

Never Too Late to Mend: Betty Trask's *Cotton Glove Country*

Of all the women writers widely published in the 1920s and 1930s, few are so lost to us now as Betty Trask (1893?-1983). She lived the rest of her life in the shadows, and has stayed on the sidelines ever since. An extraordinary essay by Mario Vargas Llosa in the magazine *Caretas* ("La señorita de Somerset," 1983) boosted her Peruvian profile but hardly propelled her to prominence worldwide. A substantial bequest from Trask continues to fund a yearly prize for first novels, so she is known as a perennial handmaiden to the emergence of fresh literary talent; but it is not generally realised that she herself, as a new author for Hodder and Stoughton, once joined that fray.

Trask's own début novel, *Cotton Glove Country*, would not have won the prize; it appeared in the same year (1928) as *Decline and Fall*. However, it deserved the plaudits bestowed by the *Brisbane Courier* ("unusual," "delicate," "poetic") and it warrants reappraisal now. It is a very unWaughlike story whose affinities are really with *North and South*. Trask's subject, like Gaskell's, is a young woman whisked away to a place of "chapels and factories," where she experiences culture shock but also finds love. Although its title might seem to point to Gaskell's Cottonopolis, the novel is actually set in a town called Mend. There was to be no mending of fences in the Mendip town of Frome, which took great umbrage at its treatment by Trask. All across the town, what the novel had presciently termed "the cotton-gloved hands of provincial disapproval" were thrown up. Instead of celebrating Trask as a notable resident, Frome buried her book beneath a conspiracy of silence. This paper, after ninety years, will bid to begin its disinterment.