

but more work on distinguishing the specificity of Western and post-colonial feminisms is necessary.

Stratton states that she has tried "to write women's writing back into the African literary tradition, a task that has also been undertaken by a number of the authors, men as well as women, whose works I have examined" (176). Yet she does not portray the African women critics whom she quotes as having produced a tradition of literary criticism to which her work is at least as much indebted as it is to Jameson and Jan-Mohamed (see Adams).

Finally, while obviously Stratton could discuss only a few women writers in detail, I wish Ama Ata Aidoo had been one of them; a Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1992 for her novel *Changes* publicly recognized a writing career dating back to 1965. Indeed, Stratton cites a 1986 study of the canonization of African writers that reports that "ranking fifteenth and eighteenth respectively, Aidoo and Head are the only women who come close to acquiring canonical status" (3). Despite these quibbles, Stratton has consolidated the critical position of African women's writing in a book that will definitively change the shape of African literary studies.

MARGERY FEE

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Andrew Vogel Ettin. *Betrayals of the Body Politic: The Literary Commitments of Nadine Gordimer*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993. pp. 150. \$26.50.

Of the small number of book-length studies of Nadine Gordimer, the pre-eminent reference for critics outside of South Africa must be Stephen Clingman's *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (1986). Clingman offers a rigorous analysis of Gordimer's novels as representations of their historical moment and recuperates Gordimer from charges of a simplistic liberalism. His detailed study of the political, social, and literary particularities of Gordimer's fiction functions as the materialist base that implicitly grounds—and makes possible—Andrew Vogel Ettin's project in *Betrayals of the Body Politic: The Literary Commitments of Nadine Gordimer*. Ettin writes:

This book works in the other direction from Clingman's by showing how Gordimer's perceptions about her own life and about sensual experience, personal interactions, and family relationships (as expressed in her fiction, essays, speeches, and interviews) are reciprocally linked to her political consciousness. (7)

Where Clingman focuses on the "inner history" of South Africa, Ettin writes, his own goal is to show that Gordimer "has explored . . . the inner experience of us all" (139). In citing Clingman, Ettin gestures towards the importance of the social and political contexts of Gordimer's writing, but in practice he brackets the "real," taking it as an always-present given that does not require critical attention. He engages instead in an extended meditation on the morality of the personal in Gordimer's writings and life. Ironically, his approach assimilates her into an American liberalism and depoliticizes her acute analysis of the ways in which apartheid has deformed the personal.

Betrayals of the Body Politic begins with the question of Gordimer's identity and identifications as "a white woman writing in South Africa." Ettin develops an analysis of her literary method and the ways in which she exposes deceptions and connections within personal relationships. Ettin's literary commitments—and those he ascribes to Gordimer—lie in the tradition of liberal humanist criticism. His analysis of Gordimer is charged with an unquestioned belief in realism as transparent representation of authentic experience and with a deep moral investment in its potential to educate readers—through identification and empathy—into a higher self-knowledge and a larger understanding of the human condition, leading, ideally, to the achievement of a moral democracy. In this view, race, class, gender, and sexuality are not significant as critical (or theoretical) categories.

Given both the moral value attached to identification (reader-character-writer, writer-character) and the assumption of a transcendent writerly consciousness, Ettin's interpretation takes on a self-justifying circularity and coherence as he discusses "the one book" (7) Gordimer has been writing throughout her life. For example, assuming the writer and reader/critic as transcendent subjects, Ettin can claim that "one of [Gordimer's] literary roles" has been "to give a voice to those whose voices we usually do not hear because their race or level of education deprives them of attention or of access to the literate community" (133). He also writes that

[e]specially in those works that decentralize the narrative vision and deny single, autocratic "truth," Gordimer's writing teaches us how to recognize and internalize the experiences of others, to hear the voices of those who cannot or will not write their own stories, to see through the eyes of those whose angles of vision have never been central to the culture. (99)

Both of these claims flow from Ettin's perception of the writer's freedom within apartheid—not freedom of expression but "a freedom to perceive, an opportunity to hear, to know, to see, to grasp what the ex-

perience of life seems like to people who know a different range of it than oneself and people of one's own background or milieu" (97). The corresponding moral responsibility that Ettin assumes as critic is based on a desire to connect (the Forsterian motif recurs throughout); entering into dialogue, exercising his capacity "to hear, to know, to see, to grasp . . . the experience of life" revealed in Gordimer's writings, Ettin enacts an ultimate identification with the writer and her vision.

Gordimer's writing has a hypnotic effect which can seduce critics into imitation of her style. Ettin experiments revealingly with such imitation in the second chapter, "Out of Springs," in which he traces Gordimer's early evolution as a writer. He uses three photographs taken from Gordimer's and David Goldblatt's *Lifetimes Under Apartheid* (1986) as structuring devices for his discussion and as the occasion to demonstrate his capacity to perceive and interpret the details of life in South Africa. Unfortunately, he misses the political irony of the way Gordimer and Goldblatt have constructed *Lifetimes Under Apartheid*, a compilation of Goldblatt's photographs and excerpts from Gordimer's fiction. In their preface, Gordimer and Goldblatt write,

[w]e believe that what white South Africans have done to black South Africans seeps like an indelible stain through fiction and photographs. The repression and tragedy of black lives is there; we did not have to look for it, only to let it reveal itself as honestly and deeply as we could. The distortion and coarsening that white people brought upon themselves is there. These cannot be hidden; the image and word give back what is behind the face and place. [iii]

Yet Ettin chooses to read the particular photos he has selected out of context, or out of history, as analogues of Gordimer's literary development (the photos are described, but not reproduced). The chapter begins with an interpretive reading of "Girl in her new tutu on the stoep of her parents' house, Boksburg, 1980," who "moves in the dynamic energy of what she takes to be her own freedom" and, of course, stands for Gordimer as a girl (36). The second photo, "Farmer's son with his nursemaid, Marico Bushveld, 1964," shifts the discussion into the ways in which Gordimer's descriptions evoke the familiarity and intimacy of the physical and emotional proximity of white and black South Africans. What Ettin sees in the photo is disturbing: the black nursemaid, in her teens, is eroticized under the male gaze, as is the intimacy he reads into the relationship between the nursemaid and the young white boy, posed already in an assumption of power—"such exquisite, tender intimacy that one's breath catches" (43). The interpretation of the third photo, "Farmer, Johannes van der Linde, with his head labourer, Ou Sam, near Bloemfontein, 1965," is intended to demonstrate "Gordimer's balance of philosophy and history, of conceptual grasp and specificity of incident" (49), but its focus on the formal aesthetics of relationship mutes the historical context. In *Lifetimes Under*

Apartheid, in contrast, the photo on the opposite page—"Tsotsis with Okapi knife, Soweto, 1972" (95)—insists on a more active, more politicized reading of the "double portrait" of the farmer and his head labourer.

In Gordimer's view, apartheid has marked all levels of personal relationship with deformity, and her fiction explores these deformities with an unrelenting rigour. The categories of the personal—family, sexuality, intimacy, etc.—are deeply problematic (even when Gordimer yields to sexual romanticism as, for instance, in *A Sport of Nature*). For Ettin, in contrast, these categories promise a utopian transcendence of political struggle, particularly sexuality. Here, for example, is his interpretation of the sexual relationship between a white activist in hiding and the white woman he meets by chance in the short story "Safe Houses" (in *Jump and Other Stories*):

These two people have met casually in the *democracy* of a Johannesburg municipal bus (her car would not start); they have formed their erotic alliance first through the primal *equalizing* medium of water, in her swimming pool where, wearing bathing suits, they are *virtually stripped of clothing's social markers*; and they have completed it by allowing themselves to experience together the passions of sexual gratification *that all of us might share equally and that depend on no categories of race, gender, or class.* (126; emphasis added)

To a certain extent, Ettin derives the legitimacy of this reading of sexuality from Gordimer herself, drawing on her more personal observations, her statements about the writer's responsibility, and the evidence of her novels and short stories. However, Ettin tends to identify the nexus of heterosexuality/femininity/"sensuous experience" as the privileged site of resistance to apartheid. Here again, the male gaze predominates, in celebration of "libidinal liberation" (76) and Gordimer's Romantic sensuousness. For example, taking on American feminist critics of *A Sport of Nature*, Ettin notes approvingly that Hillela's body is the "liberated territory" of the novel (69). Further, Hillela becomes the epitome of self-knowledge:

She acts so much by instinct that she is able to come to grips with herself by having no privileged secrets or hidden agendas; there is no avoidance of self-examination, because no other self lies buried beneath the one that is always open and accessible. She seems suffused with self-knowledge; for Gordimer, self-knowledge carries self-empowerment with it. (101)

Because Ettin has not engaged with any of the theoretical or political debates about gender, race, and sexuality, he is occasionally forced into odd critical manoeuvres (such as the characterization above of Hillela) in his attempt to deal with contentious issues in Gordimer's writing. Interestingly, these issues tend to arise primarily, though not exclusively, in relation to women and feminism. As another example, Ettin appears defensive about Gordimer's representation of black women. In a problematic discussion of her portrait of a woman in Botswana in the travel essay "Pula!," he confuses literary representa-

tion and "life." Obviously aware of a problem in the description, he offers a reading of this "woman" as "an image of remote ethnic exotica from an old travelogue or a *National Geographic*," but immediately recuperates Gordimer's political and literary method of description by reading into the image "a unique, powerful, richly complex, and sophisticated individual who is female, African, black" (62). One of the reasons for such a revisionist reading is that Ettin refuses to situate Gordimer's literary technique and strategies within their contexts; they are ahistorical. Committed to what he perceives as her moral vision—consistent and stable over time—he is unable to perceive limitations and must read her literary strategies as analogues of, or methods leading to, the moral good.

In the context of contemporary critical discourse, it is somewhat disconcerting to read *Betrayals of the Body Politic*, but perhaps it is an unsurprising sign of Western times. Perhaps the conjunction of the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Gordimer—a writer who has long assumed the role of interpreter of South Africa to the liberal West—and the electoral triumph of the struggle against apartheid can be read as sanctioning the desire to leave political and theoretical struggles out of literary criticism and to reach towards the universal brotherhood of man; if only we could connect.

DAHPNE READ

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Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. *The Social Dimensions of Fiction: On the Rhetoric and Function of Prefacing Novels in the Nineteenth-Century Canadas*. Ed. Achim Barsch. Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1993. pp. xi, 188.

The literary preface, an often-overlooked and certainly underrated text, can provide much valuable information about an author's relation to his or her reading public, about the author's poetics, and about the expectations and conventions of contemporary readers and publishers. However, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's study does not use the preface as a source for this kind of information. Tötösy's enterprise is described succinctly by Clément Moisan of the Centre de recherche en littérature québécoise (CRELIQ) at the Université Laval, who notes in his introduction to *The Social Dimensions of Fiction: On the Rhetoric and Function of Prefacing Novels in the Nineteenth-Century Canadas* that Tötösy has "with great care not only gathered and inventoried all the prefaces in English and in French in Canada during the nineteenth century, but has also categorized and made them accessible to systemic and systematic analysis" (ix). Tötösy categorizes the prefaces according to