

Book Reviews

Judith Sloman, *Dryden: The Poetics of Translation*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985. pp. xii, 263. \$30.00.

Specialists in the literature of the Restoration owe a great debt of gratitude to Anne McWhir for making possible the posthumous publication of Judith Sloman's stimulating book. Wrestling with an essentially complete but still roughcast manuscript, McWhir has produced a text and notes which are remarkably clean, readable, and accurate. The book represents Sloman's life work, with its roots in her Ph.D. thesis written in 1968 on Dryden's *Fables*. But this is not a refurbished dissertation or a thesis-ridden argument. It is the fruit of long thought and wise reflection on the work — all the work — of John Dryden.

The research for the book was completed by the end of the 1970's, so clearly there are no references to the most recent work on translation by such scholars as Charles Tomlinson and L. G. Kelly, nor to William Frost's newest contributions to the field. But Sloman's book is not out of date, partly because the "poetics of translation" is always a current topic and partly because it is only one of her topics, and not, despite the title, the main one. Her primary concern was to demonstrate "the integrated nature" of Dryden's "collective" poems, those bodies of work that group together translations of works by various authors under single titles: *Sylvae*, *Examen Poeticum*, and the *Fables*. The *Fables* are the heart of Sloman's book, and here her approach is particularly valuable. Much work has been done on the *Fables* in recent years but only on individual poems within the group; Sloman's argument for the unity of the group, though not entirely original, is as fresh as if it had been written yesterday, and rescues that poem from the fragmentation it still undergoes at the hands of other critics.

Besides these "collective" poems, Dryden's *Aeneis* also figures in Sloman's book, as one could expect from the announced topic. And there is more that one would not expect, including substantial ref-

erences to early and late plays, and to major and minor original poems as well as to the translations. Sloman ranges easily throughout all of Dryden's work and through the classical and medieval works that were his sources. She is thoroughly at home with her material and hence unusually well qualified to see the connections among the the works that she is analyzing. She assumes that the reader of her book is equally at home, so this is not a book for beginners. Perhaps some of its difficulties would have been eliminated by revision that she did not live to complete — shortcomings in organization, in transitional and summary statement, and in definition of terms — difficulties that no one could overcome for her. But these difficulties are minimal compared to the rewards the book has to offer. Reading carefully, and guided by Patricia Brückmann's Preface, one can always follow the argument. Even reading less than carefully, one can pick up insightful and provocative ideas from every page.

Sloman's political awareness and feminist sensibilities are usefully evident throughout. Without exaggerating their importance, she identifies and explains political overtones and undertones in some of the late plays as well as in the translations. She mentions Anne Killigrew as a poet and a painter in her own right, not just as the subject of Dryden's ode on her death. She compares the feminist language of Dryden's *Sigismonda* to Aphra Behn's and Mary Astell's language. There is no feminist special pleading in these brief references. Instead, there is a perceptive and balanced recognition of the totality of the Restoration literary community which I find particularly refreshing. Her sense of Dryden's character, his role as a translator, and his strategies for presenting himself in his poems is highly illuminating. For example, she sees the split identity of poet and translator reflected in the split identities of characters in the late plays and in the twins and doubles of the translations. She sees Dryden's conversion to Catholicism reflected in the heroes of his later plays as they examine their own consciences. And she sees analogies between Dryden as translator and as playwright in that both roles limit him to indirect appearance in his work. Such insights can be very useful indeed. One might feel that at times she stretches a little too far to arrive at an interpretation or establish a connection within a "collective" poem or between poems, or that she concludes a little too willingly that a poem or collection is "open-ended." Her book will be controversial. In spite of that — or, better, for that very reason — it is a most welcome addition to Dryden studies.

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ANN MESSENGER

Asher Z. Milbauer, *Transcending Exile: Conrad, Nabokov, I. B. Singer*. Miami: Florida International UP, 1985. pp. xv, 141.

Exile has been a seminal modern theme ever since Joyce's Stephen Dedalus decided that silence, exile, and cunning formed an appropriate aesthetic posture. Literary exile expresses the necessary, if painful detachment of the artist from family and society; the absurd fate of existential, "marginal man"; the detached, expatriate reply to rabid nationalism; and the poetic role of "internal emigré" recommended recently by Seamus Heaney. It is also, claims Asher Milbauer, the psychological, social, and imaginative plight of three of this century's most impressive and prolific novelists: Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, and Issac Bashevis Singer. Indeed they were prolific precisely because the paradoxical character of exile forced them to justify their lives to an audience which might not even exist. According to Nabokov, the exiled artist is "changing countries like counterfeit money," while he sheds his "unfortunate books . . . in a void" (55). He must continually dramatize his experiences of betrayal and uncertainty, in order to atone for them through the transcendental power of art. Milbauer seems well suited to analyze this plight, since he was born in Russia, educated in America, and employed as a teacher in Russia, Israel, and America. Although he comments occasionally on Nabokov's Russian, he seldom uses his favoured position to advantage. However, it does make him familiar with the dilemmas he describes, and sympathetic to those "transplanted" writers condemned to what Conrad calls an "unnatural state of existence."

The short chapter on Conrad establishes Milbauer's main themes, but also indicates the limitations in his treatment of them. He regards the novels as "fictionalized biography," a sublimation of actual experience that provides "psychic relief" to authors, who transfer their problems to fictional alter egos. This sacrificial strategy explains why Conrad "could not spare the lives of his heroes, since they were forms of his alter ego that had to be subdued for the writer to be at peace with himself" (24). Similarly Nabokov, in his early books, sentenced his heroes to death, "thus assuring his own survival" (59). Nevertheless, exile places the artist in a tragic position, torn between past and present. Exclusive allegiance to either one is destructive, resulting in various kinds of betrayal, slavery, and "spiritual death." Consequently, he must be a "tightrope walker," balanced between competing loyalties, disappointments, and misunderstandings, defined only by differences and uncertainties, doomed always to be "outlandish." Language becomes the chief index of his dilemma, since it binds him to the past yet permits assimilation. It confers identity, yet remains a mark of difference, especially to Conrad and Nabokov, who adopted a foreign tongue

as their own, and to Singer, who remained loyal to a dying language. Most important, language is the means of transcendence, because it is the agent of art and intellect, the two solutions that Milbauer finds proposed by all three novelists. The "vital and life-giving powers of art" (38) permit authors and characters to attain "equilibrium"; to balance their "two planes of existence" (74) so that they "nourish rather than destroy each other" (61); to placate memory and overcome alienation; to permit "salvation through art and intellect" (94).

This argument is neat and good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is weak in theory and underdeveloped. In his Preface, Milbauer announces that he will "employ the well-tested method of traditional literary analysis rather than the more fashionable, albeit often useful approaches practiced by formalists and structuralists" (xiii). Unfortunately he relinquishes useful critical tools, and limits himself to a great deal of plot summary, accompanied by a running commentary on thematic patterns. The main ideas summarized above are, for the most part, repeated rather than developed. At the end of the book we do not know very much more about the *nature* of the problems or solutions shared by the three novelists. This is unfortunate, since Milbauer has a rich subject and a remarkable combination of authors. In fact, I believe he performs a service simply by bringing these writers together. However, he does not pursue the interesting issues raised, for example, the biographical premise of his argument. He provides basic, background information and assumes in a general way that writing fiction acts as therapy, but he does not draw on any of the many biographical, psychological, or textual accounts of the relation between author and novel. He points perceptively to the key problem of language, but rarely expands his discussion to consider more precisely how language functions to both enforce and transcend exile; how these conditions operate between and within languages (George Steiner examines this subject in *Extraterritorial* and *After Babel*); or how they figure in the economy of rhetoric (the playground of post-structuralism). Similarly, he introduces but abruptly drops the controversial topics of difference, self-reflexiveness, and metafiction. All three novelists write about art, artists, and the artistic temperament. They present stories about story telling, and Nabokov is especially playful in making his novels reflect and subvert their own intentions, as Milbauer is well aware when he mentions the mode of "autocriticism" (49). But he does not pursue the theme, which surely is central to his subject.

Milbauer discusses only one short story by Conrad ("Amy Foster": a revealing but uncharacteristic case) and refers all too briefly to "Heart of Darkness," *Under Western Eyes*, and *Victory*. He then

considers three novels by Nabokov (*Mary, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Pnin*) and three by Singer (*Shosha, The Slave, Enemies: A Love Story*). He is always in command of his material. His commentary is clear, intelligent, and well-informed, although as I have indicated, there is too much plot summary. He seems to assume his readers have not read the novels. I feel that the key terms of his argument — transplanted, equilibrium, tragedy, art, transcendence, etc. — are taken for granted too much and explored too little. I also question his confidence in the virtue of intellect and in the victory of art. Conrad and Singer provide a vision so disturbing and caustic that no values, especially humanistic ones like these, are left intact. In "Heart of Darkness," Kurtz (who is not really an exile in the sense that concerns Milbauer) is lost, we are told, because he "adopts the darkness with its culture, its rituals, its language, its mentality" (21). But the darkness is a void without culture, a silence without language, and it nullifies all our civilized pretences to intellect and art. It compels us to revise our very notion of transcendence. The same might be said of Singer's heart of darkness — the holocaust. In view of these experiences that go beyond exile, it is hard to share Milbauer's optimism.

JON KERTZER

W. H. New, ed., *Canadian Writers in 1984: The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Issue of Canadian Literature*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1984. pp. 376.

Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review has, for one hundred issues, retained its name, its format, its design, its editorial style; it has changed editors only once. This consistency has compromised neither its importance, nor its ability to be consistently new. The journal was conceived by a group of University of British Columbia academics and librarians and George Woodcock was their chosen editor. Some months before its debut in the Fall of 1959, Woodcock expressed or, in his more theatrical term, "confessed" some editorial principles;¹ and, with a true anarchist's flair, he chose guidelines that could, in some sense or other, be reconstituted by each period.

In that "pre-editorial," Woodcock quoted from his own recent article in the *Dalhousie Review*: "Canadian writing has reached that stage in its movement towards self-conscious identity when the creative function of the critic as a unifying and defining element in the emergent tradition becomes necessary."² It is a crucial perception (though hardly a new one if one recalls A. J. M. Smith's 1928 call — "Wanted: Canadian Criticism"),³ and it's the sort of

thing that the South African writer, scholar, and critic, Stephen Gray, has spoken of in the broader context of the New Literatures:

the coming into its own of a literature, not just in terms of a prescribable number of acceptably 'great' works, but in terms of the whole nexus that supports a literature — its own publishing industry, including newspapers, magazines and journals, its own self-referring use of languages, its mutual understanding of a set of infolded norms and values, its own context of myth about the past and the present, its theoretical wing of evaluators like ourselves, its sense of settling in to do a job that has to be continually done, and — most important of all — its own community of readership and audience, which receives the work and feeds back into it reciprocally.⁴

Canadian Literature did not inaugurate that process but it has been an indispensable part of it. Woodcock and his successor, Bill New, have been alert to the possibility of the journal being part of "a kind of evolving literary history, capable of constant expansion as new facts and approaches emerge" ("Tentative Confessions," p. 20).

Perhaps the most important of Woodcock's editorial principles were a pair that might be paraphrased thus: criticism is a part of literature, and criticism must change; his single credo — "I intend to make *Canadian Literature* as many-faceted as possible" ("Tentative Confessions," p. 20). The journal's 100th issue is merely its most spectacular manifestation of that credo. Its reissue by the University of British Columbia Press as a book continues a tradition which includes *The Sixties: Writers and Writing of the Decade: A Symposium to Celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of Canadian Literature* (1969) as well as other occasional collections from the journal; and it conveniently makes available a particularly significant collection of Canadian writing and reflections upon it.

The 100th issue is not a typical one but it is an epitome of the journal's distinctive achievement. Its mode is neither memorial nor polemical but rather unostentatiously celebratory. What ostentation there is is simply the table of contents itself — contributions from 97 of the most notable Canadian writers. To be sure there are the birthday telegrams, appropriate to a centenary, from other Notables (the Governor General, the Past Chairman of the Canada Council, and the President of the host University — three more for a serendipitous total of 100 contributors) but what remains is the impression that all that is necessary is to relax into an appreciation of what's here, now. This time no credo, tentative or otherwise, is needed. The contents justify the present as well as the past and portend the future.

The one discordant note in Woodcock's 1959 manifesto, his curiously dogmatic assertion about standards — "critical standards, to be of any use, have to be universal" ("Tentative Confessions," p. 18) — is typical of its time, and of its colonial situation: it is

reflected in a residual anxiety about value in some Canadian criticism but not, thankfully, in this journal's observable policy. As the *Canadian Forum* said at the time:

If there's anything duller than mere parochialism, it's the application of universal standards to Canadian literature. And in criticism you can easily reach the point where the more universal your standards the less useful they become.⁵

The paradigmatic antagonism between writing and criticism is one that the magazine and the socio-cultural realities of the quarter-century of its existence have substantially diminished, if not elided altogether. W. H. New, in his tactful and characteristically urbane editorial to the centenary issue, refers to the way in which the magazine has "repeatedly integrat[ed] the twin processes of reading and writing" (p. 9). And perhaps, despite those socio-cultural realities, one has to emphasize that these are *twin* processes and not merely related ones, and certainly not antagonistic ones in the New Literatures of the Second and Third Worlds at all: Woodcock was absolutely right, thirty years ago, in locating "the critic as a unifying and defining element *in* the emergent tradition."⁶

The other implication of "integrating the twin processes" is that it puts pressure on form. When you begin to break down one category you inevitably put pressure on others. What this volume contains under the carefully noncommittal heading of "Articles" is certainly as "many-faceted" as Woodcock could ever have contemplated. But the important thing about the contents is not merely their diversity — though we are offered autobiography, cultural analysis, memoir, literary criticism, ideological essay, manifesto, and apologias enough — but their formal eclecticism. And the layout of the issue respects eclecticism; the "selection" (even with the few noticeable omissions) is luxuriously catholic and the arrangement determinedly alphabetical. This is not so much an anthology as an occasion, an opportunity for writers to articulate, to sketch, as Don Gutteridge says, "an argument for the sort of book one rarely gets around to writing" (p. 124).

Though the contents are eclectic, catholic, diverse in so many ways, it should not be surprising that some shared preoccupations can emerge from them. There are ways in which the culture enables certain kinds of things to be thought or, to use the term that the writers seem to prefer, to be noticed. It is seeing, as an act of writerly necessity and cultural responsibility, that seems to recur here. Keath Fraser, in a gamesome post-Stevens manifesto, ties the supremacy of fiction to the quantity/quality of "*notic[ing] the world*" (p. 116). That fiction is of the world, not beyond it, is frequently asserted in this issue. Timothy Findley's leitmotif is a lesson learned from Thornton Wilder, "*Pay attention*" (p. 106); and he pertinently

records Marie-Claire Blais's image of the writer as *un témoin* (a witness). Hugh Hood, not unexpectedly, has a confident statement of his position on the formal implications of this, too: "... any sentence in a narration is framed by the implied statement of the person telling the story, 'I witnessed this.' Narration is a testimony to witness before it is anything else" (p. 153). David Helwig, in trying to trace the possibilities of a religious belief, gets as far as believing that "[t]ruth . . . is at least partly gained by an act of outward attentiveness" (p. 136). And truth, as Aritha van Herk reminds us, is the opposite not of false but of secret (p. 332), of unnoticed. Her essay neatly deconstructs the reality-seeing-fiction model and offers a delicate aphorism that pegs the valency of "seeing" nicely: "What is important is not what is seen but what is noticed." James Reaney comes at it in another way with the conviction that important truths can/must be sought in particulars. In a vigorous essay that is all about the need to notice he says, "if you don't know the weed that grows at your doorstep . . . or the name of the tree outside your window, then you're not rooted in your environment" (p. 253). And that means, in Reaney's argument, that you can't read or write properly.

All of this engagement with "what can be seen and known" allows what seems to me to be the most interesting piece in the volume to be seen as, also, its centrepiece — Stephen Scobie's "Amelia, or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature." His essay is an amplification and development of Dorothy Livesay's 1969 paper on "The Documentary Poem." In passing, one might observe that the same form, in two manifestations, has been "found" in Australian literature, too; the co-incident should not surprise. Scobie is writing about the function of "*the authoritativeness of fact*" when it becomes part of a fiction. The opportunities for registering an "alterity" (that is in itself a cultural imperative) are revealingly explored in this essay. But Scobie's piece is not only interesting for what it says, but also for what it is. Like the texts it illuminates, it has a source — Livesay's essay — and like them it extends and revises, reconstructs and pays homage to that source while being identified and challenged by it. And like so much literary history it inscribes a tradition which situates the writer; like the documentary form it dis/covers an ancestry.

In these, as in other respects, the 100th issue of *Canadian Literature* is part of the evolving history of itself and of the literary history in which it participates.

NOTES

- 1 "The Tentative Confessions of a Prospective Editor," *B.C. Library Quarterly*, 23 (July 1959), 17-27.
- 2 George Woodcock, "A View of Canadian Criticism," *Dalhousie Review*, 36 (Autumn 1956), 221. Quoted in "Tentative Confessions," p. 18.
- 3 A. J. M. Smith, "Wanted: Canadian Criticism," *Canadian Forum*, 8 (April 1928), pp. 600-01.
- 4 Stephen Gray, "A Sense of Place in New Literatures, Particularly South African English," *W.L.W.E.*, 24, No. 2 (Autumn 1984), 228. (Keynote address, "Sense of Place in the New Literatures in English" Conference, Macquarie University, Sydney, August 1982.)
- 5 "A Canadian Literary Review," *Canadian Forum*, 39 (September 1959), p. 125.
- 6 "A View of Canadian Criticism," p. 221; quoted in "Tentative Confessions," p. 18; emphasis added.

Kerry McSweeney, *Four Contemporary Novelists: Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V.S. Naipaul*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1983. pp. 217. \$24.95.

Kerry McSweeney's justification for bringing together four contemporary novelists whose work is dissimilar in many respects is that, "in a time of widespread feeling that the form of the realistic novel is exhausted . . . , Wilson, Moore, Fowles and Naipaul have remained committed to the representational, communicative and instructive functions of the novel." To one degree or another, all have been rendered self-conscious by the much discussed *crise de roman*, but none has completely abandoned the traditional novel for the more radical forms of fiction which are currently popular with many of their contemporaries.

This broad similarity noticed by McSweeney does not amount to a thesis, and in fact his book does not develop a sustained argument which unites the novelists in question. Rather, the book divides into four separate, self-contained sections preceded by an introduction and followed by a brief conclusion. What McSweeney offers instead of a thesis as a means of unifying his subjects is a common set of procedures for studying each of the writers. He describes his intentions as follows:

I have attempted to chart the development of each writer; identify dominant themes, controlling techniques, and informing sensibility; explain what each has tried to accomplish and compare theory to practice; provide an appropriate context for appreciation and evaluation of all parts of each canon; and make qualitative discriminations.

As the foregoing suggests, McSweeney does not approach his writers armed with one or more of the currently fashionable critical

methodologies imported from Europe. Instead, he writes with a minimum of theorizing from within what he calls "the tradition of humane, constructive, and evaluative critical discourse." The book consists for the most part of judicious readings of individual novels. While he fashions no radically new insights, he writes in an intelligent, sophisticated fashion, delivering just what the dust jacket blurb promises: "a sympathetic but not uncritical account of each [novelist] in an urbane and authoritative analysis."

His section on Angus Wilson assesses Wilson's attempt to retrieve the social breadth of the Victorian novel without abandoning the concern of his modernist predecessors with the inner life of the individual. McSweeney shows that, beginning with his first novel, *Hemlock and After* (1952), Wilson explores in particular the fate of liberal humanist attitudes and values in the context of post-war English society. A sensitivity to moral issues, then, combines with his considerable talents as a novelist of manners. McSweeney argues that Wilson is especially obsessed with the dilemma of well-meaning individuals "who are forced to confront the reality of evil without and within." His acute sense of the pervasiveness of evil has bred in his fiction a pronounced element of the grotesque, a feature which has led him to liken himself as a novelist more to Dickens than to George Eliot.

In his analysis of Wilson's development as a writer over the course of eight novels, however, McSweeney demonstrates that the grotesque effects and caricature on the one hand and the psychological and social realism on the other are sometimes imperfectly married. In explaining the source of this difficulty, McSweeney locates inherently contradictory elements in his work: a belief in the transcendent reality of evil for which his liberal humanist agnosticism cannot account. *The Old Men at the Zoo* (1961) represents one possible response to this quandary. His fourth novel breaks with the fictional tradition within which morally repugnant actions are shown to be conditioned by psychological and social factors and presents instead a futuristic world of nightmarish evil. Although McSweeney admires this book's freshness and intensity, he argues convincingly for the superiority of the more realistic novels which immediately precede and follow it, *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* (1958) and *Late Call* (1964), books which skilfully blend diversity of social observation with depth of psychological exploration. It is *No Laughing Matter* (1967), though, which McSweeney considers to be Wilson's "major achievement as a novelist: the most complete fusion of his interests as a social historian and moralist with his obsessive energies." McSweeney also demonstrates that the novel marks Wilson's first wholesale attempt to attack the complacency

of his readers by incorporating such techniques of the anti-novel as parody and pastiche.

Because Brian Moore is the least celebrated of his four novelists, McSweeney takes pains to show that he belongs in the same company as the other three. He concedes that Moore's canon lacks thematic ambitiousness and a major novel of the scope of *No Laughing Matter*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or *A House for Mr. Biswas*. One might add *Ulysses* to the catalogue, since McSweeney stresses Joyce's importance as the central influence on Moore. But McSweeney holds that the gift for characterization and dialogue which informs Moore's clear-sighted, scrupulous depictions of crisis points in the lives of ordinary people makes him a novelist of high distinction. The crises suffered by his central characters are typically brought on by loneliness and a sense of failure and meaninglessness. McSweeney identifies that past as another burden, as well as its opposite: rootlessness and loss of identity. It is especially clear why the latter theme would preoccupy Moore, a Canadian citizen who was born and raised in Northern Ireland and who now lives in the United States.

Unlike Joyce's books, which are all set in Ireland, Moore's reflect the various places in which he has lived, a fact which McSweeney turns into the organizing principle of his discussion. He divides the novels into three groups according to their settings. The first contains the novels with Irish settings: *Judith Hearne* (1955), *The Feast of Lupercal* (1957), *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1965), and *Catholics* (1972). The first three dramatize crises engendered in the lives of ordinary people by the stultifying pressure of Belfast's social life and religion. *Catholics* marks a reversal in the sense that "the antagonism of the early novels to Catholicism is replaced by a sense of loss and regret for what is now gone" in the post-Vatican II church.

The second group is composed of *The Luck of Ginger Coffee* (1960), *The Doctor's Wife* (1976), and *The Temptation of Eileen Hughes* (1981). These novels, which McSweeney believes to be the least successful in Moore's canon, have settings which represent the early period of his exile. McSweeney complains that these novels are simply thin in comparison to his richer offerings. This might be so, but it is not clear what their settings, the basis for grouping them together, have to do with deficiencies. After all, the books were written at different stages of his career over three decades. And it seems to me that he underrates *The Luck of Ginger Coffee*, mistaking the weaknesses of the eponymous hero for those of the novel itself.

It is the third group, those formed by the novels with American settings, which he celebrates as the apex of Moore's achievement.

An Answer From Limbo (1962), *I Am Mary Dunne* (1968), *Fergus* (1971), and *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975) all feature more complex protagonists, more sophisticated structures and styles, more intensified preoccupations with family relationships, and an increasingly psychological rather than social focus.

McSweeney's analysis of Fowles's fiction is an elaboration of his insight that he is a writer who has not so much grown as unfolded. He shows that Fowles's novels present variations on themes and narrative techniques which have been discernible in his work from the beginning. One recurring theme is the need for freedom and authenticity, the attainment of which involves the acceptance of mystery and hazard in life. Certainty of the sort entailing a belief in God or even in the firm reality of society's conventions and received opinions is, in the terminology which Fowles has adapted from the existentialists, bad faith. McSweeney shows that in each novel the means by which the protagonist has the potential to attain freedom are the same: through the vitalizing powers of sex and imagination a young woman attempts to initiate him into a mysterious, secret world which ultimately can offer him self-knowledge. Associated with these women are older, sage-like males, who, as creative artists of one kind or another, are surrogates for Fowles within his creations. Their presence suggests that the processes by which freedom is achieved and art created are not really distinct, and the books themselves become self-reflexive paradigms of the very experiences which they narrate.

McSweeney's readings of the first five works of fiction are particularly good at evaluating their strengths and weaknesses. (*Mantissa* [1982] and *Maggot* [1985], like Moore's *Black Robe* [1985], came into print after the publication of *Four Contemporary Novelists*.) He finds *The Magus* (1965; revised 1977), Fowles's second published but first written novel, to be dazzling but flawed. For all of the narrative excitement which the book generates, by the conclusion the lengthy Phraxos sections have "come to seem pragmatic, just as the intellectual stages of Urfe's voyage towards self-knowledge have come to seem too schematic and merely notional." He prefers the less ambitious but more shapely and controlled *The Collector* (1963), Fowles's horrific study of the banality of evil. However, according to McSweeney (and most critics, including myself), his best novel is *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), that quintessentially modern Victorian story which places his customary thematic concerns into the context of history. McSweeney also admires the novella and stories of *The Ebony Tower* (1974), and he analyzes them interestingly as variations on several fictional genres and on the themes and narrative strategies of Fowles's novels. But he registers disappointment over *Daniel Martin* (1977) and persuasively ex-

plains why, owing to its prolixity, self-indulgence, and the weakness of its central characters, it is "Fowles's least satisfactory fictional performance."

McSweeney's approach to Naipaul is designed to supply a more comprehensive understanding than that of Commonwealth critics, who focus too narrowly on the search-for-identity theme. In particular, he attends to Naipaul's technical and formal growth as a writer committed to the conservative and traditional aims of the novel. He also stresses the importance of Naipaul's fastidious sensibility and clear-sighted powers of observation and description in the development of his informing themes: "homelessness, the absence of society or community, the sense of inauthenticity and loss, [and] the mingled anxiety and acedia."

The focal point of McSweeney's analysis of the novels is *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), which he judges "the high-water mark of Naipaul's career." Before his major novel he had written three works of fiction in "the minor key of colonial social comedy," *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), and the third published but first written *Miguel Street* (1959). After *Mr. Biswas* followed several important novels, but "in everything after it a progressive narrowing of his sympathies may be observed." McSweeney's explication of the novel does justice to the expansiveness and authority with which Naipaul evokes the Indian community of Trinidad in the process of depicting Mr. Biswas's dissatisfaction and longings for fulfilment.

McSweeney shows that after *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion* (1964), the novel in which he broke free of his regional barrier as a post-colonial Trinidadian by telling the story of an elderly Londoner's spiritual crisis, all of Naipaul's central characters are "uprooted and homeless, existing 'in a free state.'" Living in exile in London, Ralph Singh, the protagonist of *The Mimic Men* (1967), examines the condition of West Indian life from the outside. For Naipaul, however, the paradoxical results of this new freedom were a growing feeling of alienation and a "deepening sense of global dislocation." These are reflected in *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975), and *A Bend in the River* (1979), dark and disturbing books which McSweeney reveals to have much in common that "they may be regarded as isomers, compounds which have the same ingredients but different structures." All feature third world settings, political destabilization and racial conflict, and the interrelation of public events and the private lives of non-aligned, de-racinated central characters. McSweeney's readings are edifying in fleshing out these similarities.

Although rewarding, *Four Contemporary Novelists* is not without flaws. A more concerted effort to compare and contrast the novelists

would have been welcome, especially since the parallels which McSweeney does draw are illuminating. Bringing the writers to bear on one another would have helped to justify their inclusion between the covers of one volume. It also would have been helpful if, in addition to notes and an index, he had provided a selected bibliography. But these are minor criticisms of a book which is notable for its lucidity and cool intelligence.

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Books Received

- ANG, IEN, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. Trans. Della Couling. London: Methuen, 1985. pp. 148. \$15.95 pb.
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