Book Reviews

Chinweizu. *Voices from Twentieth Century Africa.* London: Faber, 1987. pp. 424. £6.95.

Chinweizu's collection is a bulging 424 pages in which the element of story is strong, the characters are vivid, and the incidents clear. Like any literature, this literature is of its society and of its culture, but it doesn't call for much background knowledge. So although a few of the extracts could have done with a brief introduction providing context or background, the editor's decision to keep all such paraphernalia down to a minimum is justified: the language is accessible to non-professional readers, and the chosen texts communicate directly.

Those who read for pleasure, then, should have no problems. If they want to be hooked they should proceed at once to "Men and Women" (240-300) where they are sure to recognize themselves in one or other of the wide range of attitudes and feelings there expressed in modern and traditional forms and styles, and in various mixtures of form and style.

There are some outstanding pieces in the "Men and Women" section. In prose there are: "Konni and Uta," an urban story of a man bewitched by a city prostitute; a clash of generations — in this case mother and daughter — in a well-chosen extract from a play by Ama Ata Aidoo; a wicked first-person narration about a man who doesn't really think he should be expected to choose between two women in "Tirenje or Monde?" (266) and a delightful Yoruba tale of a woman's revenge on a jealous husband in "Not Even God is Ripe Enough to Catch a Woman in Love" (277); this is followed by an Acholi woman's prayer to the lightning to strike her husband and leave her lover. The verse is in turn ribald, comic, intense, always highly rhythmic and it fetches its images like second nature out of the social and cultural practices of the community. Love in these poems can be described with gusto in sheer physical terms, or by a subtle and moving indirection as in this song from Baule concerning

an absent husband: "Whenever I go out of the village / and see a stone / or a tree in the distance, / I think: / It is my husband."

The "Men and Women" subsection is the longest in Part II "The Local and Intimate Turf" where Chinweizu inducts us into the social round and into the major social processes. We may call this the secular part of the anthology so long as we remember that there is no law of the sea and no territorial disputes between secular and religious, living and dead, or for that matter between different social activities either in the writings or in the societies out of which they come. So a ritual song celebrating the birth of twins in the "Birth and Childhood" subsection focuses on the size of the happy parents' sexual organs; the making of a gold trinket (223-31) becomes an instance of possession by the spirits of "fire and gold of fire and air," and of the self-transcendence of the artist; and still in the "Work and Play" section, a "Girls' Song for the Game of 'Pots'" becomes an act of immersion by ritual stages in culture and place, ending as a celebration of mother or the source of all life.

In Part I "The Arena of Public Affairs," most of the extracts are from authors (individual artists) belonging to the modern period. Chinweizu calls these "works from state-elite culture." Here can be found literary responses to successive invasions, to native and national resistance, and to civil strife; and there are formulations and reformulations of the contract between rulers and ruled. There is the re-telling of the Hausa "Adamu and his Beautiful Wife," a talk that is satisfying in itself, and still more rich with metaphorical possibilities; there are vivid characters like the iron lady in Abdi Sheik Abdi's tale of "Arrawelo: The Castrator of Men"; and there is the ironic wit of Ayi Kwei Armah's "Halfway to Nirvana" whose main character, the conference-fly Christian Mohammed Tumbo (the son of a Muslim and a Christian is "a compromise"), has the hardy skill of sleeping with his eyes open: after the most tedious academic sessions he is fresh for the real thing, the demanding exploits at the bar and elsewhere.

But there is in this section also, the sufferings of African peoples in history — hopelessness and impatience in South Africa ("Azania is Tired"), the man-made terror of sudden death in war ("A Warrior's Lament"), and the unnaturalness of civil war (Okigbo's brilliant "Elegy for Slit-Drum").

In Part III "Fields of Wonders," the bulk of the material is drawn from oral and traditional sources, and we are enabled to share in the sensibility of a people in perpetual awe, a people forever seeking out the story of the cosmic mysteries, of how things and creatures came into the world, and of the human encounter with Time, Death and the ever-present Gods: "If you want to understand me / come, bend over this soul of Africa." It is in a subsection of Part III under "Affir-

mations, Lamentations, Meditations" that Chinweizu gives proud place to the culture's self-assertion in Lawino's scornful and passionate essay on the folly of her husband who has turned to the new imported ways ("The Graceful Giraffe Cannot Become a Monkey" 379-90).

But Chinweizu wants to re-draw the map of African literature, and this intention determines who is excluded from the gathering and how the book is structured; it also accounts for the strong preference boldly (and rightly) given to traditional African literature (mainly oral) and to the literatures written in African languages that manage to relate intimately to the tradition even while they seek to render contemporary African experience.

According to Chinweizu, there was writing of consequence in Africa over five thousand years ago, long before Europe brought the Light and the Law. Since that visitation, however (and because of it), new African Literatures in Portuguese, French and English have emerged. It rankles with Chinweizu that it is these literatures that people think of when they speak of African literature when, as a matter of fact, there are current and lively literatures in African languages both in writing and in the form of oral literature. A true projection of African Literature should comprehend all the strands of contemporary African literature and their antecedents, and it should trace the links that existed and are possible between them.

To re-draw the map of African Literature, Chinweizu includes all these literatures in his anthology. Samples from the African literatures being produced in indigenous languages are presented in English renderings. Selections from the new African literatures in European languages are admitted if they serve a social and cultural function and if they do so at a level that can be understood by the non-academic reader. The picture is made true, and the proper norms and models are built into the enterprise, with the inclusion of epics, fables, tales, songs and proverbs from the older oral literature, especially those that have enjoyed a twentieth-century African audience. For this makes them part of "the twentieth century African conversation about the African experience of life."

There can't be anybody these last ten years who denies the status of "literature" to oral literature, or who doubts the importance of the oral tradition for African culture and African writing. But Chinweizu's is the first anthology that seeks to include so much of the oral and traditional material. And it is the first to put it side by side with the other types out of a conviction that while they may differ they are not antagonistic to one another, and, therefore, no partitions should be left between them.

Chinweizu is not easy. He castigates those who believe that African literature is "a new and fledgling" twentieth-century product that

came of age with the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Wole Soyinka in 1986. He tilts at "specialist academic circles" and speaks of "the conventional official perceptions" as if he really believes there is an Establishment actively promoting "Euro-assimilationist junk" and encouraging writers like Soyinka to produce "obscurantist" and "indecipherable" specimens of "Euromodernist jargon." Where are those mysterious people? Who are they? Where does Chinweizu get his vocabulary?

Chinweizu's anthology is a very interesting compilation that can give pleasure to the non-professional reader. It also makes the points about African Literature that the editor wants it to make. It would have done both better if there had been some selections from Gabriel Okara, Tchicaya U Tam'si, and a more sympathetic representation of Soyinka. It would have many more friends if Chinweizu can be persuaded to behave less badly in his Introduction in future editions and allow the material he has so skilfully assembled to speak for itself.

University of the West Indies, St. Augustine KENNETH RAMCHAND

Mark Williams, ed. *The Caxton Press Anthology: New Zealand Poetry 1972-1986.* Christchurch: Caxton, 1987. pp. 182. $24.95 pb.

Published nearly half a century ago, the first thoroughly indigenous anthology of New Zealand poetry (or, as some would point out, of white or *pakeha* poetry) was Allen Curnow's now classic *A Book of New Zealand Verse 1923-1945.* It was also published by the Caxton Press and it authoritatively established the starting-point of a fully New Zealand tradition of poetry. My point in mentioning this is to put it alongside Mark Williams's recent anthology *New Zealand Poetry 1972-1986.* Williams's time parameters have several significances.

Most significantly, he has felt free to put aside a half century of poetry, has confined himself to a short fifteen-year period and yet has produced a gratifyingly strong book. This is confidence, and justifiable confidence. The youngest poet here, Gregory O'Brien (b. 1961), who is also a painter, has provided a jaunty cover illustration, "New Zealand Landscape with 1957 Chrysler." Presumably the rural landscape below this sky-flying tail-finned American automobile also dates from 1957. The right-hand panel of the painting shows, in contrast, a cityscape of skyscrapers, with suggestions of ubiquitous mall and a natural landscape cut down to size and contained. This cityscape contains several in-jokes. The tallest building, for example, is labelled "Davis Corp," apparently an allusion to the young experimental poet Leigh Davis who, in his other hat, is "something in the city." Way down below this good-humoured towering monument to Davis is a partly obscured graffito which says, "Curnow Was Here," a nice

allusion to the fact that had Curnow not "been there," New Zealand would most certainly not have the well-developed canon of poetry it has today. Above Curnow's name in the painting, a passing truck carries the gently humorous banner, "Stamp Out Bare Feet! BAXTER SHOES." This alludes to New Zealand's other internationally established poet, James K. Baxter, the saint of the sixties, who (with a touch of ostentation) lived in poverty and, in the last years before his untimely death in 1972, went barefoot garbed in Franciscan style. Well, I've digressed in a way, but all of O'Brien's visual work is like this, it would be pleasant to have some to live around!

Baxter died in 1972, so his strongly romantic persona is absent from Williams's anthology. In the 1950s and 1960s, Baxter and Curnow were the opposite ends of the poetic spectrum. The "Wellington group" of Baxter's heyday, supposedly "romantic" in orientation, squabbled with the Auckland poets (not a group), a generational quarrel in the guise of nationalism vs. internationalism. These dead issues are pertinent because, for what it's worth, without Baxter, Louis Johnson or Peter Bland, Williams's anthology includes no significant poet to represent that Wellington impulse.

Williams characterizes the brief period 1969 to 1971 as transitional and suggests that two periodicals, the iconoclastic and lively but short-lived *Freed* and Robin Duddings's *Islands*, set the agenda for the 1970s and into the 1980s. Several significant poets appeared at the beginning of the seventies, notably Bill Manhire and Ian Wedde. If "the dada-anarchism" of *Freed* refocused the critical debate onto the importance of language or language-as-form, the other force responsible for the shift is C. K. Stead, as critic more than as poet. Long recognized as New Zealand's foremost literary critic, Stead (largely through his expertise in the international Modernist poets) campaigned in favour of open form or, to put it another way, for the primacy of language over representation.

Bill Manhire enters the picture at this point, with a poetry of enigma, or rather a poetry of energetic particulars in which the overriding strategy (as Williams points out) is deferral of meaning. One effect in Manhire's poetry is a sense as of something being translated, of the elusiveness of the right language, but a countervailing and complementary effect is that of particularization. The poems' interest is in the tension between these two effects. In the literary context of New Zealand, this was a new *kind* of sophistication.

A similar and related sophistication is to be found in the poems of Elizabeth Smither, although she is altogether zanier and it might be suggested that hers is a poetry of the non sequitur or the inconsequentiality which reverberates:

> I think Joan Didion has died
> I think I read it somewhere

> And something about her face
> Leads one to add two and two.

Hers is a surface of the bizarre and comic which suddenly lurches into grimmer depths.

In some respects, Ian Wedde is the most prominent and courageous of these "third generation" poets. He it was who co-edited (and, in effect, edited) the current *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (which replaced, without entirely superseding, Curnow's earlier model) and who had the daring to include whole swatches of Maori verse in bilingual versions. Wedde is a fine craftsman, who has learnt from a range of American poets from Williams to Ammons, who includes those influences with considerable aplomb, whose voice ranges with ease from the formal to the colloquial, and who, like Manhire, has tackled what some see as the language/representation dichotomy by being confidently inclusive:

> This endless hunt for meanings,
> finally a kind of curious greed.

Mark Williams in his extensive Introduction ranges further and deeper than I can here. I'll conclude by returning to Allen Curnow, who ended a sonnet more than forty years ago:

> Not I, some child, born in a marvellous year,
> Will learn the trick of standing upright here.

On the evidence of this anthology, that "marvellous year" has arrived, at least in poetry. Something like three decades ago, visiting New York, Curnow wrote of "This City we have been building so long." He was making a claim (and the line encompasses geography and the psyche and poetry), beginning the expansion of New Zealand. In the text under review, we find confirmations of this expansion, not only in the confidence of Manhire, Smither and Wedde, but also pervasively in, say, a seemingly casual, but deliberate, moment in Murray Edmond's "A Letter About Cars" (to Russell Haley): "I connect us by this quality of being coeval — like Malvern Hill and Rangiriri," or in the historical/geographical range of Michael Jackson's fine sequence "Stone" (though why is the Gaston Bachelard epigraph in German?).

A useful book to add to both the Penguin anthologies mentioned above, this collection is, throughout, exhilarating to read.

University of Victoria CHARLES (MIKE) DOYLE

Maud Ellmann. *The Poetics of Impersonality*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987. pp. 207. $22.50.

The doctrine of poetic impersonality is a central feature of modernist aesthetics. According to T. S. Eliot, its most ardent exponent, poetic impersonality results when "[the poet] has ceased to be interested in one's own emotions and experiences except as material"[1] for his poetry. Eliot and Ezra Pound are often viewed as champions of poetic impersonality. Their critical writings attempt to define what this impersonality is and their poetry is permeated by the doctrine. Maud Ellmann joins the list of critics who look at the issue of impersonality in their works. Her book presents an original and penetrating discussion of the topic and is a worthwhile addition to bookshelves already overburdened by lesser works on the subject.

Ellmann's book involves two different but overlapping projects. On the one hand, it traces the vicissitudes of impersonality in the theories of Eliot and Pound; but it also studies how their poems "murder and create" their fictive selves. For these texts manufacture forms of subjectivity, rather than reflecting personalities already made (ix). Ellmann concentrates on the theories of each man and then follows this with close readings of his major poems.

The book's first part is devoted to Eliot's work while the second gives Pound's theories a briefer treatment. Eliot's early articulations of the doctrine are couched largely in aesthetic terms and generally deal with the artist's relation to his art and to his tradition. This is reinscribed in Eliot's post-conversion theory resulting in a much more politicized version. As Ellmann says, "to achieve impersonality in 1933, the artist must submit to orthodoxy and its absolute authority, rather than to the shifting values of tradition" (46) that had been the criterion in 1919. In poetry this means a return to speech and a movement away from writing, for "[o]nly a return to speech can save tradition from the counterforces which corrode it from within, be they writing, silence, heresy, displacement, privacy" (57). Yet this retreat from the written word into the spoken word is illusory for "speech itself is tainted by the writing it excludes, just as discourse is imbued with heresy" (57). In other words, Eliot's attempts to exclude personality from poetry are doomed by the fact that the whole process is inevitably implicated by the personality it seeks to banish. This is true of Pound who also "demands impersonality and yet remains addicted to its contrary" (129). In fact, Ellmann stresses that "[b]oth poets use the doctrine of impersonality to attack their own infatuation with its opposite. Both conscript the doctrine into their political campaigns, exposing its reactionary implications. Both employ personae in their early poetry in order to conceal their subjectivity, and both perceive the limitations of this practice, too. Later their epic verse becomes impersonal and autobiographical at once" (129). However,

Ellmann believes that Pound was less enthusiastic than Eliot in his promotion of the doctrine of impersonality because he becomes "obsessed with self-creation" (129) as his career progresses.

Although the accounts of the two men's theories are concise, well documented, and convincing, the book's real strength is Ellmann's readings of the poems. In Part I she deals with poems from three different phases of Eliot's career: the early years, up to "Gerontion"; *The Waste Land*; and the post-conversion poetry including *Four Quartets*. Her readings of the early poems and *Four Quartets* are excellent; particularly noteworthy is her thought-provoking discussion of the latter. She moves from "Burnt Norton" to "Little Gidding" showing how "[t]he whole poem muses on the breach between the written and the writing selves, never answering the questions that it has to pose" (115), but through the posing of them illustrating the fact that "speech emerges out of the decay of speech" (117). Ellmann admits that the "text resists this reading" (117), yet by concentrating "upon the moments when the text escapes its complacencies" she shows us where "its terror and its beauty reemerge" (117-18). Her treatment of *The Waste Land* is disappointing and is one of the study's few weaknesses. Here she relies so heavily on Freudian and neo-Freudian concepts that she comes perilously close to a reductivist account of this poem. *The Waste Land* defies reductive readings of it; it is about more than waste and exclusion and to reduce it to a Freudian dream world in which the speakers' traumas are depicted and where death is repeated as if it were desire is to somehow take away something from its richness and complexity.

Ellmann's consideration of Pound's poetry is restricted to the two chapters that constitute Part II of the book. In the first chapter she looks briefly at some of Pound's early poems and his use of masks in them to show Pound's early notions about impersonality. Ellmann then moves to *Mauberley* in order to illustrate Pound's own shifting views on personality and his developing interests in the economy of personality and art. She claims that "with its double signature [Pound and Mauberley as authors], the text itself is two-faced, both half-ruined. One could say that they are two faces of the same coin: for there are many hints that Mauberley's art consists in striking coins, where the face is almost always shown in profile" (155). The final chapter deals with Pound's later work and it bears the suggestive title of "The Erasure of History." Here Ellmann looks at *The Cantos*. She says "[h]is poem tells the history of its author, an author who becomes a history in the interminable process of his own inscription. Poem and poet weave each other's destinies" (161). In essence, Pound, like Eliot, is unable to prevent personality from creeping into his poetry and in Pound's case this results in the very private speech which

"interferes with the distribution of the Logos" that he had sought to avoid.

By the book's end, we must agree with Ellmann's comment that "the terms 'personal' and 'impersonal' have probably outlived their usefulness" (197). The simple aesthetic notion of impersonality as involving the poet's deliberate withholding of his presence in his poem has been thoroughly exploded by Ellmann's exposure of the many other, less visible, reasons that Eliot and Pound had for developing their doctrine. Political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological ideologies have all been revealed and each of these has also been found present in the poems which the two men wrote. *The Poetics of Impersonality* makes it impossible ever to read modernist assertions of impersonality without questioning at which points in the text the gaps exist which will allow personality and other forces of society to seep in. As hard as Eliot, Pound, and other moderns fought to exclude self and society from their texts, Ellmann clearly shows us that the very act of writing is implicated by the forces which they wish to exclude and is, therefore, forever tied to just those forces they thought they had banished. Her capable blending of post-structuralist theory and a solid historical sense makes this book both a timely contemporary addition to the ongoing debate of moderism and an example of sound scholarship which illuminates the many forces at work in this chaotic literary period.

NOTE

[1] T. S. Eliot, "Introduction," *Le Serpent*, by Paul Valéry (London: R. Cobden-Sanderson, 1924): 12.

MARY-ANN GILLIES

Neil K. Besner. *The Light of Imagination: Mavis Gallant's Fiction.* Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1988. pp. xiv, 171. $29.95.

In his preface to *The Light of Imagination*, the first full-length study of Mavis Gallant's fiction,[1] Neil Besner warns that "close readers wishing to take interpretive revenge on Gallant's art may find themselves lost in a labyrinth of particulars which seem to refuse to lead toward generalization" (x-xi). Unfortunately, Besner's study constructs its own "labyrinth of particulars" where the few potentially interesting or useful or self-conscious readings are lost either in plot summary or in the metaphoric displacements of Besner's own text. Of course, my reading of his text assumes that interesting, useful readings are linguistically and analytically self-conscious, both of the texts they read and of the text they construct in their readings.

Perhaps the structure of the book, a residual effect of its origin in a Ph.D. dissertation,[2] with its seven chapters, six "on" the short story collections, one "on" the novels, is to blame for the feeling one has that all of Gallant's work will be (too often tediously and laboriously) "covered."[3] But even more worrying are Besner's statements that this will *not* be another cursory look at plot. For example, not one page after Besner has said that Gallant's work "challenges, engages, and educates her readers at the same time that it invites sustained critical study" becomes, not yet plot summary, but biography: "it is best [?] to summarize what is known about Gallant's early life" (1). On the next page, Besner's argument defers again to this unquestioned and unarticulated "best" method:

> Given the sharp focus in much of Gallant's fiction on the dangerous cross-currents of memory and imagination swirling around the past, it is *best* to read the Linnet Muir stories first as fictions, and then as semi-autobiographical fictions. (2; italics mine)

Like much of the argument in the book, the preface dismisses and then assumes contradictory methodological positions, from biography to paraphrase to formalism. The reader is left asking, repeatedly, what methodology *is* this text working with/in?

A sentence near the end of the preface offers, again, a potentially promising answer:

> Gallant's fiction invites readers to attend first to its surface and style; interpretation becomes a form of attention rather than a process of inference or deduction. (xi)

Unfortunately, the sentence which follows — the last sentence of the preface — breaks this promise when it says, awkwardly, "The kind of attention Gallant's stories cultivate, this study suggests, illuminates our readings of the past as documented, narrated history, as recorded, reported memory, and as imagined, fictional presence" (xi). I am not sure how stories "cultivate" a "kind" of attention, nor how the metaphor of "cultivation" transmutes into the metaphor of "illumination." Does the "kind of attention" illuminate? Do we do the work? Or does the "cultivation" illuminate? Does the text do the work for us? And what is the relation between the "kind of attention" that Gallant's fiction teaches us to bring and the way we read the past? Is it only after our encounter with Gallant's fiction that we can read the past "as documented, narrated history, as recorded, reported memory, and as imagined, fictional presence"? What part, in all of these metaphors (each of which suggests an unexamined correspondence between illumination and reading, past and presence, imagination and fiction), does the title — *The Light of Imagination* — play? What is ("the") "light"? What is "imagination"? For Gallant? For Besner?

"History and Memory in the 'Light of Imagination'" is the title of Besner's fifth chapter, which reads stories *From the Fifteenth District*. In the following passage from "The Moslem Wife" Besner tries to show his reader (t)his light:

> Desperately seeking the waiter, she turned to the cafe behind them and saw the last light of the long afternoon strike the mirror above the bar — a flash in a tunnel; hands juggling with fire. That unexpected play, at a remove, borne indoors, displayed to anyone who could stare without blinking, was a complete story. It was the brightness on the looking glass, the only part of a life, or a love, or a promise, that could never be concealed, changed, or corrupted. (115)

"This image represents," Besner writes, "the 'light of imagination', fusing sunlight with insight, history with memory. It is a '*brightness* on the *looking* glass', rather than simply a flat image on a mirror" (115). His argument continues: "[S]till, whether she wanted to see it or not, the light of imagination danced all over the square":

> The moment of this light is a moment of illumination, of self in sunlight... The 'light of imagination' could resolve the apparent dualities of self against world, subject against object, by fusing history with memory, sunlight with insight, diachronic with synchronic time. (115)

The "light of imagination" may be understood, Besner argues in Chapter 6 on *Home Truths*, as "a version of Gallant's synthesis of memory and history in a moment of presence" (139).

How does Besner reach this conclusion? Gallant's passage suggests that "light" ("the complete story") is a fleeting, duplicitous, and dangerous thing, a "flash in a tunnel," "hands juggling with fire." Like language, Gallant "sees" light as a representation of a representation, a reflection in a mirror. Near the end of Gallant's "Varieties of Exile," Linnett Muir comes to a similar realization, expressed in different terms:

> I was happy for him [Francis Cairns] that he would never need to return to the commuting train and the loneliness and be forced to relive his own past. I wanted to write a casual letter saying so. One's impulse was always to write to the dead. (*Home Truths* 280-81)

As so much of Gallant's work does, this passage suggests that writing plays a primary and irreducible role in the construction of what Besner calls "imagination," what I would describe as the "letters" we always want to write to the dead. For Gallant, "light" too is a fiction.

In the following passage, Gallant speaks directly of language and reading as primary in the writer's life and work (and are we all not writers when we struggle in language?):

> there is no such thing as a writer who has escaped being influenced.... Corruption — if that is the word — sets in from the moment a child learns

> to speak and to hear language used and misused. . . . For 'influence' I would be inclined to substitute 'acquisition' . . . The beginning writer has to choose, tear to pieces, spit out, chew up, and assimilate as naturally as a young animal, as naturally and as ruthlessly. ("What is Style?" *Paris Notebooks* 178)

Besner's study does not attend to the uses and misuses of language in Gallant's work. Moreover, Besner seems unaware of syntactic and semantic convolutions in his own, albeit lyrical, prose. I leave you with one final example, from the last sentence in the book:

> reading in the light of imagination, seeing its inventions, its dance of illumination across the moments of Gallant's fiction, we might hear voices keeping time in memory's histories of home. (153)

These metaphors defer meaning by displacing one another — a potentially innovative critical strategy. But the voices which "keep time" signify, not a carefully constructed reading, but another series of displacements: "memory's histories of home." If memory and history imply acts of fictionalized reconstruction, if "home" is known only in memory's histories, is Besner's point that the origin — the light of imagination — is endlessly deferred? Certainly such a reading of "home," in *Home Truths* and elsewhere, would be extremely useful. But Besner's study does not give us such readings. There is no discussion of the problematic relations between memory, history, and language in Gallant's fiction. Besner leaves us to find our own ways home, with, but too often without, Gallant.

SUSAN RUDY DORSCHT

NOTES

[1] By "full-length" I mean that this study deals with all of Gallant's fiction except the most recent collection, *In Transit*, which has just appeared.

[2] Neil K. Besner, "History and Memory in the Light of Imagination," diss., U of British Columbia, 1983. Unfortunately, the book does not include all of the very useful bibliographical information one can find in the dissertation.

[3] I have italicized "on" and "coverage" to emphasize the literal meanings of these metaphors. Besner's chapters quite literally sit "on" the stories, holding them down, "covering" them up, not opening them out.

Terrence Craig. *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction, 1905-1980*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1987. pp. xii, 163. $23.95.

Racism is a nasty can of worms however you look at it. There is first the obvious evil of racism as justification for the mistreatment of certain groups, whether the apparently superficial examples of Canadian "paki jokes" or the systematic depth of Nazi Germany's "final

solution." There is also the difficulty of what might be termed "racialism." African négritude is a good example, in which an ethnic group usually discriminated against develops a theory of superiority based on stereotypes similar to those which the racists used to oppress them.

Another problem is the vagueness of the term "race." In French it has often been used to mean a "nation." This makes the Québecois not just a different cultural group but a different race. Opposed to this are the many theorists who deny the validity of any concept of race. In their terms, even the apparently obvious distinctions, such as those between a European Caucasian and an Australian Aborigine, cannot be usefully described as a racial difference. The majority of the points of division are cultural and even the most obvious "typical" physical features vary so much as to be of little use in ascertaining a clear line between those in a racial group and those outside it.

Terrence Craig's study touches on such issues but does not pursue them. This is perhaps just as well as their complexity can prove thwarting. They raise that type of discussion in which the subject can be proven not to exist. This would not be as very useful result when our old friend common sense tells us that racism is a central part of Canadian life.

Still, one might argue that Craig could have given such problems a bit more attention. Instead, the study devotes itself to paraphrases of what Craig regards as the central texts in the area. It is a good, at times excellent, example of the application of traditional critical methods to a central issue. The problem is that for the textual analysis of racism such methods are just not good enough.

To begin, Craig makes careful claims about the inclusiveness of his study but he inevitably misses important examples (the first obvious one I noted was Hubert Evans's ethnographic novel of native people, *Mist on the River*). The study would be more convincing if it admitted the selectivity of its sample. There are other similar gaps of admission. The subject treated asks for, perhaps demands, a clearly defined critical position. If race is, as Craig states, "ambiguous and vague," then a work on racism needs more than the type of criticism which labels *The Sacrifice* "not primarily a race-conscious novel." The simple answer is, I think it is. Who wins?

Craig claims to present a "sociological view of literature" but he provides no examples of the many sociological theories of literature. His explicit avoidance of Marxist approaches implies what sociologies he rejects but that doesn't show what he is using. In any case, the agenda is clearly prescriptive: "literature has a responsibility and an established function to draw attention to social problems and to provide the moral leadership to search for solutions." In a study which so clearly avoids taking a theoretical or political stance from which to judge this search, it is difficult to create for "moral leadership" a clear

definition. One is tempted to guess it is anything which leads in the way Craig finds suitable.

"Common sense" may tell us that racism is a problem but it can't define it. Craig makes interesting and often insightful comments but they remain of limited value because they are based on an assumption that "we all know what the book says." This problem is shown in Craig's periodic use of the first-person plural. Each "we" presents the readership of the study as homogeneous in a way which the study itself proves not to be true.

Another difficulty with the study is Craig's assumptions about evaluation. He states that "Stereotypes . . . can be detected in some serious work as well." Given that many sociological studies show how "stereotypes," of ethnicity, of gender, of age, pervade our society it is difficult to see how this could be otherwise. Craig maintains that stereotypes can be avoided by the characters: "denied by their human resistance to their sociological circumstances." This might sound good but it is rather difficult to see how it works. Craig's own study claims that a completely non-stereotypical figure is possible but such a character is rejected as not ethnic at all but rather a WASP with a strange name.

Craig's suggestion that some works are at least close to good on the non-stereotype scale seems to fall into the sort of teleological assumption which Foucault so often attacked: "they were very nasty in the past but now we're nice." Craig states of Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939): "The Indians began to come into their own, if only in print."

This is another comment which is hard to justify. The nineteenth and early twentieth century have made examples of texts which intended to be pro-native and which are immersed in the cultures represented. The attack on them would be that they are now considered neither sophisticated nor accurate. Does it take much cynicism to suggest that present fiction might look just as bad in eighty years? Does it take much more cynicism to suggest that if natives had, in any deep sense, "come into their own" "in print," they might be doing better in "life."

This study is an interesting and often very well-written look at a basic problem in Canadian literature but it could be much more. Craig could have discussed how a novel can be defined as ethnic. He could have examined more of the formal elements which shape the portraits of ethnic groups. And he should have given much more consideration to the problematic of his own text. I think it was Pogo who said, "We have seen the enemy and it is us."

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Sidonie Smith. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. pp. xi, 211. $12.95 pb.

Donna C. Stanton, ed. *The Female Autograph.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. pp. xi, 244. $25.90.

Trends in literary theory and criticism have always tended to exclude women's autobiography from the literary canon. For several hundred years we have been dismissed from consideration for dwelling too much on the relationships of the private world rather than the achievements of the public. As well, we have been excluded because self-development has been seen as a progression towards an ever more individualistic ego-centred self, and what Anaïs Nin has called the "personal life, deeply lived," has not in the past been taken seriously by literary critics.

Now that thinkers from Nietzsche to Derrida have convinced literary theorists to take the personal self (or at least the constructed "fictional" self) seriously as the ultimate ground for knowing and being in the world, women's works should become central. Yet we still find them excluded from important studies, now more and more because women's stories, in the view of new androcentric standards, take the search for self too seriously, refusing to enjoy the postmodern game of self-invention, not learning to relax in the pleasurable postmodern activity of deconstructing our patriarchal selves, and insisting, as women from Margery Kempe to Kate Millett always have, on scratching through the quotidian detail of our lives in an effort to construct selves that will allow us to survive yet another permutation of patriarchy.

Two studies published in 1987 explore the "absence" that has been women's life-writing over several centuries. *The Female Autograph* (originally published as a series of essays in the *New York Literary Forum* in 1984) and *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography* work at examining a phenomenon that by all traditional standards does not even exist. Sidonie Smith's *Poetics* gives the ghost the firmest flesh, but does so, ironically, by insisting on the limitations of the same tradition of male models which she chides in her opening chapter. In "Autobiography Criticism and the Problematics of Gender," she gives a cogent summary of theory, exposing androcentric limitations and advocating the theories of difference that would legitimize women's autobiography. But then, surprisingly, she tells us that she will exclude letters, diaries and journals as well as oral histories even though these are "autobiography in the broadest sense" and restrict consideration of the "relationship of gender to genre to formal autobiography as it emerged in the West over the last 500 years, inquiring into the textual and contextual workings of texts that were written to

be published and thus addressed to that arbiter of all cultural ideologies, the public reader." It is no wonder she has to conclude that most of the works studied have the "life and vitality" forced out of them by male generic contracts, since she has excluded the forms women have traditionally practised with more freedom.

It should be said that inside her strict limitations Smith does a consistently informed and intelligent analysis of how women have written the "double story" of their marginalized selves, divided always between the effort to create a public self in the language of the father and yet give breath and life to another self, a feminine self which must be cast in deforming molds from religious hysteric through sentimental heroine to male-defined intellectual. She has an admirable grasp of the directions of Anglo-American and French autobiographical theory, both androcentric and feminist, and the first section of the study, "Theoretical Considerations" will be of unarguable use to critics and in the classroom. However, the "Readings" which follow these considerations are in some ways disappointing. Smith is firmly held by the limitations she has borrowed from the androcentric tradition. She creates, perhaps unconsciously, a hierarchy of women's works in which Margery Kempe's fourteenth-century account is labelled "voluble outpourings" whereas the American twentieth-century autobiographer, Maxine Hong Kingston, produces "self-reflexive meditations." We are led away from a consideration of the accomplishments of women who must weave a self despite the formal limitations placed on them, and towards a ranking of texts in which a Harriet Martineau is described as a "psychologically damaged nineteenth-century woman," a woman who achieved by sacrificing her "passional life" and a twentieth-century Kingston is described as achieving the artistic unity and victory of becoming "like her mother a mistress of the word in a culture that would privilege only . . . patriarchal descent." In a very subtle way, Smith's self-assumed limitations of genre, chronological ordering and the sometimes too negative tone of her readings of pre-twentieth-century autobiographers makes her guilty of the same error Patricia Yaeger (*Honey-Mad Women*) has observed concerning French feminists such as Hélène Cixous, an "exclusion of feminine precursors."

Smith is not the first feminist to make the mistake of privileging twentieth-century postmodern texts. After all, it is part of our androcentric literary tradition to build new positions by "murdering the father" as represented by the literary movement immediately preceding our own. We all live with that legacy, feminists included. *The Female Autograph*, in its very format, would seem to overcome that tendency. It denies narrow definitions by insisting on the word "Autogynography" rather than autobiography, and by allowing its essays to range from "The Female Hand in Heian Japan," through "The

Artist's Autograph in Letters and Paintings," to "Women as Law Clerks," thus refusing the limits of literary genre and periodization. The text is a refreshing corrective to Smith's too narrow scope, especially in Donna Stanton's introduction in which she describes "autogynography" not in terms of a limiting literary tradition, but in terms of a "global and essential therapeutic purpose: To constitute the female subject."

But despite the thoughtful substance of some of the essays, for example Catherine R. Stimpson's "The Female Sociograph: The Theater of Virginia Woolf's Letters," or Janel M. Mueller's analysis of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (which offers a more positive view than Smith's essay), Stanton's collection is limited by too many selections with large titles and disappointing content. The collection's biggest names are the most problematic in this regard. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar offer, in "Ceremonies of the Alphabet: Female Grandmatologies and the Female Authorgraph," nothing new in their conversion of Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" into female "anxiety of authorship" except to apply the construction of alphabets as metaphor for male power rather than the traditional pen/penis metaphor. The purpose and findings of Philip Lejeune's researches into vanity publishing by women remains unclear in his article and the surprisingly conventional "My Memory's Hyperbole" by Julia Kristeva, in which she describes her disillusion with "politics, including feminism," and with third world revolutions, contains nothing that we could not find in various French memoirs (or anti-memoirs) since Simone de Beauvoir's. Her championship of the United States as the new "David before the growing Goliath of the Third World" may well be meant as a clever irony, but in context seems gratuitous.

Kristeva's personal essay offers a curiously stale finish to Stanton's collection which promised so much in its format and opening. However, my disappointment with both these books is no indication of my future use of them. As writer and critic, but especially as teacher, I need these books desperately. They are water in a critical area that despite appearances to the contrary is still largely desert. They are challenging presences in the "dark continent" of the study of women's autobiography. Like Estelle Jelinek's *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography* and other works now emerging they are only beginning expeditions in the exploration of vast and varied landscapes. Hopefully, if exploration grows as it should, their most useful purpose will be as starting points, honoured as such, returned to at the start of each new journey, but receding quickly as new horizons arise.

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Books Received

BENNETT, BRUCE, ed. *A Sense of Exile: Essays in the Literature of the Asia-Pacific Region.* Centre for Studies in Australian Literature: U of Western Australia, 1988. pp. x, 244. $12.95 pb.

ECO, UMBERTO. *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce.* Trans. Ellon Esrock; Note to 1989 Edition by David Robey. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989. pp. xii, 96. $7.95 pb.

———. *The Open Work.* Trans. Anna Cancogni; Intr. David Robey. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989. pp. xxxii, 285. $17.95 pb.

FLORY, WENDY STALLARD. *The American Ezra Pound.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1989. pp. xiv, 247. $25.00.

HANSON, ELIZABETH. *The American Indian in American Literature: A Study in Metaphor.* Queenston, Ont.: Edward Mellen P, 1988. pp. 128. $39.95.

HARRISON, JIM. *Dalva.* New York: E. P. Dutton/Seymour Lawrence, 1988. pp. x, 324. $27.95.

HOLLANDER, JOHN. *Melodious Guile: Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1988. pp. x, 262. $28.50.

HUTCHEON, LINDA. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English Canadian Fiction.* Toronto: OUP, 1988. pp. xvi, 229. $16.95 pb.

KELLMAN, MARTIN. *T. H. White and the Matter of Britain.* Queenston, Ont.: Edward Mellen P, 1989. pp. 248. $49.95.

LEITH, LINDA, ed. *Telling Differences: New English Fiction from Quebec.* Montreal: Véhicule P, 1988. pp. 142. Unpriced pb.

MAES-JELINEK, HENA, PIERRE MICHEL, and PAULETTE MICHEL-MICHOT, eds. *Multiple Worlds, Multiple Words: Essays in Honour of Irene Simon.* Liège: U of Liège, 1988. pp. xvi, 322. BF1.050 pb.

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