

One Hundred Per Cent

This Americanization movement in literature is gaining an alarming hold. The Great American Novel is no longer simply an average good novel accidentally written and published in America; it must be America herself, packed between covers. There has come to be a standard recipe: take chaos, strife, an emergent people, the urge or vast inchoate forces—put all that into a book, and there you have America.

The Dark Mother, by Waldo Frank, is one of these, a novel from which the reader emerges battered, bruised and blind. But the chaos is of clumsy words and confused idea and extravagantly indiscriminate material—all precipitated about two or three simple and ancient ideas that have been the property of every race since time began. A young man goes to the great city to seek his fortune; he does a little work on the side, falls in and out of love a half dozen times, and the book ends with him on his way to marriage. Why be thick and dark and turbulent about that?

It is not playing with paradox to say that the picture of formlessness and turmoil may be drawn with spare, clean lines. Read *Poor White*, by Sherwood Anderson. Its form as a novel is rather awkwardly haphazard; Mr. Anderson has more power over the sketch-sequence form of his earlier book, "Winesburg, Ohio." But detach the characters and let them stand alone. These are really Americans, sprung straight from their local Middle Western stock and soil, shaped by the occupations and society of a Middle Western small town. And whether it is Hugh McVey, the dumb and obscure dreamer, or Clara, ignorant, restless, shrewdly groping—or anyone else in the book—the curious, interesting fact is that Mr. Anderson has inadvertently followed the 100 per cent recipe more faithfully than Mr. Frank or any of his self-conscious kind—and then produced a book that for human picture and characterization is as simple and lucid and unforced as a child's bedtime story.

The Dark Mother, by Waldo Frank. Boni & Liveright. *Poor White*, by Sherwood Anderson. B. W. Huebsch.