

Book Reviews

George Whalley, *Studies in Literature and the Humanities: Innocence of Intent*. Selected and introduced by Brian Crick and John Ferns. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1985. pp. x, 270. \$27.50.

George Whalley's death in 1983 created a deeply-felt absence in the Canadian academic community. It was not just that he was a distinguished scholar and critic, and a man of great integrity and charisma; but we had grown used to looking to him as the spokesman for the humanities, one who we knew would always articulate, with eloquence and discrimination, our own best conception of what it is we do, or try to do, in our departments of English, our faculties of arts, our universities. The present collection, compiled after his death by Brian Crick and John Ferns, makes freshly available a number of Whalley's papers and lectures on the humanities delivered over the course of more than three decades. It deserves to be in the hands of all of us whose concern is the study of literature, and, even more important, of all those administrators and bureaucrats who consider the study of literature to be an outmoded pursuit in a vestigial organ of a university.

In the somewhat embattled state of the humanities in the post-sputnik era, we can turn to Whalley as a source of inspiration and argument on many issues that touch us nearly. In "Research and the Humanities" he steadily resists the institutional take-over of the concept of "research" as an end product, and the granting procedures that require research in the humanities to look like research projects in the natural sciences. "Research . . . is the beginning, or an intermittent subordinate process, not the end of a humanist's work" (118). In "Humanities in the World at Large" he provides a history of the development of the terms "science" and "humanities," and insists that in spite of the facile and modish opposition between them developed by C. P. Snow in *The Two Cultures*, "pure science and the humanities are interdependent and complementary" (232). On the recurrent issue of literacy, in his contribution to *In the*

Name of Language, he also provides us with a memorable reminder that illiteracy does not end with a reasonable acquaintance with the three r's:

If we cannot recognise by the ring of it that an argument is specious, or that it is no argument at all, being merely a reiteration of emotional catchwords and sophisms; if we cannot tell by the ear the peculiar *timbre* of a third-rate mind fumbling with matters he neither understands nor respects; if we cannot sniff out the shiftiness of doublespeak, of gross dishonesty and bland self-deception dressed up in jargonish togs of the latest design . . . ; if we can do none of these things, then we are indeed illiterate, no matter how extensive our vocabulary, no matter how many improving magazines we subscribe to. (135)

Literacy in these terms becomes a concern of us all, within and beyond academe.

But if Whalley in his championship of the humanities has provided us with a rallying call, and a means towards some kind of professional solidarity, he has also taken positions within the discipline that remind us of our own internal divisions. His voice is sometimes perceptibly that of the old guard, and he is unashamed of taking the elegiac tone. "I affirm that I do not see in the modern world anything as humane or as daring as the philosophical virtues we have inherited from Plato and Aristotle through the long rich humanist tradition of Europe" (247). He takes a stand against Frye, and against what Frye's criticism has led to. It is no doubt late in the day to be reacting against *The Anatomy of Criticism*, and in fact this particular essay dates from 1958. But Whalley sounds there the keynote of a position to which he is constant: he objects to the *Anatomy* as an essay in poetics because "one discovers that the view of language as autonomous, self-shaping, impervious to all external influences is more closely related than one would have expected to the desire to establish criticism as a science free of value-judgements" (40). For Whalley reading and criticism are ineluctably matters of judgement and discrimination, and literature is not merely self-referential, but is necessarily and intensely connected with experience. "Humane studies arise from life," he insists (106). "Too often we forget the necessary bond between poetry and life" (179).

He is cautious and fastidious about trends and fashions, within literary studies as well as beyond them. He refuses to be borne down by the strong tide in favour of subordinating literature to "the Media," that new plural Muse who gathered so much clout in the sixties. Our anxieties about "canonicity" he quietly dismisses with the unargued assumption that "In general, the 'greatest' writers and writings are most likely to engage us in the most valuable educational activities and hold us to them" (112). He is disturbed by the

diversion of the study of literature into all those branches of knowledge that literature can be *about* — politics, psychology, sociology, linguistics — the “drift of humanists towards a parascientific specialization,” he calls it (242). To be too insistent about teaching a poem along polemical lines is to fall into a temptation to which teachers of literature are understandably prone: “constructing a surrogate poem as a plausible substitute for the true poem. . . . The result can be, for the thinker, very satisfactory: it is a way of dispensing with the unmanageable uniqueness and strangeness of the poem by converting it into something differently constituted, and because we have made it ourselves (a little slyly) it will be utterly familiar” (223). And he never adapted to today’s unisex usage, and firmly talks of the reader and the scholar as “he.”

But however his avoidance of trends may offend the different groups among us now, his sustained endeavour is to speak for all seasons, and to address what is constant in our discipline. He is impatient of the “—isms” of the various branches of criticism; he is even a little distrustful of the species *literary critic* (198); but he urges us to be endlessly attentive to the work of literature itself, to the poem, the thing created. Coming through always is his delight in the intricacies of language; the beautiful balance of words and rhythms, the achieved meaning of which the verbal articulation is an inseparable part. “Listen,” he urges us. “Listen to the opening lines of *Paradise Lost* or ‘Kubla Khan’ or ‘The Wreck of the *Deutschland*.’ You cannot be a musician without a refined capacity for listening; the same for a poet; the same for an informed reader of literature” (212). It is our business as teachers to train our students not to *interpret* (or to make over the poem into their own image of it) but to *listen* with heightened refinement. In such a position he is neither advanced nor reactionary, but only reminding us of what must be our constant business. J. Hillis Miller, a much more “advanced” critic than Whalley, recognizes the same obligation; in his 1986 presidential address to the Modern Language Association on “The Triumph of Theory,” he maintains that “the ethics of reading” includes “an obligation to read — to read carefully, patiently, and scrupulously, under the elementary assumption that the text being read may say something different from what one wants or expects it to say or from what received opinion says it says” (*PMLA*, 102.3: 284). We still need to be reminded of such things.

In focusing on the positions Whalley adopts on this or that issue, I have made him sound more polemical than he is. He has been recurrently recruited to fight the battle for the humanities; but as reader, scholar and teacher he is characteristically quiet and receptive. Even the verb *to teach*, used transitively with literature as its object, he finds “has a disagreeably aggressive sound to it” (215).

What he recoils from is the implication that what we do when we teach is pack something (the product, poetry) into someone (the consumer, student). Our "teaching" instead should be a training in receptivity, a heightening and refining of the student's capacity to listen and to feel. "I ask you to be patient," he says more than once (215, 248). This patience is not just a matter of inertly waiting. It is an active and sustained attention to the text as well as the headlines, to the delicate balance of nuance and implication as well as statement, to the sounds and patterns of words as well as to their signification. To be patient, for Whalley's reader, is a very strenuous and demanding business.

Although the majority of the essays in his collection are written in Whalley's role as spokesman for the humanities, there are fortunately some in which he has the opportunity to talk sustainably about single authors and their works: Coleridge and "The Ancient Mariner" (though of course Whalley's major work on Coleridge is published elsewhere), Aristotle, Jane Austen, E. J. Pratt. Here his capacity for refined and active listening is amply apparent. And a further characteristic of his criticism also emerges: he is ready to write eloquently and without embarrassment about *feeling* in literature. He is perfectly aware of the danger of being "sentimental" ("one of the most derogatory terms in literary criticism") [91]; but he will not let that deter him from examining the emotional content of a work, which is, after all, very often a major reason for its greatness. He is ready to show how "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" derives its haunting quality from "our intimate experience in the poem of the most intense personal suffering, perplexity, loneliness, longing, horror, fear" (16-17). One reason that Jane Austen deserves to be called a "poet" is for the emotional depth of her work: "she wrote with the gravity of a born humorist, out of a life that had known its own peculiar sorrows and immedicable desolations" (167). Aristotle's *Poetics* is basic to Whalley's critical thinking, and not least I think because Aristotle is ready to make pity and fear — emotions that belong to the audience as well as to the protagonist — a crucial generic test.

"A respectable scholar needs to be a bit of a poet," Whalley concedes genially (210). And it is one of the pleasures of the book that he allows the poet in himself to show. We are amply treated to the humorous aphorism, the delicate irony, the apt analogy. For instance, professors of English, in a society that has suddenly begun to bandy about the catchphrase "The Survival of Literacy," become "members of a vanishing species, fellows of the duck-billed platypus, the whooping crane, the sperm whale, and those delicately poised pelagic birds of the Pacific Islands that were driven from their own natural homes by pigs and rats" (123). There is a certain fitness in

a criticism that partakes in the grace of expression of which it discourses. One feels as one reads, this is the thing itself, going on before me: the making with words. "Nobody has any reasonable excuse for being a bore, in speech or writing," runs one of Whalley's aphorisms (115). He is not a bore. Would that the same could be said of all of us!

I have said that Whalley has been called upon to articulate for us what it is we do as scholars and teachers of literature and language, and so I will give him the last word:

As humanists we train, support, feed, excite; we try to teach people how to *read*, so that they can enter directly into the activity of the most powerful and penetrating minds that we have record of, and so to find how miraculously complex, integrative and inventive the human mind is, and language too; and so to discover themselves by losing themselves. We try to teach people how to *write*, so that their states of feeling, their sense of value, the quality and accuracy of their perception become clear and ordered, their awareness of all things heightened, their capacity for sustained reflection strengthened — recognizing that everybody has in the end to do his own work, has to work out his own integrity and destiny in solitude. (244)

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JULIET MCMASTER

Feroza F. Jussawalla, *Family Quarrels: Towards a Criticism of Indian Writing in English*. New York: Peter Lang, American University Studies, 1985. pp. x, 209. \$29.20.

The international literatures in English come out of forty or so countries, many where English is the second or twentieth language. Although this body of writing on which the sun never sets presents new challenges for the critics — both at home and abroad, until recently no one worried much about the techniques applied: Critics relied most often on the touchstone method — that is, judging the work by British models; or talked vaguely about universality; or used nationalism as a yardstick; or, if foreign, praised the work's exotica. In fact, they could take almost any approach, even badly, because whatever they wrote might well qualify as seminal. Nor was there a pressing need to follow any modish critical theories.

But gone are those carefree days. The appearance of a book like Feroza Jussawalla's *Family Quarrels* serves as another harbinger of the new era, one that rejects the free-wheeling ways of the past and demands greater originality, more discipline. Jussawalla addresses but one of the literatures and argues a single point: the criticism accorded Indian writing in English has failed and continues to fail the writers. Although harshest on the Indian critics, often charac-

terized as pedantic, pretentious, provincial, pompous, she finds the work of the international critics lacking as well.

The first chapter summarizes the criticism on Indian poetry and fiction written in English, and finds little to admire, charging that the critics have not looked at the work in its "linguistic and social contextual background" (x), or its "multicultural-multilingual situation" (36). Instead, as the next two chapters reveal, they have stressed what they perceive as an incompatibility between style and theme, questioning how a sensibility formed in one language can be expressed outwardly in another, unless the foreign tongue is nativized.

To illustrate her points, Jussawalla offers numerous examples of inadequate criticism on widely-known works. At one point, though, when Jussawalla suggests that *Midnight's Children* is the result of bad criticism, we parted ways. If inept critical writing helped produce Rushdie's masterpiece, then I tend to think the critics Jussawalla damns deserve some praise after all. R. K. Narayan fares much better in the book, which decries "formulaic abstractions such as Indianness, experimentation, innovativeness, modernism, and other critical criteria that do not look at the wholeness of a work of art" (130). Narayan, often dismissed by Indian critics for lacking all of the above and more, receives intelligent and sensitive treatment from Jussawalla. Granted, this rare writer deserves such praise. Yet is it necessary to reject Rushdie's splendid sprawl in order to embrace the miniature tales of South India?

That many Indians who write in English have often travelled or even live abroad seems to be common, so they naturally examine the effects of alienation and expatriation. That Indian critics dislike such themes also appears to be the rule, and leads them to label the work of writers like Ruth Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya anti-nationalistic, unIndian, and worse. On the other hand, they praise the writing of another expatriate, Raja Rao, whom Jussawalla accuses of "perhaps" doing "his best to exaggerate the Indianness of his content" (134). The sections devoted to a double vision of India and the one on "Gandhism Versus Criticism" reveal succinctly a recurring problem in much of the critical writing on the international English literatures: nationalism gone awry. For example, Jussawalla finds it ironic that Indian critics often judge a work partially on the way it treats Gandhi. The commentary on this and like problems is judicious, and applies as well to similar nationalistic criticism of other literatures. Take for instance Australian critics who castigated Patrick White for failing to portray all Australians as genuine "cheery souls."

By the time I reached the final chapter of *Family Quarrels*, I had a good idea of what is wrong with the criticism but little notion,

except in general terms, of how it could be improved. (I was relieved, though, that I had limited myself to reading Indian literature in English and had never written about it.) Here lies, I believe, a fault in the concept governing the study: too much emphasis on the quarrels and not enough on solutions to the conflicts. Jussawalla does admit early on that the book is limited for the most part to refuting the previous criticism — and she performs the task so effectively, at times so tirelessly, that she must have offended a few critics along the way. The unrelenting argumentative tone that occasionally jars might be blamed on the work having once been a dissertation, an admission made at the outset. Possibly more could have been done to disguise the source, freeing it, say, from some of the linguistic jargon, excessive quotations, and dogged persistence in pursuing a point.

In spite of these limitations — minor considering the comprehensiveness of the study, *Family Quarrels* makes an important contribution to the new field of critical theory on the international English literatures. It seems to me that it might in the future serve as a point of reference for those trying to resolve the family quarrels between Indian creators and their critics, as well as those between writers and critics in other areas. We can all learn from this forthright evaluation of Indian criticism, whatever our fields of study.

The final chapter unveils an ideal criticism, one which embraces both the Sanskritic and Western traditions. Perhaps Jussawalla will in the future put to work her own extensive knowledge of Indian literature in English, proving that she can not only criticize criticism but also produce the kind of “‘moral’ criticism” she proposes.

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ROBERT ROSS

Gayle Green and Coppélia Kahn, eds., *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985. pp. xiii, 273. \$25.00; \$10.95 pb.

Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. London and New York: Methuen New Accents, 1985. pp. xviii, 206. \$25.00; \$11.95 pb.

Nothing so signals the domestication of post-structuralist theories as recent books summarizing and explaining them. Whether student, teacher, or simply interested reader, we need no longer, publishers assure us, puzzle our own way through the thickets of theory; for the price of a paperback a professional guide will blaze our way. The advantages of such guides are obvious to those wishing to be *au courant* without devoting major intellectual energies to making their own way through theoretical tangles and to teachers who,

more often than not, are among their number but who must nonetheless acquaint classes with the thought behind the jargon and ideologies of contemporary literary discussion. And indeed, publishing enterprises such as Methuen's New Accent series are largely aimed at the naïve but captive market of classrooms. However, the disadvantages of such guides often counterweigh their advantages. Their economy of summary leads to over-simplification and even reductiveness. Nor are critical readings of theoretical texts, the selection and emphasis inherent in summary, or interpretation themselves ever innocent. Students "acquainted" with theory only in the guise of such works make judgements on the basis of a slight, vicarious, and already ideologically-mediated "knowledge" of primary sources; frequently more mature readers substitute in their own "scholarly" and "critical" work quoted summaries from the guide for the original texts, handing down not only useful insights but errors and dubious or limited interpretations as critical heirlooms.

Guides to feminist literary theory share those advantages and disadvantages. Committed to the insights that *all* criticism is ideological and that we serve our best intellectual interests by exposing the ideological and gender biases of literature and criticism, and committed to revision of the literary canon and of the ways we have read both men and women writers, feminist critics must welcome "guides" which make it possible for non-"specialists" to introduce feminist criticism and theory into classrooms. However, the mediating ideology of a "guide" between the reader and the original texts, as well as the "guide's" choice of one rather than many paths to lead readers through the textual thicket, inevitably undermine both the self-consciously constructive ideology of feminist criticism and its determined pluralism. The two works under review position themselves in relation to such problems in different ways. The essays of *Making a Difference*, written for this volume, primarily summarize, and to a lesser extent evaluate, previous feminist criticism. The author as mediator of critical theory and ideology is taken one step further in Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* in which summary is but the groundwork for extended and rigorous critiques of various feminist positions.

A collection of essays, given self-conscious editors, offers an easier occasion than a single-authored work for embodying the pluralist discourse of feminist theory. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn's collection is designed as a guide through the pluralism of contemporary United States literary feminism from a moderate socialist point of view that describes women's oppression as both a "material reality" and a "psychological phenomenon." Cora Kaplan, in the volume's most important essay, argues convincingly for a socialist

feminist critical practice that would "redefine the psyche as a structure, not as a content," in order to understand how "social divisions and the inscription of gender are mutually secured and given meaning."

Beginning with a useful overview by the two editors, who juxtapose a summary of feminist scholarship in history, anthropology and literature with the best reading we have to date of Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page," the volume then offers a more narrowly focused review and critique by Sydney Janet Kaplan of "Varieties of feminist criticism." Like Moi, Kaplan reserves her strongest criticism for Elaine Showalter's attempts to construct a feminist theory and registers a strong resistance to monologic and anti-pluralist formulations of feminist theory. "French Theories of the Feminine" are given a separate chapter in which Ann Rosalind Jones adds to her 1981 essay (reprinted in *The New Feminist Criticism*) a distinction among four types of Franco-feminist criticism — deconstruction, "hearing silences," "decoding the semiotic" and "the politics of style" — and a discussion of recent criticisms of them. Linguistic and psychoanalytic issues are raised by Nelly Furman and Judith Kegan Gardiner respectively. Furman makes a superficial argument based on an unconvincing analogy of language with marriage; the reader would do better to approach the question through Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality" (*New Literary History*, 1985). Gardiner's essay is an overview too brief to be useful to any but the most uninitiated; however, her introduction of object-relations theory into the debate and her summary of the major feminist psychoanalytic theories can serve as an overture to further reading.

A second group of essays moves from interdisciplinary sources of feminist criticism to issues of subjectivity. Cora Kaplan's "Pandora's box: subjectivity, class and sexuality in socialist feminist criticism" combines superb demonstration of socialist-feminist methodology with class issues of increasing concern to feminist critics; here is an historical reading of the dialectics of feminism and representations of sexuality and class in nineteenth-century literature and life. Distinguishing between novelistic discourse and the actual class and sexual experiences that discourse first appropriated, then shaped, she demonstrates that "class subjectivity of women and their sexual identity . . . became welded together in nineteenth-century discourses and took on new and sinister dimensions of meaning." The realist novel, in this insightful reading, becomes mimetic not of actual social and sexual divisions and "rituals" but of "the powerful symbolic force of class and gender in ordering our social and political imagination." Since it is precisely that symbolic force feminists both live within and try to theorize and live outside of, Kaplan's analysis

points to the fundamental difficulty of self-positioning of each and every feminist. That Bonnie Zimmerman's 1981 essay, "What has never been: an overview of lesbian feminist criticism" should be the only reprinted essay in the volume testifies to the extensive work that needs to be done in the area. Susan Willis's "Black women writers: a critical perspective" demonstrates "community, journey, and sensuality versus sexuality" in black women's writing; the argument for community over individual identity not only conforms to the socialism of *Making a Difference* but makes an original contribution to black feminist criticism.

The collection returns to the literary canon in Adrienne Munich's "Notorious Signs, feminist criticism and literary tradition." This final essay shows some of the weaknesses of the collection as a whole — occasional over-statement and repetition of material summarized elsewhere in the volume — but it also makes a forceful argument for feminist criticism's re-vision of the entire canon. Among its strengths are the acknowledgement of the need to evaluate women's complicity in misogynist canon-making and its distinction between literary texts which may or may not be sexist and sexist literary criticism.

These writers gently criticize earlier feminist critics in the interests of theoretical or critical modifications of their own. Toril Moi, in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, is brilliantly incisive in her summaries of Anglo-American feminist and Franco-feminist theories, summaries which she uses as evidence for rigorous and challenging critiques of the theoretical inadequacies or (more infrequently) strengths of these critics. Her method recalls Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*: like Eagleton, she writes from a Marxist position and like him she prefers dissecting the social and theoretical shortcomings of others to advancing a clear summary and incisive critique of her own position. Marxist feminism receives only three pages of discussion in Moi's work (in the context of Simone de Beauvoir's socialism). Acknowledging that socialist feminists have tended simply to add "class" to other thematic concerns and that they have failed to examine twentieth-century Marxist theorists for what can be usefully appropriated to feminism, Moi nonetheless offers in these brief pages Marxist-feminist criticism as "an alternative both to the homogenizing author-centred readings of the Anglo-American critics and to the often ahistorical and idealist categories of the French feminist theorists." She does not, however, sketch out that alternative and her protectionism represents a significant disappointment in this book.

Moi opens with a contentious introduction alleging the inadequacy of contemporary feminist theory on the basis of what she takes to be its failure to deal with Virginia Woolf. She concentrates

on Elaine Showalter's negative reading of Woolf, giving comparatively little time to more positive readings, in order to argue for a combination of Derridean and Kristevan reading practices that would locate "the politics of Woolf's writing *precisely in her textual practice*." Many, myself included, would agree with Moi about the textual politics of Woolf's writing; however, there are in the hundreds of essays about Woolf more gestures toward such reading than Moi acknowledges. Moreover, she uses Woolf simply to set up her case against the Anglo-American theorists which forms the substance of the book's second section and for Kristeva with which she concludes; she never returns to Woolf's work.

Her history and analysis of Anglo-American feminist theory proceeds through a discussion of Kate Millett and Mary Ellmann, "Images of Women Criticism," the "woman-centered" criticism of Moers, Showalter, and Gilbert and Gubar, and on to the "theoretical reflections" of Kolodny, Jehlen and, again, Showalter. Not the least of the pleasures of this chapter is its reading of Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about Women* as a deconstructive text subversive of humanist values, a reading which offers another source and another direction for Anglo-American feminist theorists. Black and lesbian feminist criticism go undiscussed because, in Moi's view, they present "exactly the same *methodological and theoretical* problems as the rest of Anglo-American feminist criticism." Those problems derive from the entanglement of that criticism in humanist values and "depoliticizing theoretical paradigms" and its consequent commitment to notions of a unified subject as conceptualized by patriarchal thought; they are outlined with clarity and precision in Moi's discussion of *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Turning to Franco-feminists whom she praises for having found ways of writing from the margins and of deconstructing patriarchal ideology, Moi still holds considerable reservations. Cixous, in the clearest exposition to date of her thought, Moi presents as veering between Derridean deconstructive textual practice and "a full-blown metaphysical account of writing as voice, presence and origin." Irigaray also stands charged with metaphysics on the grounds that, in her attempt to name the feminine, she idealizes the figure of Woman much as does the patriarchal tradition she is deconstructing. Moreover, Moi rightly argues, Irigaray falsifies women's positions by failing "to consider the historical and economic specificity of power, along with its economic and material relations." While Moi holds Kristeva (who she grants is not a feminist theorist) politically accountable for her individualism and her failure to offer a materialist analysis of marginality, she finds in essays such as "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini" the historical and material context other theorists fail to provide. In Kristeva's theorizing of marginality

and subversion, "her radical deconstruction of the identity of the subject" and the theory of language to which it leads, Moi locates the possibility of an anti-humanist, anti-essentialist basis for a feminist theory and "a feminist vision of a society in which the sexual signifier would be free to move; where the fact of being born male or female no longer would determine the subject's position in relation to power, and where, therefore, the very nature of power itself would be transformed." That utopian theory and social project she leaves to her readers.

I began by noting the limitations, and even dangers, of the ideological mediation such guides offer to readers who do not actually read the critics and theorists they discuss. Of the two books under review, the commitment to socialist feminism is more pervasively present, but more easily recognizable, in Moi. The Greene and Kahn collection, because its essays make a less tightly structured argument, leaves more room for the student to enter the debate on the basis of the text actually before her. Moi's summaries of theoretical positions are much the more thorough and incisive, but the very forcefulness of her criticisms may have the paradoxical effect of closing the discussion for all but initiates. Should that happen, the "guide" comes dangerously close to classroom indoctrination.

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SHIRLEY NEUMAN

Stephen R. Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986. pp. xi, 276. \$19.95.

Should I begin this review with a few confessions? Perhaps I should admit that I am not a student of South African literature or history, that I am not a student of "world" literature or so-called third-world literature, that I am not even all that familiar with Nadine Gordimer's work, except for *Burger's Daughter*. My credentials for writing this review are perhaps rather sparse: I have written on the novel I mentioned; but perhaps more importantly, I have pursued, through a too-long, but not-long-enough career as a graduate student, a way of understanding literature (and the novel in particular) in terms of history, a way of writing about literature and its relations to history and society that neither lessens nor inflates the importance of any of them.

Perhaps this last is not the reason I was asked to review Stephen Clingman's *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer*, but it is certainly the reason I accepted the offer, and it was in the hope of discovering some clues to such a methodology that I began the book. For it proclaims itself as not only a study of the novels of Nadine Gordi-

mer, but also an experiment in socio-historical literary criticism. In the preface, Clingman states that the book is "a modest attempt to think . . . through again" the relationships among history, society, culture, ideology, and literature, using the "extreme example" of South Africa and Nadine Gordimer's fiction within that context (ix).

In his introduction, Clingman outlines his project. He is treating Gordimer's fiction as a certain sort of historical evidence, as "the area in which historical process is registered as the subjective experience of individuals in society" (1). This in itself is a rather well-tried method, but Clingman's is a less idealistic version in that he insists that the literary writer does not simply observe the social situation objectively, thus holding up a mirror to society, but is rather herself a social being, the product of the very subject of which she writes, of the language in which she writes. The evidence, then, is not straight-forward and transparent; history is not simply on the face of the work, but leaves its traces in every aspect of the work, in its formal problems and resolutions, in its gaps and fissures and contradictions, as well as in its content — in its unconscious as well as in its consciousness. Clingman convinced me that what I was about to read was the theory of Terry Eagleton, Frank Lentricchia, Fredric Jameson, and others, put into critical practice.

Clingman is convincing as well in his argument that Gordimer is an exemplary subject for the study of the novelist's relationship with her subject matter, the novel's relationship to history. Because she is a white South African writing during a period of profound social and political change that revolves around the issue of the whites' position in South Africa, her work can be expected to reveal not only a conscious response to her history, but also the marks of that history at deeper, more unconscious levels. And Clingman meticulously situates Gordimer and her work in its socio-political context, drawing upon an extensive knowledge of South African history to do so. His detailed analyses of her observations of South African society, of her developing and often contradictory commitments that are implicit in that observation, of the ways in which she attempts to resolve the contradictions, are themselves exemplary for anyone attempting socio-historical criticism.

However, the book does have its problems. Not least of these is a certain discontinuity between the more theoretical sections of the book — the Introduction and the final chapter, "Deep History" — and the main body of the work, the "close readings" of the novels themselves. Not only are the theoretical questions, hypotheses, and conclusions more or less disconnected from the practical criticism, but the theory seems to have little bearing on the practice in places. Clingman tends to fall into some of the old traps of historical criti-

cism: a too-easy identification between the world within the novel and the world outside of it, between the characters and their creator. That is, he seems to forget the most interesting and challenging methods he outlines in the introduction.

Perhaps there is just too much material here for the sort of complex and detailed analysis that Clingman's project seems to demand. He covers eight novels, as well as, necessarily, the nearly forty years of South African social and political history which are the context of this fiction, all in the standard 250-page thesis. The inevitable result is that his analyses of the novels tends to be on the level of plot, episode, theme, and broad narrative issues. The sort of attention to minute details of narrative and language, to the workings of ideology on the micro-levels of the text, which I had been led to expect, is simply not sustained with any consistency, and perhaps can not be in a work of this range.

What we get instead is a rather repetitive elaboration of a few key issues, terms, symbols, and themes. Under the pretext that the book is a "history" of a "consciousness of history," Clingman connects these symbols and themes to his theory by a sort of pseudo-psychoanalytic interpretation of their "unconscious" meaning. However, the meaning too often seems to be already determined by the premises and seldom seems to be all that "unconscious," with the result that his conclusions are not overly convincing.

In the end, I wonder whether Nadine Gordimer isn't too easy (or perhaps too difficult) a subject for this sort of analysis. Her books are just so obviously about the world in which she lives and she herself is so outspoken on the subject of South Africa outside of her fiction that easy identifications are almost inevitable, and the subtleties and contradictions almost impossible to catch.

All of this is to say that I'm more than a bit disappointed with Clingman's work. But this is perhaps because of the expectations with which I approached it as much as because of the work itself. It remains an excellent study of Gordimer's work, covering her very early short fiction as well as her major works, and bringing together much secondary material that has never before been in one place. Its bibliography and notes are extensive, providing ample material for anyone interested in pursuing a study of Gordimer. And its insistence on the importance of social and political history to the study of literature and on the complexity of a historical literary criticism is, indeed welcome, if not adequately executed.

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Michael Kirkham. *The Imagination of Edward Thomas*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. pp. xi, 225. \$39.50.

The reputation of Edward Thomas grew very slowly during the fifty years after his death in 1917, but that growth has intensified markedly in the last twenty years: thanks to the efforts of R. George Thomas and Edna Longley, we now have an authoritative biography and definitive editions of the poems, and since the pioneering study of H. Coombes in 1956 we have five book-length critical studies, by Vernon Scannell (1963), William Cooke (1970), R. George Thomas (1972), Jan Marsh, and Andrew Motion (1980). The intensification occurred just as the terms romantic and modernist were being re-examined: it is not surprising that a central issue has been the placement of Edward Thomas within those traditions. Most of the attempts by critics to secure his reputation have had to argue either that he is a Keatsian romantic simply better than the Georgians with whom he is grouped or that he anticipates the sensibilities of the experimental modernists of the 1920's. It is his unassertive manner, the relative quiet and restraint of his poetic voice ("self-deprecating yet unflinching" [103]), that have made the efforts at categorizing him so difficult. The addition of Michael Kirkham's book goes some way to resolving the problem: Kirkham argues in effect that the two views are not perhaps as distinct as most would have them, that Thomas is better read as an uncertain Romantic, clearly in the conversational-meditative tradition fostered by Wordsworth and Coleridge, but without the certainty of personal vision and pseudo-religious purpose of those early Romantics, and with some of the skepticism, unease, tension, and restlessness of many sensitive inhabitants of the bewildering and faith-destroying twentieth-century.

Kirkham's approach is non-historical: because Thomas's 142 poems were all written in just over two years (between December 1914 and January 1917), it is more useful, Kirkham claims, to investigate the "domain of Thomas's imagination" (ix) as if it were a unity, the final poetic distillation of his development as a prose writer and professional man of letters in the previous fifteen years. He begins consequently with a chapter on the "imaginative prose," culling the central themes, attitudes, and emphases that are to re-emerge later so tellingly in the verse. The next six chapters detail those themes as they are expressed in the poems: the self-recognition and criticism of the limitations of his personality — his melancholy or his solitary disposition; the pathology of questing, especially for the social "other" self, which is always doomed to failure; the consequent tensions between the calls of home and of nomadism; his un-supernatural and un-sentimental naturalism; the occasional emergence of a self-transcending or self-transforming "metamorphic imagination" in which time is suspended and the rural England of

the past is idealized; and the realistic counter of that latter tendency — the socio-historical concern with the deterioration of national character, the theme of an enfeebled, superannuated England (Kirkham quite properly reminds us of Thomas's admiration of George Sturt, one of the most powerful elegists of English country life). The last three chapters turn then to Thomas's technical expertise: the Hardy-like mastery of a wide variety of rhythms, metres, and dictions, the achieved "organic" tensions between inner and outer form, that is, between the structure of sense and the verse-form, and the unsettling use of metaphors and symbols to question the stability and even possibility of meaning.

That last point might lead one to suspect that Kirkham is another of these post-structuralists bent on finding gaps, reflexive opacities, and dismantling indeterminacies everywhere. But that would be unfair and misleading: Kirkham is never so self-indulgent or so dogmatically skeptical. His stronger allegiance, I suspect, is with the New Critics and their less playful obsession with paradox and ambiguity. Kirkham likes Thomas too much and too responsibly to be able to advance through him a convincing nihilism, but this is not to say that he allows Thomas completely to be himself. For alongside the certainly challenging characterization of the essential qualities of Thomas's verse, as summarized above, is a critical argument that begins in a challengeable and undefended assumption about the nature of poetry and rather too forcefully brings forward the arguably weaker elements of Thomas's style to defend it as well as the thesis concerning the poet's place between nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditions. The central assumption is that poems to be living are necessarily inconclusive (*v*), that conflict, ambivalence, and tension are what "the modern reader" expects to find in poetry (65). So we find Kirkham, when confronted by examples in Thomas that may not easily conform to this, saying rather often things like "it may not be immediately obvious," or "though there is no precise verbal echo, it is surely not fanciful to see a resemblance . . .," or "I am reluctant to surrender the ambiguity of [a particular word]," for he is ever in search of the "submerged suggestion." This has an unfortunate effect on his prose style: in his need to find complex, paradoxical and profound (and, as for so many post-Romantics, the profound must be paradoxical) implications in the verse, there is a constant pressure on his own language: the result is frequent overstatements and inflations.

In the concluding chapters on style, we realize that Kirkham's previously insistent pointing to opposites and paradoxes has been preparing us for his contention that the essential Thomas can be characterized as achieving "an *urbane* poise, a social manner that could not be predicted for a poet of Thomas's disposition and

affiliations. . . [yet] its light elegance endows the poems not so much with a hard finish, though the manner is polished, as with a shimmer of uncertainty" (187). The poise aims at "an inconclusive openness" (188). In fact, he goes on, Thomas is drawn to things that "resonate with elusive significance" (196). The appeal to the poet of the hidden and latent is finally part and parcel of his fascination with "the mystery of human mortality" (197). The slight inflation of the thought in that last step develops further than when Kirkham transfers his conclusion about Thomas's sensibility and poetic method into a general proposition about our critical reading: "Of course [how very confident he can now be], where poetry is concerned there is no such thing as certainty of interpretation" (200).

Fortunately Kirkham like all serious readers cannot proceed if that proposition excludes the possibility of a distinction between certainty and stabilized conjecture. He presents his own readings with conviction, and while a more overt evaluative perspective would have guarded that conviction against the lurking disruptions of the fashionable and all too general disbelief in certainty, he compensates by paying respectful attention to the readings of others. His venture is refreshingly collaborative: he continually measures his conclusions against the most influential ones of others, especially F. R. Leavis and Edna Longley. If he doesn't believe that certainty is possible, he certainly gives one the impression that he believes that progress toward less uncertainty is possible. The other strengths of this book would not be possible without that. Perhaps encouraged by Edward Thomas himself, Kirkham brings a vigorous common sense to several contentious issues. He agrees with Thomas that "literature makes not a copy but 'an equivalent of speech'" (149), and that "form is both a confinement and a necessity" (175), thus undermining his own unconsidered contention that Thomas like all Romantics is dedicated to the expression of immediacy and spontaneity (168). He refuses that recent critical convention that makes an *inevitable* separation between "the poet" and "the speaker in the poem" (154). He draws a helpful distinction between the "prosaic" realism of Hardy, Frost, and Thomas and the "literary" realism of Eliot and Pound, the latter characterized by "exquisite" ironic talk of the boulevards as opposed to the intimate plainness of the former (158); a little later he adds, "fact is pursued [by Frost and Thomas] because it is the necessary ground of love" (177). In fact plainness in verse is admirably defended throughout, but especially in what is perhaps the best chapter in the book, Chapter 8: "Language and Movement."

We must then be grateful for this book; it is probably the best of the lengthy studies we have so far. He does advance, if a little too

single-mindedly, the argument over Thomas's place within the traditions. And his readings are sensitive, intelligent, and intricately responsive to subtleties — it's just that he is sometimes too keenly in search of subtlety, pushing delicate, poised complexities of statement over the edge into mysteries and paradoxes, and when that is done, too ready to celebrate it as sincerity and honesty. He is of course not alone in this century in continuing to believe that the imagination is "organic" and has a privileged and almost antagonistic position over reason in the poetic act — the title of this book warns us. It leads him to the easy belief that reserve in a modern poem must be a sign of insecurity, and this releases the critic's ingenuity.

Kirkham has done for the criticism what R. George Thomas did a couple years ago for the biography: he has striven to see the "whole" man, bringing the prose and poetry together further to counter the popular notion that Thomas was suddenly transformed from a literary journeyman into a poet by the intervention of Robert Frost and the outbreak of war. But while looking for the whole, complex, multi-sided man in individual poems, he de-emphasizes the poet at his best and therefore a way of distinguishing the best poems. And certainly *that* man is to be found when he transcended his melancholia and despair to satisfy what R. George Thomas calls his "urgency to convince." His wife, Helen, has said, "Edward was always a truth teller," but he could have only been truly satisfied with telling the truth, not of our inevitable uncertainty, but of the "country creed" he defended so eloquently in his most mature and assured work, when he achieved what he himself called "a deep ease and confidence . . . underneath that unrest." And again, in his own words: "It is not, however, to a man walking for pleasure that we shall go for a sense of roads, but to one like Bunyan. *Pilgrim's Progress* is full of the sense of roads." The man who wrote that could not be satisfied with the man Michael Kirkham finds seventy years on in the poems.

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Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon, *Re-Writing English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class*. London: Methuen, New Accents, 1986. pp. 188. £4.95 pb.

Re-Writing English offers valuable insights into major cultural-political debates which have preoccupied feminist and socialist academics in Britain since the late seventies. The book originated in the collaborative work of the literature group in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and it manifests several important features of the Centre's contribution to the theory and

practice of cultural politics which are often marginalized or even ignored, especially perhaps by those critics who seek to construct an analysis of the Centre's "position" through a selective appraisal of its publications. In particular, the challenges associated with feminism cannot be underestimated, leading not only to a re-examination and reconstitution of working practices and organization within the Centre itself but also to fundamental questions concerning the relation between radically critical academic theory, paradoxically "located" and isolated within institutions of Higher Education, and the wider context of the social formation in which cultural and political strategies, policies and practices may be developed.

Re-Writing English, then, is very much concerned with the high walls of the English academy, the entrances to which are guarded by the highly selective processes of a National examination system while the garden itself has been regularly weeded to uproot anything not dedicated to preserving the rarified transcendence of canonic literature. Within English culture the tension between liberal definitions of education, the function of literary studies, and material socio-political realities has long been fraught with contradiction and complexity. As an instance of such discursive negotiations, The Newbolt Committee's *The Teaching of English in England*, a 1921 government report, offers some useful illumination of the historical formation within which the "discipline" of "English" was forged. Here, the literary tradition is clearly defined as both profoundly "national" and "universal," as having "nothing to do with the social problem" (i.e., class and unemployment, which are "political" affairs) while also offering a mode of resistance to the threatening "culture of Bolshevism." Subsequently the interwar era witnessed the institutionalization of literary culture as a fulcrum of liberal education while proletarian culture and its heterogeneous institutions, inevitably confronting the realities of mass unemployment, poverty and depression, suffered the fate of marginalization both then and subsequently in critical discourse.

The thirties as a decade has always been important to the left in Britain. Never more so, perhaps, than in recent years which have seen the decline of traditional manufacturing industries, mass unemployment, the exacerbation of a North-South divide together with the advent and establishment of the new authoritarian-populist right and its anti-statist dismantling of both the nationalized industries and the welfare state in the interests of a market economy. *Re-Writing English* examines the basis of class and gender politics upon which narratives of the past may be constituted with particular reference to the parallels and crucial differences between the thirties and contemporary British culture.

A second context for the book is the *New Accents* series itself. Probably the best-known volume in the U.S.A. is Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (again deriving out of the Birmingham Centre), but in Britain the series was probably at its most influential in the late seventies and early eighties when a number of contributions addressed the ways in which a variety of theoretical perspectives significantly undermine traditional conceptions of "literature" and literary-critical practices of analysis.¹ Following hard on the heels of the Cambridge "crisis" in English studies — the outlines of which have been traced by Raymond Williams in *Writing in Society*² — the *New Accents* collection of essays entitled *Re-Reading English* attained a certain notoriety, at least in the trade journals (e.g., *The Times Literary Supplement*).³ Here the focus of attention was the discipline of "English," its history and the institutions through which its ideological character had been sustained together with analysis and applications of alternative, theoretically-informed critical practices. Largely, of course, the collection had most resonance, one way or another, for those who taught English in Higher Education, despite gestures towards other sectors. *Re-Writing English* takes up the debate concerning the nature and values of liberal English studies, offering a historical critique of the culture and politics of "Englishness" and its location within literacy and "literature," while attempting to do more than gesture towards a wider social context than is constituted around the academy. Thus, the historically diverse social practices of reading and writing provide the basis upon which Batsleer, *et al.*, proceed to discuss the discipline of literature within the curriculum and its institutions and then working-class writing, journals and educational institutions in the inter-war period. Moving on to other forms of writing/reading largely ignored by mainstream literary analysis, two chapters focus on gender and genres of popular fiction — masculinity and the thriller, the structuring conventions of romantic fiction. Both are thought-provoking and suggestive accounts of the cultural relations between textual representation, narrative pleasure and social subjectivities. "Some Women Reading," the book's penultimate chapter — offered as "more provisional than the rest of the book" — could perhaps have followed the discussion of popular fiction to highlight the problematic issues involved in the active processes of reading/textual construction under determinate social conditions.

However, the necessarily condensed intervening chapter is a valuable exploration of the impact of feminism on both writing and criticism. In the latter case four strands of criticism are outlined in relationship to work being done in schools, in further and higher education and in adult education, crucially raising questions not only of curriculum content but also of pedagogic practice and the

role of the teacher. The "strands" delineated are feminist readings of canonical texts (Millett, Ellman); fiction as representation of social and historical aspects of women's experience (most developed in Britain); women writers as a kind of "'subcultural' group apart from, and in opposition to, the dominant male culture" (111); and "deconstructive" criticism, in many ways the most problematic strand, especially in its ahistorical tendency and its opposition to realist writing. The critique offered of all four, however, is that:

they have in common a lack of engagement with contemporary writing, and a disabling distance from the practical circumstances and struggles which determine access to creativity. They lack too a sense of the wider contexts in which women read and talk about their reading, particularly those outside and independent of any formal structure. (113)

The remainder of the section poses key questions about the relation between feminism and criticism, offering some practical suggestions about "how feminists might approach literature, or rather English, in different educational contexts" (117). In their discussion of writing the concentration is on the emergence of a feminist culture, its impact on cultural institutions and publishing especially through writers' workshops which have fostered the desire to reclaim access to "the creative resources systematically denied to most people" (138). Here, as elsewhere, the writers eschew the programmatic and take full account of the tensions and contradictions between various alternative strategies and cultural practices.

The concluding chapter maintains this openness in its examination of the continuities and discontinuities between the class-cultural politics of the thirties and any socialist-feminist initiatives which may be undertaken in Thatcherite Britain. Perhaps the writers could have offered a more thorough-going analysis of that context — the displacement of economic crisis onto the education system, discourses of "social need," the attack on Humanities and critical Social Science allied to restructuring and limiting (even further!) access to Higher Education, the impact of "new" technology within very "old" power structures and so on. In such a context it is perhaps pertinent to remind ourselves that "school" derives from the Greek word *Scholé*, with its simultaneous connotations of intellectual debate and freedom from material necessity, while "academy" finds its origins in Akademos, the man who owned the garden in which Plato and his students were enabled to debate philosophical issues. In English education there has never been too much doubt about who owns the garden in terms of the relation between access, curriculum, social class and freedom from material necessity. To this "history" must be added analysis of gender inequality and, as the writers admit, ethnicity. In its attempt to instate the value and heterogeneity

of reading, speaking and writing as a means to power and control in our lives, however, *Re-Writing English* does much to prise the ivy away from the crumbling walls.

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NOTES

¹ I am thinking here, for instance, of Terence Hawkes' *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977), Tony Bennett's *Formalism and Marxism* (1979), Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980).

² Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society*. (London: Verso, 1985).

³ Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Re-Reading English*. (London: Methuen, 1982).

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