

## Books in Brief

### Evidence of Love

by Shirley Ann Grau  
Knopf, 240 pp., \$7.95

THIS latest of Shirley Ann Grau's novels is an elaborated study of a father and a son whom she first introduced in *The Patriarch*, a short story published several years ago. Spare, and dry to the point of aridity, the narrative portraits emerge in three separate sections related, in turn, by Edward Milton Henley, a desiccated millionaire who looks back on a life of virtually uninterrupted self-service; his son Stephen, a graying Unitarian minister steeped in the passions of scholarship; and Stephen's wife, Lucy, a woman with a past, whom life leaves widowed and isolated in a Florida retirement in which her days "spin as smoothly as glass" and where she can "watch dust spin in a fall of sunlight by the hour."

As the contours of these three destinies take shape, one waits, with mounting impatience and finally in vain, for something in the proceedings to catch fire. Though the *idea* of the novel is engaging enough—allowing for immediacy and detail in the self-portraits, variety in the incidents and in the settings their reflections recapture—

the totality is curiously flat and uninspired. To be sure, the book has its moments; sparks fly especially in Lucy's section, perhaps because the author is most in touch with the rhythms of a female sensibility. It is difficult to say exactly what goes wrong in *Evidence of Love*. Peopled with characters resurrected from a previous work, the novel is obviously an investigation of lives the Pulitzer prizewinning author herself has found compelling. Alas, there is very little here to make us agree that she should have found them so.

—JANE LARKIN CRAIN

### The Rio Loja Ringmaster

by Lamar Herrin  
Viking, 305 pp., \$10.00

BASEBALL and women are the preoccupations of this brash first novel. Herrin evidently wants to sweep the Series with his hungry reach, and one rises to one's feet to cheer him on despite his lapses. Trying too hard is one error; he is tempted to put some kind of twist on too many of the sentences he pitches. Remarkably apt, a lot of them, but often they dazzle past, leaving the reader staring at an empty mitt. The hero is Dick Dixon, sometime major-league ballplayer getting over a failed marriage in Mexico. He wants both to throw a ball as hard as he

can and to find a woman who can harmonize his life, and those two wants clash. They certainly clash with Lorraine, his ego-demolishing wife.

Much of the novel takes place in a small Mexican town, where Dixon is putting himself back together and playing some cactus-league *béisbol*. He is drawn in turn to Terry, an artist who takes her art more seriously than she does him; Mercedes, trapped in a loveless marriage; and Consuelo, heart-whole and healing. These relationships will give partisans of women more than a moment's pause. Herrin is a watchable heir to the Hemingway tradition, eager to be with the boys in the cantina, but eager also to be with the busts of authors in the pantheon.

—RALPH TYLER

### Come Back, Lolly Ray

by Beverly Lowry  
Doubleday, 230 pp., \$7.95

LOLLY RAY is the town twirler. Suited up in dime-size solid-gold overlapping sequins and launching her baton into space like a silver star, she is at once a metaphor for lost southern glory and the embodiment of contemporary southern kitsch. Lolly's ability to transcend her background—generations of red-necks and trailer-camp eccentrics, always on the outskirts of social acceptance—is an act of imagination and will, a sign that, like her baton, the South will rise again. Her failure to complete that transcendence is what the town has always known—you can't get over what you are—town drunk, whore, or bootlegger; town Chinaman-artist, Jew-judge, or town trailer tramp.

Carroll Cunningham is, like Lolly, finishing high school (a military boarding school), and, like her, is indifferent to the conventions of the town, even though his family is on the top rung of the social ladder. In a romantic novel, their lives would intertwine. But Beverly Lowry eschews romantic storytelling for trenchant social observation. Boy and girl do not meet. Instead, they form pieces of a mosaic of southern small-town life, which, under a gloss of consumerism, is cemented in the past and only grudgingly is giving up its ghosts.

The traditionally southern twin themes of transcending defeat and resisting the flood tides of change dominate this wry annotation to *Gone With the Wind*. Bronze statues of ancestors gleaming in moonlit



graveyards are rendered tragi-romantic... and ridiculous. Lolly Ray brings her boyfriend, Lieutenant James Blue, to view this memorial to glorious defeat. James trips over a gravestone, loosens his bowels, and loses his erection, but is otherwise unhurt.

Lowry's imagery has the energy and tension of paradox—exquisite lacework crocheted by an obscene old woman; the shimmering, yellow flow of a pageboy hairdo on a drunk. She achieves satire by piling up a purposeful superfluity of details about social artifacts: Buicks, brassieres, Sunday-school medals. She charts the course of silly and bigoted codes of behavior and probes the pain and longing of those who don't fit in. A book of multiple and varied pleasures.

—SUSAN HOROWITZ

**The Selfish Gene**

by Richard Dawkins  
Oxford, 224 pp., \$8.95

RICHARD DAWKINS's book is going to disappoint a lot of readers, and not necessarily because it is a bad one. From the advertising and the blurb, readers may be led to expect a pop-science work full of controversial statements about sex, violence, and other plummy topics. What they will get instead is a finely reasoned, rather involved discussion of one of the fine points of evolutionary biology, a discussion that is longer on mathematics than on controversy.

The book is devoted to the thesis that the basic unit of evolution is neither the species nor the individual but the "selfish gene" of the title. According to this theory, we are all "survival machines," programmed by our genes to promote their best interests. Dawkins makes a persuasive, if not totally convincing, argument for the selfish-gene theory. He writes well and cites a great deal of interesting scientific work, so the book will reward those who really care about the details of evolutionary theory.

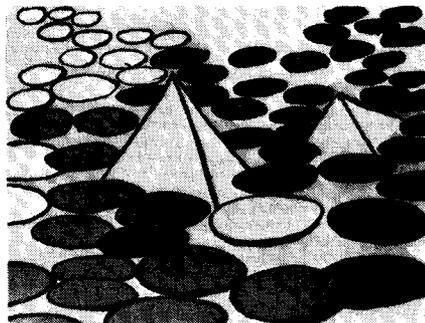
Dawkins, a scientist himself, seems too restrained to go in for the freewheeling theorizing about human sexuality and the roots of mankind's violent behavior that made Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape* and Robert Ardrey's *African Genesis* best sellers. Since people are more interested in sex and violence than in the mathematics of evolution, they're likely to be disappointed by Dawkins's more competent example of science writing.

—EDWARD EDELSON

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