitled Siesta. The Flemings remained in Augusta almost two years, during which time Mr. Fleming completed the novel which was published in 1935 in both American and British editions.

Returning to New York in 1935, Mr. Fleming went to a small twelfth floor office on Forty-second Street. Even while the metallic ring of the typewriter bounced against

the walls of the little office, the memories of the South seemed to settle over the mid-Manhattan picture beyond his window. A new novel, To the Market Place, began to take shape, shifting South and North in its scenes and viewpoints and presenting a story of young Southerners leaving their backgrounds for the excitements of New York. The book deals with the lure of the big city and with the outlanders - the Southerners, the New Englanders, the middle-Westerners - who make their way to New York, each seeking to find his own way of life.

It seemed to worry Mr. Fleming that the magnitude of New York was so great it was impossible for one to take advantage of all the city had to offer. He thought he might write better books if he tried some other place; that things to write about might be "fresher, less intellectualized" away from New York. "The material was there, but I could not get close enough to it to write about it."<sup>1</sup>

Another thing that prompted the return to the South was the feeling that his daughter, Shirley, now about nine, should have some place she could call home and to which she could "belong." They coveted for their daughter the secure, close family and community life that they both had known.<sup>2</sup>

The Flemings drove from New York back to the fast

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

growing town on the banks of the Savannah River. Mr. Fleming's mother had died in 1935, and the home was empty. Unable to sell or rent it, they decided to move in and stay there until they could dispose of it. It wasn't long, however, before the family felt the spell of home and the easy routine that is so much a part of the South; thus they gradually decided to settle permanently there. Shirley loved the big house, the friendly people, and felt truly a sense of "belonging" in this town where her father had lived, and his father and grandfather before him. This was quite different from the impersonal atmosphere of the metropolitan area.

Shirley went away to school at Chatham Hall in Virginia and, like her mother, on to Smith College where she received her Master of Arts degree in music.<sup>1</sup> She has repeated in part the lives of both her father and mother, for she too has gone "to the market place." At present she is living in New York and writes for the magazine Hi-Fi Music at Home.

Back in Augusta again, Mr. Fleming's main interest was to get in touch with the town. Thinking the newspaper might be the best place, he began to write a weekly column for the Augusta Chronicle. Entitled "The Watchtower," the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.



column dealt principally with criticism of music and movies. Mr. Fleming feels that he might never have run into a true picture of the political situation had he not been working on the paper.

Interested in the mechanics of municipal government, he became increasingly indignant at the political irregularities going on in his native Augusta. Shocked at the conditions, he made an effort through his column to stir the people out of their lethargy. He instigated the organization of the Augusta Citizens Union, an organized group of citizens that was finally instrumental in overthrowing the political machine.

A Book of the Month Club selection, his novel, Colonel Effingham's Raid, in many respects runs parallel to his experiences during this period. The book tells of the reforms wronged and irate citizens can bring about when properly led.

Mr. Fleming is a tall, quiet man, always completely at ease. He has a slow, studied manner of speaking that belies the forcefulness of his character. Not content merely to write about the wrongs and ills of the South and his home town, he has proved himself willing and capable of actively doing something to right these wrongs. He fervently believes that we cannot have good government unless the citizens will watch and take an interest in it. It seemed

to him that his fellow citizens, so ready to do big things for their country during World War II, tended to hang back when it came to fighting for good government in their own home town.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Fleming did not return to his native Augusta just because it may have been a more conducive atmosphere for writing, but he assumed his responsibility as a citizen and became an integral part of the life of the community. In addition to his organizing the Augusta Citizens Union and serving, first as president, then as treasurer, he has taken an active part in other civic affairs, holding such offices as member of the Board of Trustees of the Academy of Richmond County, member of the Library Board, serving as president of this Board in 1943. He has also been a member of the board of the Augusta Art Club.

A rapid flow of dignified humor characterizes Mr. Fleming's writings. His books are clean and wholesome and written with meticulous care. He knows his South and his Southerner, although he has enough detachment occasionally to poke quiet fun at their aristocratic convictions.<sup>2</sup> He has traveled widely, living abroad and in New York; this seems to give him a perspective in his writings that few authors attain. Most of his readers attempt to make

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Book of the Month Club News, December 1951.

Augusta the setting for his later novels and have tried to read parts of his life into his characters. Mr. Fleming admits that

. . . all of my activities can be readily traced in the books I have written, as well as all the other details of my life - if you know how to trace.<sup>1</sup>

Most of Mr. Fleming's writing is done in his study at home. Actually his study looks more like an artist's studio; although he laid aside his brushes in 1923 in New York, he has now begun to paint again. In March 1958 he had a show at the Country Art Gallery in Westbury, Long Island.

Mr. Fleming is an extremely modest man, somewhat reticent to talk about himself or his books. He admits to working on three manuscripts at the present time, working on them at his usual unhurried pace.

Writing is an important thing to me and I do the best job I can. I take as long as necessary to do the job well and if I find I can't make the book work, I let it go.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning the completion of his three books Mr. Fleming declares he may never finish them.

I am interested in them; I feel they have real potentialities. But I also feel there is not much public interest in the sort of books I write. I have never compromised by consciously lowering

<sup>1</sup>Interview with Berry Fleming, February 3, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Berry Fleming, February 21, 1958.

a book's quality in order to appeal to a wider public; the books are as good as I know how to make them. Some of them, frankly, better; better, I am afraid, than I know how to write now. I have lost the touch, lost, also, the long-burning enthusiasm it takes to settle into a piece of work that you know is going to require two or three years to complete. Two or three hours, with luck, are enough for a watercolor.

And after all, since I started out almost equally drawn to writing and painting and wrote books for thirty years, perhaps I owe the next thirty to painting. Suppose we say I hope to publish quite a remarkable novel in the fall of 1987.<sup>1</sup>

This valuable integrity that is found in all of Mr. Fleming's writings is as much a part of his life as the South about which he writes.

Whether he is using the artist's palette and easel or his small grey typewriter and bond paper, he is creating true to life pictures that make a valuable contribution to the field of twentieth century literature.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE NOVELS OF BERRY FLEMING

Since the publication of Mr. Fleming's first novel in 1927, he has written eleven books, nine of which are novels. His other two books are chronologies: 199 Years of the Augusta Library and Autobiography of a Colony. In addition he has been a frequent contributor to various newspapers and magazines such as The New York Evening Post, Life, Harper's, the British publication Punch, and many others.

There will be an inclusion of his two chronologies in the final bibliography. The scope of this paper, however, does not include a consideration of his numerous contributions to periodicals and newspapers. His ~~three~~ short stories will be listed, but not annotated.

Chapter II will present his novels as a notable contribution to twentieth century literature, with comments on his literary style and the critical reviews as appearing in the Book Review Digest. Additional reviews were secured from the press clippings in possession of Mr. Fleming.

The novels, briefly annotated, are arranged in chronological order according to the copyright date of each title. As has been shown in the preceeding chapter, there

is a close correlation between Mr. Fleming's personal life and the themes of his writings. For this reason it appears logical to annotate his novels in a chronological order, rather than grouping them according to type.

### The Conqueror's Stone<sup>1</sup>

The first of Berry Fleming's novels, published April 23, 1927, is the action-filled story of a Carolinian pirate of 1766. "He was the mildest mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut throat" are the lines quoted by Mr. Fleming in the introduction of his book, summarizing aptly the character of the protagonist, Nicholas Waine.<sup>2</sup>

Nicholas lived on the coast of South Carolina until, at the impressionable age of thirteen, his father took him to England, enrolling him in a boarding school there. Even at thirteen Nicholas was very headstrong and defiant. Since his ideas of education were extremely at odds with those of his parents and school masters, he ran away from the boarding school. Nothing more is heard of him until seventeen years later he appears as first mate on a pirate brig. Pursued by the British forces half-way across the Atlantic, the pirate ship glides into an inlet not far from Nicholas' home in the Carolinas.

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<sup>1</sup> (New York: John Day Company, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> New York Times Book Review, May 8, 1927, p. 22.

Nicholas, a ruthless man, has no misgivings as he kills his pirate shipmates, appropriates the chest of gold, and sets out for his parents' home with his black servant Daniel and a mysterious Captain Quinn.

His parents are delighted to see their long lost son but, while the happy reunion is in progress, the British vessels also put in at port. An intense hunt gets underway as the British try to find the notorious pirate captain.

With a suave coolness, Nicholas offers his services to the British in tracking down the pirates. The audacity of this proposal and his subsequent daring escapades give suspense and excitement to the novel.

The Conqueror's Stone was well received and Mr. Fleming hailed as ". . . a young writer of wholly remarkable promise."<sup>1</sup> The New York Times stated that the novel

is written more ably than the works of many a writer with an established following. While of course the theme can lay no claim to novelty . . . Mr. Fleming has handled his material in an individual manner that instantly arrests attention and one can feel what one too often misses in current fiction-- the personality of the writer animating the work . . .<sup>2</sup>

The dignified humor that characterizes many of Mr. Fleming's later writings is prevalent in his first novel as noted in the Boston Evening Transcript: "It is an absorbing story,

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<sup>1</sup>James Branch Cabell, New York Times Book Review, September 11, 1927, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>New York Times Book Review, May 8, 1927, p. 22.

and excellent, and humorously written."<sup>1</sup>

It was the general opinion of the reviewers that Mr. Fleming showed a deftness of characterization in Nicholas Waine, skillfully weaving into the story breathtaking action and suspense.<sup>2</sup> There are some unexplained facts in the plot and in some instances too much detail of codes and maps.<sup>3</sup> In general, however, The Conqueror's Stone was considered a superb first offering worthy of note.

#### Visa to France<sup>4</sup>

Clement was a young American who for many years had aspirations to write a novel. In his attempt he is side-tracked by many things. First, he is young and there seems to be an endless round of places to go and things to do--distractions which Clement always welcomed. Cocktail parties, tennis games, lovely girls, and country club dances were put first in his life. Then Clement fell in love and married, after which he found a routine centered around his home that left him little time or inclination to start on his novel.

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<sup>1</sup>Boston Evening Transcript, August 3, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Mid Week Pictorial, June 16, 1927, (Review from the press clippings of Mr. Berry Fleming).

<sup>3</sup>New York Times Book Review, May 8, 1927, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>(New York: Doubleday, Doran Company, 1930).



In a final burst of enthusiasm, Clement engaged a villa at the resort of Les Planches-sur-Mer, determined to avoid distractions and accomplish his literary mission. He goes alone except for two essentials: his fat cook and his dust covered typewriter.

The usual distractions, which he secretly coveted, did not appear. Clement justified his procrastination by not being able to find the perfect French heroine. The Englishmen, Americans, French, Italians, and Germans who are guests at the resort would furnish plot material for any novelist, but it never occurs to Clement to write about these people.

Mr. Fleming uses Clement Train as a basting thread to draw together the personal lives of these international guests. The plan of the book is casual, according to the New Yorker, and,

. . . its people are indolent and good-natured, but its dissertations on the minor aspects of international manners are shrewd, amusing, and light-hearted.<sup>1</sup>

Other reviewers also stressed the lightness and gaiety of Visa to France.

It is a gay book, a regularly gay book without at all being another of the numerous and depressing "funny" books . . . Visa to France doesn't take itself too hard but it should be very gratefully received by a public which does not often get a book of such gay intent so beautifully turned out.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>New Yorker, VI (May 24, 1930), 42.

<sup>2</sup>Saturday Review of Literature, VI (June 21, 1930), 1140.

The New York Times stated:

This engaging book is one that can be put aside and picked up again at any hour for an entertaining chapter. Yet few will close the covers until Train turns over in the sand and mumbles drowsily, "Ah well! For God's sake quit worrying about the world!"<sup>1</sup>

The reviewers seemed less enthusiastic about Mr. Fleming's second novel. Louis Kronenberger in the Bookman felt that, although Visa to France was engagingly written,

. . . here and there it spurts with amusement, then falls back into longueurs. There is some really clever and cultivated discussion of America and Europe . . . but on the whole it lacks characterization.<sup>2</sup>

Isabel Paterson of the New York Herald Tribune thought "the plot improbable and unimportant."<sup>3</sup> All reviewers seemed in agreement, however, that the novel was fresh, witty, and intriguing. A book completely different from The Conqueror's Stone, Visa to France has been classified as a book of sophisticated humor, depicting realistically poignant tragedy beneath the glitter.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Square Root of Valentine<sup>4</sup>

Valentine had a very stable background. He was a Harvard graduate from a good family of average wealth.

<sup>1</sup>New York Times Book Review, May 25, 1930, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Louis Kronenberger, Bookman, LXXI (July, 1930), 442.

<sup>3</sup>Isabel Paterson, New York Herald Tribune Books, May 14, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>(New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1932).

He stepped from college to a promising position on Wall Street. At first glance one would think Valentine had everything. He had a charming wife, a large suburban home, but he also had the alarming habit of losing his job every midsummer.

Each year he heard the faint, alluring tinkle of a bell that led him to do absurd things completely alien to his character. The bell always brought a vague restlessness, a stirring of never-known memories.

Hearing the bell, Valentine arose at three one morning to see how the world looked so early in the day. He found it to be a confusing, fascinating place. Absurdities seemed normal to him and, reluctant to return home, he solved his inner conflict by taking the square root of himself.

There is amusing satire on Wall Street, religion, science, art, and love woven into this mad summer excursion.<sup>1</sup>

Enthusiastic reviews lauded Mr. Fleming for his exquisitely accurate writing.<sup>2</sup> Harriett Sampson in the New York Herald Tribune acclaims the book as "one of superior cleverness. The wit has alacrity and the phrases carry surprise."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> New York Times Book Review, March 13, 1932, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Morley, Book of the Month Club News, March, 1932.

<sup>3</sup> Harriett Sampson, New York Herald Tribune Books, March 13, 1932, p. 15.

The New York Times stated:

Mr. Fleming's humor resides in a certain delicacy of touch and of imagination; in a quiet inconsequence and a perfectly quiet and serious description of preposterous incidents; and in the solemn and logical working out of hair-brained arguments worthy to be ranked with those of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Fleming has shown himself a master in his ability to cover deep thinking with a delicate touch of humor. As expressed by Robert Nathan in the Saturday Review of Literature, ". . . the book is rich with thought and loud with humor."<sup>2</sup>

The main criticism to the novel was also voiced by Mr. Nathan:

Mr. Fleming has not written his book as well as he might. He has allowed himself to go slack at times to appear loose and careless, even to be dull . . .<sup>3</sup>

#### Siesta<sup>4</sup>

With his fourth novel Mr. Fleming begins his emergence as a portrayer of contemporary Southern life. Siesta is less a novel than it is a series of intimate close glimpses into the lives of the people of a small Southern community.

<sup>1</sup> New York Times Book Review, March 13, 1932, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Nathan, Saturday Review of Literature, VIII (March 26, 1932), 615.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935).

Mr. Fleming strolls into Georgetown Alabama on June 4, and remains there until September 4 of a summer characterized by an 'empty, bloodless sort of heat, timeless, as if that part of the world had ceased to move and were lying out there motionless under the sun.' There he remains, so to speak, with his hands in his pockets, lazily reporting on the lives and actions of a group of the principal inhabitants. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The community as a whole and the lives of the individuals who comprise the community are thrown open to the reader. One seems to feel the loneliness of Widow Pickens and the yearning of young Nora to break away from family ties. Southern problems and Southern attitudes are shown subtly through the characters.

H. M. Jones brought out the objectivity of Mr. Fleming's picture of the South in his review in the Saturday Review of Literature, stating that the book ". . . is as impartial a portrait of a Southern town as I have seen in print."<sup>2</sup>

Praising Mr. Fleming's work along the same lines is the review appearing in the New York Herald Tribune:

Siesta is a book drawn from true American sources, of an intense realism achieved more by subtle implication than forthright explication--and a truthful picture of how the present generation in deep Dixie lives, loves and thinks. It is just as authentically American a document as 'Main Street'--but a 'Main Street' south of the Mason and Dixon Line.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H. M. Jones, Saturday Review of Literature, XI (April 6, 1935), 599.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>E. L. Tinker, New York Herald Tribune Books, April 7, 1935, p. 4.

Lewis Gannett, writing also for the New York Herald Tribune had this to say about Mr. Fleming's style of writing:

Siesta is a deftly written book with a technique that sometimes reminds one of Dos Passos, but is more skillful; a pity that is missing from Caldwell stories; a warmth all its own. . . . It may be the best book by a young Southerner since Evelyn Scott wrote "The Narrow House,"<sup>1</sup>

All of the reviews were in agreement that Siesta was a good and truthful portrayal of the South.<sup>2</sup> The main criticism was that there seemed to be no focal point for attention.

Since the accident of place forms the only important connection and since no single story stands out from the others as a focus of attention, the emphasis of the novel is necessarily scattered. . . . the action of a dozen novels into the space of one.<sup>3</sup>

#### To the Market Place<sup>4</sup>

In the glamorous days of the late 1920's New York becomes the focal point for a group of young people from the South. They converge in New York, the "Market Place" at which they hope to sell their talents. Mr. Fleming weaves his story around the lives of these young people in their

<sup>1</sup>Lewis Gannett, New York Herald Tribune, April 4, 1935, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Amy Loveman, Saturday Review of Literature, XI (April 6, 1935), 599.

<sup>3</sup>New York Times Book Review, April 14, 1935, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>(New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938).

quest for self-understanding and self-expression.

The novel concerns itself with the individual lives of its characters loosely inter-weaving one with the other. Owen's efforts to become a painter are frustratingly halted at the death of his father. Finding the family business more or less thrust upon him, he comes to a new and deeper realization of family ties and old traditions. After a few years spent in his native South, the magnetic spell of New York diminishes. Just as Owen's sense of values changes so does that of the other characters in the novel.

The main unfavorable comment was that the characters seemed of little interest or importance, tending to be almost dull at times.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, Harriet Anderson thought

To the Market Place

. . . one of the most interesting and intelligent novels that have appeared in a long while. The narrative action and suspense are absorbing enough to justify high praise of the story alone. But there is as well observation of character . . . acute and deep and talk full of overtones that satisfy the contemplative mind.<sup>2</sup>

H. M. Jones in the Saturday Review of Literature touches on one of the high points in all of Mr. Fleming's works--his extremely vivid descriptions. Particular noteworthy was the opening scene in To the Market Place.

<sup>1</sup>Commonweal, XXIX (November 11, 1938), 79.

<sup>2</sup>Harriett Anderson, New York Herald Tribune, October 30, 1938, p. 60.

Mr. Fleming also has a feeling for conversation and an ear for the American lingo.<sup>1</sup>

The reviews in general were favorable, although the characters may not have been so sharp as in other of Mr. Flemings's works.

### Colonel Effingham's Raid<sup>2</sup>

Colonel W. Seaborn Effingham, United States Army, Retired, was smoldering mad. Not one to bear his anger in silence, the force of it echoed throughout the valleys and hills of Fredericksville, Georgia. His army uniforms hanging in moth proof bags didn't mean that his willingness to fight for democracy was retired and stored away too.

Returning to his native Fredericksville he was appalled at the state of affairs. The local political machine was well-oiled with the citizens' misused money. Determined to smoke out these politicians, the old Colonel rallied his forces to fight for the return of justice and democracy. The townspeople soon found that Colonel Effingham could lead a group of civilians just as well as he had commanded a division of soldiers.

The plot evolves around the politicians' plans to build a new city hall. Although the present structure was

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<sup>1</sup>H. M. Jones, Saturday Review of Literature, XIX (October 29, 1938), 5.

<sup>2</sup>(New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943).



substantial, lovely, completely adequate in size, it was nonetheless "condemned." Cousins and in-laws were to be granted fat contracts. Colonel Effingham, however, with the help of an aroused citizenry, saved the building and the taxpayers' money.

This is probably the best known of Mr. Fleming's novels, for in addition to being a Book of the Month Club selection it was also made into a movie. The reviewers enthusiastically commended Mr. Fleming for his satirical style of humor and his interpretation of a small town's political problems.

Colonel Effingham's Raid is excellent satire and, like all good satire, it expertly blends contraries -- here, humor and there a deep seriousness. Moreover Fleming writes as with a surgeon's scalpel for, on almost every page, he cuts through the fat, deep but painlessly.<sup>1</sup>

The satirical humor, not without its serious implications, was also praised in the New Yorker.

Mr. Fleming's light-hearted sketch of his native Deep South has a pleasingly un-Faulknerian sanity. He makes fun of his countrymen with an affection that nevertheless has its ironical underside. His laughter is constant but never superficial.<sup>2</sup>

Colonel Effingham's Raid is far more than a light-hearted sketch of the deep South. Mr. Fleming has voiced his deep concern for "America and America's future."<sup>3</sup> Al-

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<sup>1</sup>E. J. Cronin, Book Week, March 14, 1943, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Clift Fadiman, New Yorker, XIX (February 20, 1943), 57.

<sup>3</sup>New York Times Book Review, February 28, 1943, p. 5.

though Colonel Effingham's Raid almost parallels Mr. Fleming's own experiences in his home town, the book has a universal appeal.

Mr. Fleming has had the good sense to stay out of his home country long enough to regain a sense of proportion. . . . He can separate his characters from the dark heat waves that engulf them . . . never confuses psychopathic sexualis with true drama. Nor does he permit a gift for mordant satire to obscure his real concern for America and America's future. He has probed the dry-rot of Dixie politics to the heart.<sup>1</sup>

The New Republic gave the only unfavorable review stating:

Colonel Effingham is meant to embody the democratic conscience, but all too often the gentleman of the old South who models aged whiskey on the billboards stands in for him. The style of the book, which has prevented the emergence of a single sentence written in modest English, is an affected melange of Confederate history and the Manual of Arms.<sup>2</sup>

S. V. Benet, in the New York Herald Tribune, commended Mr. Fleming for his insight into Southern character but felt his comedy a little mechanical.<sup>3</sup>

The overall response to Colonel Effingham's Raid was overwhelmingly favorable and enthusiastic. "This is our native story telling and our native humor at their best."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>New Republic, CVIII (April 19, 1943), 518.

<sup>3</sup>S. V. Benet, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, February 28, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Atlantic Monthly, CLXXI (April, 1943), 148.

"With the publication of this novel Mr. Fleming deserves to rank among the best of his contemporaries."<sup>1</sup>

### The Lightwood Tree<sup>2</sup>

This is a free country and I've got all the right in the world to talk about the Home Folks Party, and . . . if you'll pardon me, I say to hell with the Home Folks Party.<sup>3</sup>

Like a nuclear bombardment, these words set off a bristling chain reaction in a small Southern Community. Mac, a young filling station attendant, who voiced his opinion of the political party then in power was arrested without a warrant and held incommunicado in the city jail.

The incident is perhaps the making of George Gliatt, a high school history teacher in the small town of Fredericksville, Georgia. George is a middle-aged, mild, conscientious man. A dedicated teacher, he has never asserted himself or tried to cultivate his own leadership ability. A series of events during the past few weeks encourage George to evaluate himself, changing the pattern of his life from a "thinker" to a "doer." The transition solidified when he saw Mac, his former student, arrested for having expressed himself publicly about the local political machine. George jeopardizes his job, his future, his love as he

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<sup>1</sup>New York Times Book Review, February 28, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>(Philadelphia, Pa.: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1947).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

attempts to fight injustices and fascism at home while his brother and other Americans are fighting for democracy abroad.

There are frequent flashbacks to the history of the Georgia town showing heroism of a similar nature during the revolutionary period.

The reviewers were divided about the value of these flashbacks into the town's past. James Hilton of the New York Herald Tribune stated:

The Lightwood Tree is a book worth re-reading if only because of its periodic excursions into the past are likely to be skipped by the reader, who is already interested in the modern story. But they are an integral part of a structure which constantly seeks a third dimension such as the history that is causative in the behavior and conditions of present day characters. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Edward Weeks, who reviewed the novel in the Atlantic Monthly, felt that Mr. Fleming wove his story together with "fine historical color and deftness of transitions."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, there were a few who felt that the flashbacks into local history interrupted the continuity of the story. Perhaps the most critical was Orville Prescott in his review in the New York Times.

. . . his sentences are so long, loose and rippling that they produce a soporific hum at one moment and

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<sup>1</sup>James Hilton, New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review, August 17, 1947, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Weeks, Atlantic Monthly, CLXXX (October 1947), 124.

then jolt you out of your drowsy calm with sudden problems caused by mysteriously missing verbs, bewildering showers of dashes and fancy shifts in time and place. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The Booklist, in agreement with Mr. Prescott, stated that the "flashbacks into local history are good in themselves but interrupt the sweep of George's story."<sup>2</sup>

In general the book was thought to be a true picture of a Southern town with well developed characters. Although the story occurs in a small town, its message is universal. According to the Saturday Review of Literature:

. . . in democracy both the leader and "the people" have something essential to each other, and . . . the dull mass of "the people" is no more ridiculous without adequate leadership than a courageous man without understanding contact with the people whom he would save and lead.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Fortune Tellers<sup>4</sup>

People in the small Southern town in Georgia had half-forgotten the murder committed in their community twenty years ago. A northern newspaperman, in his determination to prove that the Negro sentenced for the crime is really innocent, poses a threat to the reputation of the town's leading citizen. The townspeople loyal to the

<sup>1</sup>Orville Prescott, New York Times Book Review, August 24, 1947, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Booklist, XXXIV (September 15, 1947), 32.

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Daniels, Saturday Review of Literature, XXX (August 16, 1947), 10.

<sup>4</sup>(Philadelphia, Pa.: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1951).

sanctity of the family they cherish, are united in their efforts to protect them.

A second threat of disaster envelopes the community as the churning rising waters of the river press against the leaking dike. In this eminent danger of a flood, the methodical probing of the northern journalist is forgotten.

Against this tense, exciting background is the story of Clive Barfield, a wealthy kaolin mine operator. Clive finds himself fighting two battles: one against the flood, since he is directing the town's heroic fight against it; the other against the journalist, since Clive is the son-in-law of the Tafford clan involved in the murder.

Until this crucial time in his life and in the life of his community, Clive has been a rather weak person. The crystallization of his character is a high point of the story--a story of people rising above petty selfishness, suspicions and an old crime, to work together for the common good of the town.

Mr. Fleming's eighth novel, The Fortune Tellers, was a Literary Guild Selection. He was also awarded the 1951 Literary Achievement Award for Fiction given by the Georgia Writer's Association. The award was given to Mr. Fleming for

the quality and taste that are consistently present throughout his work: for his fidelity to his convictions and his ability to express them . . . and for the light objective truth yet always proportionately subjective which he sheds on Man

Southern and Men Universal. . . . he is a native son from whose pen has come something of value to Everyman.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main criticisms of Mr. Fleming's works seems to be his use of flashbacks into the lives of people or, as in the case of The Lightwood Tree, into the history of a town. Such is the case with The Fortune Tellers, according to Harold Roth in the New York Times. Mr. Roth thinks the flashbacks highly complicate the plot, as does Mr. Fleming's careful attention to details.<sup>2</sup>

The other major criticism was voiced by V. P. Haas:

The Fortune Tellers, coming after such sparkling tales as Colonel Effingham's Raid and The Lightwood Tree may prove a shock to some of Berry Fleming's admirers. The unhappy fact is that Mr. Fleming has crowded too much into a single book and has, as a result, spoiled three good stories.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of reviews were favorable, acknowledging Mr. Fleming's graphic descriptions and his excellent portrait of a small Southern town.

Mr. Fleming discloses . . . the mature novelist's ability to write on four levels: his plot excites; his characters reveal; Fredericksville, quite as typical a Southern place as any in Faulkner, is illuminated; so is man's relationship to the universe.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from the Award.

<sup>2</sup>Harold Roth, New York Times Book Review, November 11, 1951, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>V. P. Haas, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, November 18, 1951, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIV (November 10, 1951), 16.

Carnival<sup>1</sup>

Johnny Croshaw's story is as old as Adam-- and to tell his story Mr. Fleming takes the reader on an excursion into the world of the carnival. The sights and smells and noise of a people-thronged midway rise from the pages of the book. The woody smell of the sawdust, the odor of frying onions and sugary cotton candy sting the nostrils.

Progressing down the midway, the reader meets Johnny, a strong, fine young man, who has just seen the painted clown "Mort" kill his grandfather. Johnny's first brush with death makes him defiant, angry, and bewildered at how lonely a thing sorrow is. Only at this point does Mr. Fleming divulge that Johnny Croshaw's story is symbolic of any man's search for self-meaning. The midway symbolizes life with a big, burly policeman ordering the people to keep moving, not allowing anyone to turn back or retrace his steps into the past. The side shows and events are merely the facts of life. Carnival shows raw reality, tired illusions, the false, forced gaieties of life broken by the occasional winning of a cheap bauble not worth the price paid.

Mr. Fleming has tried something new in this imaginative, allegorical novel. Packed with meaning, "it suggests almost everything you have read that looks for a

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<sup>1</sup>(Philadelphia, Pa.: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1953).



solution to life's problems."<sup>1</sup>

Although beautifully written, Carnival probably does not have a universal appeal. It seems to be a book for a select group, as expressed in the review appearing in the Chicago Sunday Tribune.

Carnival is an imaginative, beautifully written novel, which makes a strong appeal to the curious and will find a place on the shelves of those readers who take pleasure in off-trail books. . . . It is not a book for the general reader at all, for it is replete with symbols and allegory, and the contemporary reader is far too impatient to go along in this excursion of fantasy.<sup>2</sup>

Not only has Mr. Fleming presented a completely different theme from any of his other novels, but the reviewers were loud in their praise of his unusually beautiful literary style.

. . . it must be emphatically stated that Carnival is a work of art, a fascinating performance on something of a tightrope. Though a novel in form and language, it is poetry in substance and pitch. And while embracing the great, ultimate themes it maintains obedience to the stern discipline of unity, brevity and economy. Though some may find it too disturbing for their pleasure, it is a grimly beautiful book.<sup>3</sup>

The Retail Bookseller commented on the realistic picture of life, which Carnival presents.

<sup>1</sup>Jane Voiles, San Francisco Chronicle, August 30, 1953, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>August Derleth, Chicago Sunday Tribune, August 16, 1953, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Georgianne Sampson, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, August 16, 1953, p. 4.

It should be offered both as a literary puzzle and an intelligent view of life. Actually, it is an allegory of life and death, not of the easy symbolism of Robert Nathan's "The Train in the Meadow," and especially not the somewhat sentimental and obvious kind of allegory the public seems to prefer because it flatters them and tells them, in a sweet, sad way, that life is beautiful. "Carnival" is not like that at all. It demands the reader's imaginative attention. We can promise one thing: it will not put you to sleep.<sup>1</sup>

According to John Nerber of the New York Times,

"Carnival" is a disturbing, forceful novel. It is, in effect, the summation of Mr. Fleming's meditation upon the essential meaning of human life. An angry and paradoxically sad tale, it strikes the reader inevitably, like a dream in which the dreamer is conscious he is dreaming and struggles to awake, but cannot.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Fleming handles the time element in his novel particularly well. The carnival sustains its gay pace as gusts of time blow by.<sup>3</sup>

. . . defiant honesty and knowing how to create a new poetic vocabulary for new feelings are qualities of the modern writer. Mr. Fleming has these qualities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Retail Bookseller, LVI (August 1, 1953), 89.

<sup>2</sup>John Nerber, New York Times Book Review, August 16, 1953, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Jane Voiles, San Francisco Chronicle, August 30, 1953, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## SUMMARY

Berry Fleming began writing while an undergraduate at Harvard, selling his first article for about five dollars to the New York Evening Post.<sup>1</sup> Since that early beginning, he has written eleven books, three short stories, two poems, and numerous articles in literary magazines and newspapers.

Mr. Fleming is a moderately prolific writer whose works have a thoroughness indicative of the time and research spent in their preparation. His versatility as a writer makes his books appealing to a varied reading public.

Mr. Fleming is not a writer who speaks to all places at all times but he does speak honestly and with talent.<sup>2</sup>

The allegorical novel Carnival would probably not appeal to the same reader as does the briny, action filled story of Nathan Waine in The Conqueror's Stone.

An attempt has been made in this paper to show that although five of his novels have a Southern flavor, their themes are varied and his literary style fresh and

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Berry Fleming, February 21, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>Harvey Curtis Webster, Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIV (November 10, 1951), 16.

different for each one. There is a universal appeal to his three regional novels set in Frederickville, Georgia.

The unusual perspective and objectivity with which Mr. Fleming presents the problems of the South are due to his broad travels and his New England education.

. . . a writer of Southern inclinations, with a background of years spent in the north, who does not turn blind eyes to what is going on at his doorstep, is very important in evaluating southern temperament and southern morals. . . .<sup>1</sup>

He deals with the problems of the South in such a way that personal prejudice steps back so that a clear view of the past problems and their reaction to present ones can be seen.

Mr. Fleming's books have been widely reviewed with the vast majority of the reviews favorable. The main criticisms have been: his use of abrupt flashbacks that tend to break the thread of the story; and his crowding too much into one book, as in The Fortune Tellers.

Mr. Fleming writes with a superb touch of humor, but the deeper meaning underneath the surface echoes through the corridors of the contemplative mind long after the book is closed.

A novelist whose books are clean and wholesome,

Berry Fleming usually succeeds in telling a good Southern story in a moderate Southern accent without resort to miscegenation, lynching, rape, or general

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<sup>1</sup>Time, LVIII (October 22, 1951), 128.

degeneracy to obtain his effects.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Fleming's main literary contribution has been in giving his readers an unbiased, honest picture of the South today. Whether he continues to do this through the medium of paints or words, he will do it honestly and earnestly and not without a sprinkle of quiet humor.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

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