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Review of *Jane Gilmore Rushing: A West Texas Writer and Her Work* By Lou Halsell Rodenberger

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Jane Gilmore Rushing: A West Texas Writer and Her Work. By Lou Halsell Rodenberger. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2006. xii + 175 pp. Photographs, selected bibliography, index. \$29.95.

In her career as critic and scholar, Lou Rodenberger has made a significant contribution to the study of Texas literature. *Texas Women Writers: A Tradition of Their Own* (1997), which she coedited with Sylvia Grider, is in particular a readable and extremely useful literary history. Rodenberger's new book, *Jane Gilmore Rushing*, offers a full-scale biography and critical assessment of one of the most important Texas women writers of the twentieth century.

Rushing's engaging memoir, *Starting from Pyron* (1992), supplies much of what we know about the author's beginnings. Jane Gilmore was born in 1925 and grew up in the community of Pyron in Scurry County northwest of Abilene, in an area known as "the breaks." Her early adulthood was filled with college, graduate work, teaching (she taught for many years at Texas Tech University), marriage, and motherhood. Her focus on writing didn't begin until the late 1950s or early 1960s.

Rushing's body of work is not an extensive one. Before her death in 1997, she published seven novels, two books of nonfiction, and a handful of short stories. She was unashamedly a regionalist. She once said her work "sprouted out of [my] West Texas background like mesquite out of a prairie pasture." Much of her fiction is set in the village of Walnut Grove, modeled no doubt after her home town.

Rushing obviously loved the West Texas land and its people, but she also recognized and wrote about the negative aspects of communal life in West Texas: hypocrisy, religious intolerance, bigotry and prejudice against those who are different (including those of a different race or ethnicity). Typically her plots feature a protagonist, usually a strong-willed and determined woman, who struggles to break free of the bonds of small-town conformity.

The only one of her novels that seems not to fit the mold is *Covenant of Grace* (1982),

a fictionalized version of the story of Anne Hutchinson in seventeenth-century New England. And yet even *Covenant* follows the pattern, with Hutchinson rebelling against an oppressive religious hierarchy. Perhaps New England small towns are not all that different from those in West Texas.

Rushing's best novels are *Walnut Grove* (1964), *Against the Moon* (1968), and *Mary Dove* (1973). She was a competent stylist capable of considerable subtlety and nuance, as Lou Rodenberger points out. *Jane Gilmore Rushing* shines the spotlight on a writer who should be better known than she is. It is a book that will appeal to all who are interested in regional literature, especially Texas literature.

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