

Book Reviews

Earle Birney, *Spreading Time: Remarks on Canadian Writing and Writers, Book I: 1904-1949*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1980. pp. xii, 163. \$5.95.

For forty years now, Earle Birney has been one of Canada's leading poets. He has also been a novelist, a scholar and critic, an essayist, a pioneer teacher of creative writing, an editor, a broadcaster, a soldier, a revolutionary, and a world traveller. Birney carries lightly his breadth of learning, experience and achievement: *Spreading Time* is casually written, often anecdotal, and simply organized by its author's personal chronology. But this personal informality is here, as it is in Birney's poetry, the ironic masking of a careful structure and a serious substance. To an astonishing degree, the chronicle of Birney's literary life in the first half of the twentieth century is the story of Canadian literary life in the same period, so that *Spreading Time* may be regarded as a sort of personal literary history, in which Birney's causes, struggles and successes are representative and thus significant.

Birney begins with a long section covering the period from his childhood in Alberta to the completion of his undergraduate years at the University of British Columbia in 1926. Here, and throughout the book, he offers a bare outline of autobiography and focuses instead on matters literary. The story of Birney's early pursuit of a "permanent love affair with Words and their infinite shapes and sounds and meanings" gains its particular interest from its setting. Birney grew up on ranches and in small towns of the pioneer west, reading voraciously but perforce eclectically. By the age of seven, he was, culturally, "an Anglo-American stew, a small pot of gobbets from what had survived of my father's reading fare, casually collected in wandering bachelor years through book-scarce regions of the nineteenth century Canadian West. In all of it there was only one scrap that I now know to be CanLit: a slim clean book called *Among the Millet*, dated 1888, by somebody named Archibald Lampman." And here is Birney's theme. Even in childhood, he

sought out and responded to the books in which he found his own country reflected. But these were never plentiful and, as he discovered when his standards began to be formed by Garnett Sedgewick's English Department at U.B.C. — where no Canadian and almost no post-Victorian literature was countenanced — Canada's "Maple Leaf School" of nature poetry, to which Lampman belonged, was disappointingly bad. Thus, isolated on Canada's west coast, and all unaware of a similar struggle three thousand miles to the east in Montreal, Birney's quest began, however haltingly, for writing which should be Canadian without being parochial, which should be fertilized but not choked off by an awareness of the best in modern world literature.

But if Birney is representative of his generation's revolt against its nineteenth-century predecessors, *Spreading Time* demonstrates also an awareness of, and respect for, his native tradition. Among Birney's earliest recollections is hearing his father read to him from that volume of Lampman, and he mentions more than once in the first section of *Spreading Time* his admiration for the poems of D. C. Scott and Isabella Valancy Crawford:

I was now nineteen and believed I would never grow different, would always be, like my father, an "outdoors man". I turned back to Campbell's book [the *Oxford Canadian Verse*] simply because I could find in it satisfying descriptions of wilderness things approximating what I knew, not "western" of course, but North American at least. I hunted for "good lines" in Carman, Roberts, Pickthall, but found richer rewards in Crawford again, and now also in Duncan Campbell Scott. I was settling down cosily with the Maple Leaf School out of ignorance of the best poetry of my own century.

Finally, then, Birney is most representative (and this is true of his poetry too) in his attempt at synthesis: of the past with the present, of the national and the international, and of the natural and the sophisticated.

These antitheses permeate *Spreading Time*, both its passages of memoir, and the contemporary essays, reviews, broadcasts and letters (many previously unpublished) which it includes. With memoir and memorabilia, we follow Birney through his academic studies and teachings at various Canadian, British and American universities; through his involvement with Trotskyism during the depression, and his abandonment of Marxist faith under the looming spectre of World War; through his term as literary editor of Canada's leading intellectual journal, the *Canadian Forum*; and through his successful efforts to establish a creative writing curriculum at U.B.C. These activities, and others, brought Birney into contact with virtually everyone vitally involved with literature in Canada: there are over 230 names in the index to *Spreading Time* (a figure excluding the

publications and organizations also listed). And Birney's acquaintance was wide not only in space but in time. He knew the elderly Charles G. D. Roberts (whose first poems in 1880 had sparked the beginning of Canada's mature literature); he knew, and published, almost all of his own generation; and his creative writing classes in the late forties encouraged a new generation of Canadian writers.

The incident which Birney chooses to symbolize his struggle to advance modern Canadian writing could hardly be more representative of that struggle in the country as a whole. The Canadian Authors' Association was a product of the same 1920's nationalism which motivated Birney and his young contemporaries. But the CAA was backward rather than forward looking, enshrining the poetry and poets of the eighties and nineties while its members sought commercial not artistic success. It became the chief target of the modernists in Canada, and Birney was among the most accurate of the marksmen, as several of the satires included in *Spreading Time* show. But he remained a lone sniper, never joining the modernist battalion, with its poetic cliques, whose infighting and elitism he condemned. And it is quite in keeping with his search for synthesis that in 1946 Birney accepted an invitation (indeed, a summons) to edit the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*. Although Birney's serio-comic account of his two years as "CPM's improbable editor" goes on a bit too long, it deserves its prominence in *Spreading Time*.

CPM was owned and run by that "body of aging hacks and reactionaries," the CAA. The description is Birney's: he knew that his chances of a peaceful editorship were slim. But he knew also that a national magazine seeking out the best Canadian poetry was badly needed. His transformation of *CPM* from a house organ for the genteel rhymings of CAA duespayers into a magazine of genuine excellence was all too successful. It amounted to a coup, and elicited counter-subversion and finally a counter-coup from the old guard. But if Birney lost his iconoclastic battle, the young turks whose army he had led without joining were winning the war. As the first volume of Birney's literary memoirs closes, it is 1949, the year the Massey Commission began the hearings which led to the creation of the Canada Council and a new era of recognition and support for serious writing in Canada. In this era, too, Birney has been prominent and representative. But that story must await Book II.

LES MCLEOD

Michael Jackson, *Wall*. Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1981. Unpriced.

In Michael Jackson's poetry rootlessness and anxiety, the recurring concerns of western poetry, have an unusual depth and clarity that owes much to the difficulties of the cultural matrix in which New Zealand poetry has to be born. Although he is not a prolific poet, Jackson's two published collections of verse are of outstanding quality and require something more than the cursory reviews which his work has so far seen. *Latitudes of Exile* (1976) was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and now *Wall* has been awarded the New Zealand Book Award for Poetry in 1981.¹ It is worth considering what it is that Jackson has to say that has sounded so responsive a chord in New Zealand's literary establishment.

First there is considerable technical ability in both collections, an aspect that has been especially refined and extended in the latter work. Generally, the poems in *Wall* are far more tightly wrought than in *Latitudes of Exile*. Yet even in the early collection the degree of linguistic and emotional control is impressive. For example "Baby" begins with closed single lines — such austerity commanding an appropriate solemnity.

We have never known his name.
He died when he was four.

(*Latitudes of Exile*, p. 28)

However in *Wall* Jackson avoids that method of control and is more adventurous in his experiments with the interplay of words. To use the subject of drowning again, the change can be indicated in the poem "River Man."

Should have a name
months drowned
should be known by now
this pilfered remnant of a man
they pulled from the river.

(*Wall*, p. 17)

Beyond such obvious tactics and development *Wall* shows Jackson's developing skills in word play and image making. He exploits the particular phenomena to suggest the inner nature of individual human experience. What he portrays is the type of lacerated truth with which poetry is uniquely concerned and equipped to comprehend. Two poems, one from each collection, which illustrate his ability in this type of poetry can be compared and the advances noted.

For the wrecked man
there always is

a day not far from autumn
 when the chestnuts and sycamores
 were dappled by sunlight falling through
 and the girls of the family
 brought tea and scones
 to a gingham tablecloth
 on the front lawn . . .

("Jack Flanagan," *Latitudes of Exile*, p. 30)

And standing there, the sound of rock
 still drifting from the village,
 recalled the girl with open blouse
 whose arms would hold her boy
 before that summer ended;
 and walked on south along the bank
 towards the iron bridge, amid
 the bubbling ruminations of frogs.

("After Virginia Woolf," *Wall*, p. 25)

In each case there is beautiful and evocative use of language which creates an imaginary memory outside of time which then becomes an image for the laceration wrought by change. The advance in *Wall* includes the play with tone, seen for example in the easy reference to frogs. Quite apposite — he makes it even more concrete — while in *Latitudes of Exile* the bathos of stale melodrama and strained emotion ends the poem: "an empty bottle of gin" is pegged to rhyme uneasily with the closing word.

Each of these collections has emotional and intellectual coherence. No poem obtrudes, each adds to the vision of the whole which reveals the unity of thought. In *Latitudes of Exile* there is an implicit structural development. The first bracket of poems seems to be those set in different non-New Zealand settings and from these there is then a sequence of New Zealand memories followed by a series of poems that measure some of the parameters of experience, the limitations of the heart, mind, and will. The penultimate sequence then explores the casualties of life (for example "Baby," "Annabelle Kemp" and "Jack Flanagan") while the last (and largest) section deals with the latitudes of exile which, as the last poem, also functions as a *summa* of the collection. All of these poems are explorations into the qualifications of experience, the negations, ambivalences and hesitations. The world here is one in which man is not at home and never will be. Here the sense of pointless geographic voyaging touched on in the opening sequence (e.g., "The Red Road") reaches its full circle in the thwarted energies of "Alternatives."

This poem has been written before
 it has been written by men and women

who never read a line of poetry all their lives
 it has been said and imagined countless times
 it is the poem of the Labyrinth
 of the other way, of forgotten roads
 and of the wheel of chance

(*Latitudes of Exile*, p. 35)

In *Wall* a similar architectural impulse can be perceived since the organization of the poetry discloses an even more taut unity of thought. The cover photo of a crofter's stone wall acts as an icon for the opening title poem which continues to reverberate throughout the collection. As the poems are cumulatively read the simple human activity of building a wall from the most enduring materials of the earth acquires sufficient emotional significance to shape the work. Here the wall images man as *Homo fabricator*: a wall-builder as part of his strategy for survival — whether physical or psychic.

Both collections — particularly *Wall* — demonstrate Jackson's talent of objectifying New Zealand experience. In each collection there can be noted a preoccupation both with images that adhere to what Australian literature has accepted as the "voyager tradition" and with the more common images of cultural and psychic alienation that form a familiar strand of the perturbation that runs through New Zealand literature. A number of tactical stances seem to characterize Jackson's contribution in this area. First, his use of settings in three continents. On the most basic level this liberates his poetry from the narcissistic preoccupation with the New Zealand locale that can still be detected in some New Zealand writing. Instead the poet's self locates the New Zealander's sense of isolation by articulating a sense of estrangement through other cultures. Jackson knows the fell of a cultural "outsider" — as in "Alternatives" (*Latitudes of Exile*, p. 35) — he writes as "from a man against a world." In *Wall* he extends this tactic and blends the alienation of a wider world with that human loneliness that cannot be avoided in New Zealand writing. For example, from "Mistral"

how can I say anything
 without comparison, without
 remarking the sky is African,
 the light the same as in
 the Wairarapa dusk. I felt
 I was a stone, . . .

(*Wall*, p. 47)

Through such tactics the value of Jackson's contribution to New Zealand poetry can be gauged. As he objectifies New Zealand experience by diversity of settings, so he also universalizes the concerns

of his poetry and connects the essential structures of New Zealand experience with the wider themes of alienation that characterize modern experience. The problem has been confronted by other New Zealand poets. For example, James K. Baxter used the structures provided by myth to put New Zealand experience into the wider context of the human quest. Jackson tends to rely upon the implicit theme of the journeying self which underpins his verse.

As a consequence the rather well-worn themes of Commonwealth literature are presented more substantially and with a greater objectivity. Jackson "names" the demons of exile, the aspects of a transposed and modified provincial European culture in an alien setting. "The Old Gods" is one poem in *Wall* which is an obvious example.

We will go on
surprised by our casual tenancy
at river bends and pools
forgetting the wilderness
as we have always done
and hear
between the bodies of earth and sky
brusque arms over a red plateau
raking the terraces
making over the land
to the old gods again.

(*Wall*, pp. 21-22)

Yet it is the poem "Mistral" which takes the sense of alienation and the leitmotif of the journey a stage further. Subtly, but elusively, the sense of dessicated leaves in the wind, he images the quiet despair of a society and its culture. The scene may be Wellington — or anywhere — but the tone and sentiments are those of the academic and the poet who knows and questions the depths of displacement that characterize contemporary experience.

We argue about time
memory and comparison.
Gerard remembered Wellington
a street above Evans Bay
where dry leaves skidded and spun
in the wind on a similar day.
But I am nowhere else.
The mistral fills me only
with the noise of myself.

("Mistral," *Wall*, p. 44)

Wilson, Harris. *Explorations*. Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1981. pp. iv, 145. Unpriced.

At the core of Wilson Harris's life is a process, and the attempt to understand, record, and expand that process is the constant focus of his writing. His novels are the lab reports, the recorded experiments of that process in action. His criticism on the other hand talks about that process in himself, in other writers, and in art. The end result of all his writing is to activate vision, to activate an awareness of what one might call a latent or unrealized power in anyone interested in the humanities and in society. Harris describes that power in one of his recent explorations:

It is a vision of mysterious regeneration that apprises us of our limits and in so doing awakens a capacity to dream beyond those limits, a capacity for infinite conception of life and of humility, a capacity for complex risk, creativity and dialogue with others through and beyond institutions inhibited by, or based on, the brute conquest of nature from which creation has recoiled again and again over long ages to leave us and our antecedents bereft and yet intensely aware of the priceless gift of being that begins all over again in the depths of animated perception. (p. 136)

For readers interested in new possibilities, new approaches to literature, *Explorations* is a very thought-provoking collection. But it is not for the casual reader.

Over the last decade, writing about the process of thinking has been very much in vogue. Harris goes further. After distinguishing between different modes of thinking and the results they have produced in social history, he opts to explore a thinking process guided by different aspects of the imagination as it is revealed in works of literature, the plastic arts, and literary criticism.

Reason, "however marvellous," is a necessary but secondary activity that verbalizes the vision of the imagination. However, it must be monitored closely because it is susceptible to conscripting opposition through the social biases that circumscribe the imaginative process. Harris describes the common characteristics of the reasoning process in this way: "To idolize logical continuity or anti-structure and commit ourselves to a revolutionary bias, or to idolize logical continuity or structure and commit ourselves to a conservative bias" (p. 53). He presents a more acceptable function of reason, however, because "a capacity to digest as well as liberate contrasting figures is essential to the paradox of community and to the life of the imagination" (p. 53).

Throughout the essays, Harris invites, indeed prods, his readers to contemplate the creative processes that have shaped cultures. The starting point for his poetic meditations is usually a piece of literature, a painting, or sculpture. The constant invitation of the meditations is to contemplate each object in a new way, setting aside the

normal habits of thought or prevailing social attitudes, and to be directed by the force of the imagination responding to the object.

Nowhere, to my knowledge, does Harris organize an explanation of his vision, nor need he, although it might be helpful. Nevertheless, one senses a precision of language throughout the explorations that is always present. The activities designated by a word like imagination are carefully distinguished. Imagination can function critically, subjectively, instinctively; it can reflect, expand, participate, dialogue, and above all create. And for Harris it seeks one all-important goal: to visualize contrasting motifs of intensity within the thinking process as an antidote for any personal or cultural fixations that can oppress or destroy a human community. The process is always totally engaging and highly visual because it "involves a dialogue with values *through* appearances" (p. 65). It is: "... a pressure accumulated as it were, from nowhere and everywhere, upon the imagination to obey a conscience-in-depth that breaches fashionable optimisms, fashionable pessimisms, or dictates of commerce, class, race" (p. 99).

When the imagination contemplates an object to the extent that it becomes that object, it is reflecting. At the point when it expands to include the emotional forces which created it, the voids that it helped fill, the positive statements that it made, even when the unconscious forces that it contains are also experiences, the imagination is participating. To progress a step further, when the imagination is proficient enough that it can repeat the same process to the same degree with two objects, that is, that it can participate in two objects, then it can attempt a dialogue between the two objects about the present and the future. Such a process is creative thinking of a very high order and not for everyone. But Harris has the ability to do just this.

Over the years he has immersed himself in the study of history and culture as well as art, not only or even primarily to understand, but also to reflect, participate and dialogue. *Explorations* is a record spanning the last fifteen years of his efforts to articulate that creative participation. The objects of those explorations are primarily drawn from the pre-Columbian Americas and from modern artistic movements. The dialogue is always about the nature of the human community.

As might be expected, Harris approaches his work with rigorous discipline:

I believe it is necessary to study the text and texture of novels closely. It is easy to make propaganda of ideas, to overlook actual texts, to lose both the pleasure and profit involved in sensing the authenticity of narrative as the active medium of ideas." (p. 63)

He is also conscious that some works simply derive from the past

while others dialogue with it. Nor is this simply a rhetorical ploy.

In a discussion of Achebe and Conrad, Harris reveals an almost mystical attitude toward the power of language and grammar. Distinguishing between nouns and adjectives he writes:

They [adjectives] are qualitative and infinite variations of substance clothed in nouns. Nouns may reveal paradoxically when qualified that their emphasis on reality and their inner meaning can change as they are inhabited by variable psychic projections born of the mystery of creation. (p. 139)

His footnote to "asymmetric context" is a challenging explanation of metaphor that should provide students of literature a rich starting point for exercising their own creative process (p. 140, n. 3).

In the context of Harris' thought the function of the work of art is not only to be created, but also to create again and again. For this to happen, a reader must expand his response and

come into some alignment with its subjective ground since, in this way, one begins to unravel the significance this has beyond itself, in world communities at large gripped by an abyss between economic institutions of performance and enigma of sacred/eroded values. (p. 110)

For quotation seekers, in the course of the explorations, fresh and thought provoking statements are made about contemporary writers, art forms, and language. Recent movements in literature, criticism and culture also receive attention in varying degree. Ultimately a reader of *Explorations* realizes that the book is a series of essays on the creative process and that the continuing process of art is important and ever challenging. It "teaches us that sovereign gods and sovereign institutions are partial, . . . but when we begin to penetrate their biases, they also begin to transform their fear of the other, of others, of other parts, in a larger complex of wholeness. In this medium of transformation, the unconscious psyche is in dialogue . . . with the unconscious mind. And out of this dialogue arises the living on going momentum of the imaginative arts" (p. 125).

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Michael Millgate. *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*. New York: Random House; London: Oxford University Press, 1982. pp. xvi, 637. \$25.00.

For the critic the chief interest in any account of Hardy's often lonely and withdrawn life, external to his writing, lies in proposals of experiences, preferably well-founded, which could have shaped his generally sceptical and glum view of marriage in his novels, short stories and poems, and his apparent antipathy, complicated at

times by admiration, desire and frustration, towards his fictional women. Or rather, it many times appears that such are his view and feeling, although Hardy, always over-sensitive to criticism, especially to charges of "pessimism," protests that in his best work the characters themselves assume their own independent lives and that he himself presents simply a series of "seemings" where he elaborates neither doctrine nor philosophy. Given the extent of obvious authorial intervention and interpretation, we cannot readily accept such professed neutrality.

If, in this context, we put on one side without necessarily discarding it, the "intralinguistic" critical opinion that any biographical inference or association with contemporary event or feeling is illicit in the act of "pure" criticism, we observe that since Hardy's own version of his life, published in two volumes under the name of his second wife, Florence, as *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* in 1928 and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* in 1930, biographers of varying intelligence and competence have been scrabbling around in endeavours to unearth, in Hardy's life, secret sexual relationships, jiltings, furtive paternities, which could in any degree contribute to the bitterness in his fiction. In his own account of his life Hardy only allowed to be known what was advantageous and proper. It seems, as described by the Max Gate gardener, Bertie Stephens, in James Stevens Cox's series, *Monographs on the Life Times and Works of Thomas Hardy*, a collection of booklets often overlooked, that Hardy systematically destroyed many of his papers and letters and that after his death he left instructions for Florence to destroy many more. Consequently recent biographers have had to be content with meagre pickings from some of which absurdities and fantasies have been conjured.

Probably one of the most remarkable conclusions to be derived from a reading of Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy: A Biography*, an eminently sound and scholarly account, is that there was nothing very pertinently concealed in the way of sexual adventure despite the fact that early and late Hardy was searching for it. His encounters, nevertheless, make fascinating reading perhaps because they are so ordinary as in a certain sense the people and the settings in his fiction are ordinary and it appears that the fierce illumination of sexual poignancy and desolation and the rest belong less to outer personal experience than we may have suspected. Whatever the case Millgate reinforces his story with all available evidence, meticulously and honestly assembled, makes do where unavoidable with intelligent and plausible surmise, and with confidence and authority conducts the reader through those areas of Hardy's emotional life which may have had some seminal or moulding influence on his

writing. His precocious admiration for Julia Augusta Martin, "The Lady of the Manor," his mild, indulgent flirtation, before he left for his five years of architecture in London, with his young cousin Tryphena Sparks, the episode of his possible intercourse with Emma on a hot summer's day in Cornwall, the possibility that in his later marriage to her he proved impotent, and his vain pursuit of a number of fashionable beauties of the day, such as Agnes Grove and Florence Henniker, are all entertainingly and discriminately told. The most poignant perhaps of them all from the girl's point of view rather than Hardy's, a drab and somewhat disreputable story, is the account of his association during the London office years with Eliza Nicholls, a servant, to whom he seems "to have been more or less formally engaged" (p. 84). His last meeting with her at Findon in Sussex may well have prompted "Neutral Tones," an early poem devastatingly caustic in its total evacuation of feeling and sense. Yet this was no affair of deep passion and Eliza it was who was hurt as Hardy, like Angel Clare, switched his attentions to her younger sister.

Unlike other recent biographers, Millgate is a reputable and informed Hardyan critic and scholar who has written deservedly acclaimed books on his subject. It is hardly surprising therefore that a pleasing and essential feature of this work lies in his amalgamation of critical expertise with the biographical story. If at times there appears to be too much certainty of transference, from this model to that fictional character, which cannot always be condoned by implicit acceptance of the transforming process of artistic creation, these occasions are indeed few. As is the case generally, however, the plausibility of Emma's pregnancy, simulated or not, is unexceptionally dealt with in Millgate's account of Hardy's courtship of her at St. Juliot:

The exceptional dryness of the summer of 1870 provides a basis for associating with it the poem entitled 'The Place on the Map': 'Weeks and weeks we had loved beneath that blazing blue, / Which had lost the art of raining, as her eyes to-day had too.' The place itself — 'a jutting height' with 'a margin of blue sea' — is immediately suggestive of Beeny, but because the subject of the poem appears to be the harsh interruption of an idyllic love relationship by the woman's discovery of her pregnancy, it has not generally been associated with the childless Hardy and Emma. But it is not impossible that Emma, desperate at twenty-nine to catch and hold the man who has so fortuitously intruded upon the isolation of St. Juliot, had permitted sexual intimacy, and then announced a real, imagined, or pretended pregnancy — 'the thing we found we had to face before the next year's prime' — only to confess, once Hardy had publicly committed himself to marriage, that, like Arabella in *Jude the Obscure*, she had been mistaken. Such a reading is at least consistent with the

sexual and somewhat childish, provocativeness of Emma's appearance and behaviour as they emerge both from these poems and from *Early Life*.
(pp. 129-30)

In a later chapter on *Jude*, in which he is speculating on Arabella Donn's and Sue Bridehead's "origins," Millgate returns to this supposition:

To these speculations may be added another . . . the possibility that Emma — with a sense of the deepest betrayal — may have recognized aspects of herself in the presentation both of Arabella and of Sue. If 'The Place on the Map' is indeed to be associated with Hardy and Emma, then the episode is in some degree echoed in Arabella's trick of false pregnancy. If Emma, as Hardy once declared, was indeed free-thinking at the time he first met her, then Sue's decline from brilliant independence to bleak religiosity in some measure reflects Hardy's sense of such a progression in his own wife. (p. 354)

These are but two of numerous instances of a skilful bonding of biographical narrative and critical acumen. "It is tempting to assume," Millgate suggests, that the bastard child of Jane Phillips, at one period a servant of the Hardy's, which was privately baptized before its death, may have prompted "the brief life and pathetic death of Tess's child, Sorrow" (p. 191). Hardy's sister Mary, of whom he was very fond, Horace Moule, whose personality was split into an Alec and an Angel, Aunt Martha, who had some of the characteristics of Bathsheba, and her husband, John Sharpe, who had some of the dash of Sergeant Troy, are among many others, especially Hardy's relatives and intimate friends, who are presented both as themselves as they touched Hardy's life and also as they may have partly informed his writing.

This, so far as it can be, however, is a whole biography and not solely concerned with Hardy's often unsuccessful sexual forays, his often sad emotional encounters and their relevance to those awesomely charged moments in his writing. His life is reconstructed in patient and convincing detail which is enhanced by a stirring and urbane readability. The work is delightfully illustrated with over fifty black and white photographs, and family trees and maps. The organization of the book is formidably thorough and solid. With it Millgate has filled a biographical gap in the field of Victorian letters and what Edgar Johnson did for Dickens and Gordon Haight for George Eliot, Millgate has done for Hardy, has, in effect, written the definitive life for many years to come.

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Books Received

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- BLOOM, HAROLD, *The Breaking of the Vessels*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. pp. xiii, 107. \$10.00.
- ELLIOTT, ROBERT C., *The Literary Persona*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982. pp. xiv, 174. \$17.00.
- FIEDLER, LESLIE A. and HOUSTON A. BAKER JR., eds., *Opening Up the Canon: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. pp. xiii, 161. \$8.50.
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