



—United Press.

Eva Peron in Madrid—"racked by a (quenchless) thirst."

Scorn in the State

THE WOMAN WITH THE WHIP. By Maria Flores. New York: Doubleday & Co. 286 pp. \$3.50.

By DUNCAN AIKMAN

THIS biography of Evita Peron was in its final proof stages when its subject died in Buenos Aires of cancer on July 26. The obituary estimate of the Argentine "first lady's" character and of the moral havoc she has wreaked upon her country's people is thus confined to five pages of an almost breathtakingly incisive epilogue.

Yet the book throughout is written with a refreshing detachment from Argentine partisan politics and an almost timeless perspective on history—as if its author were setting down, with delicious and always quotable but usually documented malice, the sins and psychography of some bygone virago like Catherine de Medici. At the same time it tells us more about modern Argentina and the Peron regime, with its cruel, crooked, and paranoiacally rabble-rousing ways to power, than any book which Peronismo has yet inspired. And it tells us about it with a sustained sense of personal intimacy with the principal characters and the exciting impact of unflagging liveliness. Miss Flores, an Argentine

resident of the United States apparently writing in English, wins, in fact, as a beginning biographer, spurs with golden rowels.

Her basic analysis of Evita's personality is that she lived a delusion of megalomania. "Megalomania carries with it a self-inflicted goad," Miss Flores writes of the "whip-woman's" state when she had married Juan Domingo Peron just before his 1946 election to the Presidency, "and no power achieved can satisfy the victim. Like the sailor adrift who drinks of the sea, Eva is racked by a thirst which can never be quenched, that is fed and not slacked by each new draught of power, that must, if death does not reach her first, drive her insane."

The megalomania, Miss Flores proceeds, was the product of psychic wounds in childhood and early womanhood. Born Maria Eva Duarte, in the dreary hamlet of Los Toldos, on the dusty pampas 200 miles from Buenos Aires, she was the youngest child in the "second family" of a small-time businessman, Juan Duarte, who had a regular establishment elsewhere. She grew up there and in the larger but no less drab country town of Juñin, where her mother, when Evita was still hardly more than an infant, found another "protector" in

an Italian cheap restaurant proprietor. Then at sixteen, being good in school elocution programs and pageant parts, she ran away to Buenos Aires with a professional guitar player. He promptly abandoned her so that for the next five years, 1935-40, Evita starved, relatively speaking, between pittance-pay bit parts on the radio.

She was already, by Miss Flores's account, what the Argentines call "a *resentida*, a resentful one. She had two real causes for resentment against society: that she was born poor in a country of great wealth; and that she was born a woman in a society made for man. The fact that she was a woman made it more difficult for her to escape from poverty; it was almost impossible for her to escape except by the use of men. And those very men who were so ready to seduce an unprotected girl like herself with gifts or money or lies, if they were necessary, were as ready to defend the honor of a daughter or a sister—was it not a valuable family property?—with the sword. It would have been surprising if Eva had not hated the men who regarded her so lightly and the women whose virtue seemed of so much more importance than her own."

Eva, then, although able to simulate passionate affections easily enough, used men, as Miss Flores interprets her, through a kind of cloud of hatred. In the early 1940's, for example, she dexterously cultivated a pair of soap-manufacturers who sponsored radio programs, and her income and program status then immensely improved.

After Argentina's military coup of June 1943, she expeditiously switched to a Colonel Imbert, who as government Director of Posts and Telegraph, controlled all radio stations. Through Imbert early in 1944 she met a rising man in the background of the ruling junta, the Minister of Labor and Public Welfare, Colonel Peron. Within a little more than two years, after an agreeable apprenticeship in an adjoining apartment menage for two, she and Juan were married and Juan was Argentina's President.

Miss Flores is convinced—and convincing—that Evita, with megalomania and her hatred for boosters, has been the stronger character of the two. Evita's immense rabble-rousing energies, she plausibly recounts, raised the Buenos Aires mobs and brought

Duncan Aikman, a Washington newspaperman, has written many books, among them "The Turning Stream" and "America's Chance for World Peace." He has contributed voluminously to many newspapers and magazines in Latin America.

about Peron's release when he was tossed out of the Government and imprisoned for part of a week in October 1945. She stiffened qualities of decision in the bridegroom's slightly cautious ex-subaltern's temperament. She organized the graft departments of the regime, beginning with small-time transactions in import permits, and ending with the huge frauds at the expense of the nation's resources conducted by IAPI, the Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Foreign Exchange, and the monstrous extravagances of her own showy charity organization, the Eva Peron Social Welfare Foundation.

She directed, or at least knew about, the brutal tortures of political prisoners conducted by the Special Section of the Police, with which effective Fascism is being imposed upon Argentina. And to create an emotional climate in which Fascism could flourish, she was the regime's chief rabble-rouser and mob-inciter until her final illness.

In result of these operations, Evita died owning chains of newspapers, motion-picture studios and theatres, radio stations, huge blocks of stock in industries—perhaps the wealthiest woman in Latin American history; certainly, in an evil sense, the most powerful.

Due to the noisy circus ballyhoo with which she personally ran her charities, she died, too, Miss Flores sets forth, with the legend of an ecclesiastically uncanonized Santa Evita trailing after her—a legend which “the unscrupulous . . . may use to manipulate the simple, the foolish, and the fanatical.” Evita, Miss Flores suggests, in the final fantasies of her megalomania came to believe in the legend herself and “began to court death (through overwork and ceaseless tension) to prove that she was a savior and a saint.”

Hence, her “tragedy was . . . in her life, the life of the destroyer who must in the end be self-destroyed.” “For,” Miss Flores goes on, “the Perons have done much to destroy the spirit of their people; they have taught fear to the honest, cupidity to the simple, bitterness to the brave, and they have stamped a country of individualists with the spurious stamp of political uniformity.” All this was done, of course, in the name of a more abundant life for the Argentine masses. But . . . “it was not the poverty and unhappiness around [that Evita] would relieve but the poverty and unhappiness of her youth she would avenge.”

This is grim epitaph-writing—but not unsuitably grim for the wreck of a nation's life which Santa Evita has left behind her.

Notes

PATRIOTIC PAINTER: Charles Willson Peale, aptly called the portraitist of the American Revolution, was a man who knew what he wanted to do, and then went ahead and did it. After an apprenticeship to a saddler he opened his own shop in Annapolis, traveling to Norfolk for supplies. Here, happening by chance to see some landscapes and portraits by a local artist, he forthwith decided that he himself could do better. At that moment an American artist was born.

Peale realized, however, that he needed some instruction in order to master the technique of portraiture. For lessons from one of the few established painters in Maryland, he bartered one of his saddles. Subsequently, the young man was able to obtain instruction from no less a master than Copley in Boston; and a little later, some of his friends furnished funds to send him to London, where he worked under the celebrated Benjamin West.

His own native ability, together with this formal training, made of Peale an artist whose talent was widely recognized when he returned to America. He was besieged with requests for portraits by increasing numbers of leading people. It was in 1772 that he

painted his first portrait of George Washington, one of several so well known to millions of Americans. Shortly he reached his full stature as an artist of skill and distinction.

Berta Briggs tells the story of this great painter and lovable human being through his years of service with the Continental Army to the establishment of his famous museum of natural history and curiosities in “*Charles Willson Peale: Artist and Patriot*” (McGraw-Hill, \$3). Without pretending to be erudite, she presents a lively picture of an artist with an active searching mind, one who not only preserved the likenesses of the great men of his period, but who also projected his originality into other areas of culture in his day. A greater number of illustrations would, indeed, have been welcome, and more extensive critical remarks on the most important portraits would have given deeper insight into the actual work of the artist.

—NATHAN G. GOODMAN.

CONFESSOR TO THE LOVELORN: A Southern matron with a sketchy education and little worldly experience, Mrs. Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer was to become one of the most widely read, lampooned, and imitated columnists of her time. As Dorothy Dix she was a mother confessor to the lovelorn, an

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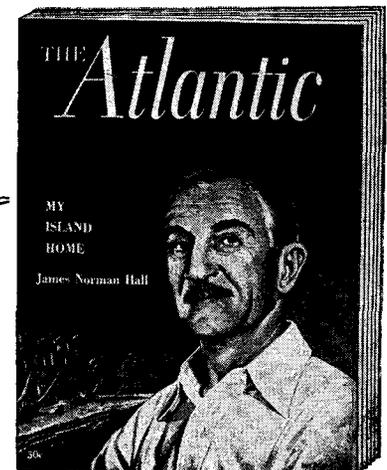
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