

context for the reading of Coetzee's novels. What a pity that the flavour of his writing is not a factor in Gallagher's discussion of cultural, historical, and theoretical context.

ROWLAND SMITH

Alison Light. *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars*. London: Routledge, 1991. pp. xiv, 281. \$15.95.

Alison Light's *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* presents a matrix of revealing strengths and weaknesses. I use the metaphor of the matrix to avoid the sense that these strengths and weaknesses are somehow hierarchical or separable; each dimension of the book serves only to foreground the other, to define the matrix as a whole. Principally, Light's discussion of four women writers—Ivy Compton-Burnett, Agatha Christie, Jan Struther and her character Mrs. Miniver, and Daphne du Maurier—supports the following thesis: "It is the women of an expanding middle class between the wars who were best able to represent Englishness in both its most modern and reactionary forms" (10-11). Secondly, however, this book confronts the political climate which prevails in academic criticism at the present time. Here I have arranged these two elements of *Forever England* hierarchically in deference to Light's explicit concentration on the first element, since the latter effect is more an incidental occurrence than an announced objective. However, it is the interplay of these two levels of discourse, the said and the unsaid, which gives a clearer picture of Light's book and of some of the potential pitfalls inherent in the writing of criticism in the present politically charged academic climate.

Light's preface declares that "devoutly theoreticist readers will search in vain for the exemplification of a particular theory or paradigm" (ix). This claim brings out in relief the terrain on which *Forever England* treads most firmly and confidently. The discussions of the four writers demonstrate "that other history, history from inside" (5). Light maintains that "the place of private life and what it represented became the subject of new kinds of national and public interest and found new literary forms" (5). The literary forms she investigates range from the uniform world of Compton-Burnett's family novels to the journalistic entries of *Mrs. Miniver*. The chapter on *Mrs. Miniver* is the strongest; it best incorporates Light's conceptualizations of conservatism and feminism through a useful reinterpretation of the too-often homogenized notion of the "middle class."

Light's innovative approach displays a profound understanding of the historical context and an equally incisive knowledge of the currents in feminist theory (as her compendious notes and bibliography attest); it also brings her to some unexpected conclusions on the subjects of

feminism and femininity. For instance, she reads the matriarchs in Ivy Compton-Burnett's fiction as "just as likely to be attracted to cruelty as to caring" (40). She then widens the focus of this conclusion, setting it directly contrary to the prevailing feminist discourse of the period, with a courageous and unsparing logic: "If part of feminist consciousness in the early twentieth century was to vilify the image of the angel in the house, Compton-Burnett's radicalism takes that retaliation to its logical extreme" (40). It is at times like this that *Forever England* is at its finest. It is an excellent literary history of early twentieth-century Britain, with many interesting facts and anecdotes sprinkled throughout. Light provides a view of the British modernist period through a different prism than the more traditional one, with Pound, Joyce, and Eliot as its most prominent, and consequently most distorting, facets.

Forever England contributes to the body of modernist criticism that includes Bonnie Kime Scott's anthology *The Gender of Modernism*. In her introduction, Scott asks, "Did the formal innovations advanced by modernism and the phallic metaphors used to express them suit women writers as well as they did men?" (5). Light asks a similar question: "Now that there was a chance of writing it [a feminine historical narrative] for themselves, might they not want a different plot altogether?" (5). These two declarations of feminine independence actually lead in different directions, and it is this divergence which illustrates *Forever England's* over-cautious immersion in the tide of literary critical controversy.

Scott's avowedly radical invitation to reevaluate the modernist canon proposes a modernism that is "not the aesthetic, directed, monological sort of phenomenon" which New Criticism and Formalism perpetuated through the 1960s, but rather a modernism that is "polyphonic, mobile, interactive, sexually charged; [and] has wide appeal, constituting a historic shift in parameters" (4). Light, on the other hand, wishes to take issue with "feminists [who] have preferred to believe that feminism and conservatism are mutually exclusive" (14). It is on the occasions when Light ventures outside the boundaries of the intersection of feminism and conservatism to address political issues relating to the present time that she makes several statements which weaken the overall effect of her study.

The most significant instance of this clash between the said and the unsaid in *Forever England* occurs in its "Afterword," where Light makes the following statement:

The commodification of literature, which it is so easy to berate, was also a kind of democratisation. Du Maurier's superior romances and Mrs. Miniver's literariness are as much signs of this sense of access to the literary traditions of the past, offered as new sources of entertainment, as they are preserves of old-fashioned images of class differentiation. (216)

Such a statement, relegating the notions of literary commodification and the supposed democratization of a readership to a brief "afterward"

acknowledgement casts these issues as conclusions rather than premises. C. K. Stead's *The New Poetic*, and, more recently, Marjorie Perloff's discussion of the dynamics of the relationship between artist and audience in *The Futurist Moment*, are just two instances which confirm that this debate is ongoing. This brief note in *Forever England* acknowledges issues which might have been seen as a vexatious oversight by some, but it does not address them. The effect of this strategy is far more vexatious than a clear omission would have been.

Light appears to have heeded Edward Said's warning against the dangers of an oppressive critical orthodoxy, which threatens to dupe professional critics into "blithely predetermining what they discuss, heedlessly converting everything into evidence for the efficacy of the method" (26). From her initial acknowledgement of the 'devoutly theoreticist reader' through to her personal admissions of her own class biases in her "Afterword," Light appears to struggle with the potential disjuncture between her subject matter and the conclusions it leads her to, and the more radical politics of academic criticism in general—and feminist critiques in particular—against which she holds some of these conclusions. Although *Forever England* is a great success at what it sets out to do, it would have been stronger overall if it had not succumbed to the temptation of making too many concessions to those with whom it does not agree.

WORKS CITED

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ANTHONY STEWART

Viney Kirpal. *The Third World Novel of Expatriation: A Study of Emigré Fiction by Indian, West African and Caribbean Writers*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1989. pp. vii, 174. Rs. 150.

As we now begin to encounter a second generation of postcolonial writers, it is worthwhile to look back and examine, the work of those who first struck for independence in the artistic world. Of necessity, we are talking mainly of writers in English who directly confronted the issues of pride and inferiority in the face of a long history of English literature. Viney Kirpal compares the works of those who voyaged to the centre and those who stayed at home in the periphery. Her critical work, *The Third World Novel of Expatriation*, reveals similarities among the novels of writers in her regions of study, India, West Africa, and the Caribbean.

To contain the highly emotional dialectic of home versus émigré writers, Viney Kirpal chooses a strongly structured critical approach.