

# Be-Bop Minuet

**I, LIBERTINE.** By Frederick R. Ewing.  
151 pp. New York: Ballantine Books.  
Cloth, \$2.75; Paper, 35 cents.

**I**N one of the few completely honest blurbs ever to appear on a book jacket, the publishers describe this novel as "turgid." My copy of Webster's World Dictionary defines the adjective as "swollen; bloated; congested; distended beyond its natural state by some internal agent or expansive force," a pretty fair description of eighteenth-century England and certainly not inappropriate to much of Frederick R. Ewing's style.

Nevertheless, readers who enjoy their genealogy served up with sex, and unraveled at a twentieth-century tempo, will find much to their taste in this be-bop minuet based on the life and times of Elizabeth Chudleigh, Duchess of Kingston, and her unacknowledged heir, Lance Courtenay. Bawd (Lilith Axelrood) meets Libertine (Courtenay), who is on the make—not for a love affair but a title. Bawd loses Libertine when she discovers that they are both offspring of Lady Chudleigh. Libertine loses title when he unwittingly helps Miss Chudleigh void the marriage that made him an Earl.

Throughout, the characters are depicted in a manner that suggests, at times, that they might have descended not from English nobility but contemporary spacemen. Mr. Ewing views his people like a discriminating head hunter. Of Courtenay—



Jean Shepherd.

"His teeth were excellent, especially the upper right incisor." Of Miss Axelrood — "She had unusual ears."

"Mr. Ewing" (the pen name of Theodore Sturgeon) is himself afflicted, to a degree, with tongue-in-cheek. "I, Libertine" has been termed by Publishers' Weekly "The hoax that became a book." Originally, the hoax was launched by Jean Shepherd, an all-night disk jockey who sent his listeners (the Night People) into bookstores in quest of a "classic" that did not exist. Mr. Ewing came to the rescue—i. e., the book was co-authored by the team of Shepherd and Sturgeon. "I, Libertine" is history once over slightly.

DAVID DEMPSEY.

**The New York Times**

Published: September 16, 1956

Copyright © The New York Times