

# James Barr

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him to stay with them whenever he might have the chance to do so. He would always be sure of a warm welcome.

Stephen left the next day. Standing beside his parents' car, he suddenly gripped Carl's hands with his own and pressed them tightly. For once there was no smile on his face as he stood there looking down questioningly into Carl's face. It was a strangely reluctant boy whom Carl had to push with a joke into the car.

Some weeks later Stephen was called up into the American Air Force; his greatest wish had been granted. As Carl read the letter containing the news, he thought: May Fate be kind to him and not let him be sent to the area of combat.

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## James Barr

*Profile of an American Author by R. Young*

On the strength of two published books it may seem an exaggeration to rank an author among the very few able to impart a new complexion to the difficult theme of homosexuality, and by reason of this fact and his excellent literary style to place him in the company of such well-known writers as André Gide and Marcel Proust. But this statement is true in the case of James Barr, the American author, who so far has published one novel «Quatrefoil» and one book of short stories titled «Derricks».

What distinguishes James Barr from other modern writers on the theme of homosexuality — writers whose numbers are steadily increasing both in the US and in England — is the fact that for James Barr homosexuality is only one element, though a decisive one, in the lives of his protagonists, and that he never loses sight of their existence as a whole. Though Barr gives the homosexual problem a prominent part in his writings, he shows his characters at the same time not only as homosexuals but as complex human beings. By this process he successfully avoids the weakness inherent in so many fictional writings on homosexuality — the presentation of this phenomenon as a «special case». Quite rightly the author never questions for a moment the right of his characters to be taken as «normal» individuals, not to be judged exclusively by the fact of their being homosexual but as people of a highly developed and valuable mental make-up. This point of view is probably one of the reasons why one receives such deep satisfaction from the reading of Barr's books. To give one example: his short story «Success-Story». This depicts the slow building-up of a friendship between two business partners over a number of years. No sentimental trash about these two men is to be found in this story, and except for one paragraph there is no so-called «love-incident» in it; but the inner tension of the story and the presentation of the problem of how much patience is required and how many factors are involved in the formation of a lasting

relationship between two men are stated in such a forceful way that even this short story by itself gives sufficient proof both of James Barr's extraordinary power of description and of his great ability to present homosexuals not as «freaks» but as men fit as any others to take their place in human society and fully conscious of their own responsibility toward it — a society which ironically enough rejects them in nearly all cases, simply by reason of their homosexuality.

As to the literary quality of Barr's writing and his masterly command of language, I should like to quote what a friend, engaged in the translation of «Quatrefoil», recently wrote me: «The fact alone that in translating Barr's prose you cannot exchange one descriptive word for another, that one is even unable to change the flow on one single sentence, proves what a conscientious and word-conscious author Barr is». His creative power enables him to build up a first-class plot; he possesses a well-balanced feeling both for moments of action and of reflexion. His prose is tightly woven, there is no slap-dash anywhere, and his ability to present not only the homosexual theme in its entirety but also his men and women as logically developed characters is exceptionally great.

Of James Barr's books, his novel «Quatrefoil» has as its main theme the importance of the influence of an older man in forming the character of a younger one. This process of mental education is closely interwoven with the development of a physical relationship between the two men — a physical relation, the outcome of love, which is given its proper place but never overshadows the more important question of the mental formative elements of such a friendship. Barr's treatment of this theme leads straight back to the Greek concept of homosexual love and its value in moulding men's character.

Within the limited space of this «profile» it is impossible to give readers more than the fact that James Barr's book of short stories «Derricks» covers the immense range of a problem erroneously considered by many to be a very limited one.

Both books have been published by Greenberg Publishers, New York, a French translation of «Quatrefoil» under the title «Les Amours de l'Enseigne Froelich» has just been published by Editions de Paris, an Italian edition is in preparation and a German one is hoped for.

James Barr, still young in years, has brought to his writings on the homosexual theme an exceptionally mature mind — a fact which causes readers to look forward to his next works, another novel being at the moment in production.

