

perceptions of women by changing their fictional representation: life, that is, imitates art. "I wish to show," writes Ingham, "how the attempts to reaccent the signs of both the *womanly* woman and the *fallen* woman succeeded in rewriting their significance and what this meant for the treatment of class and gender as a whole" (20). Yet the focus of Ingham's investigation seems to dissipate as the book progresses. At various moments Ingham alludes to the Brontës' use of pseudonyms, narrative syntax, "the more expansive language of women" (47), "women's language" (48), and Victorian conventions of motherhood, in addition to returning regularly to a discussion of working-class unrest and generalized social instability. Yet, with the possible exception of the last topic, these concepts are invoked rather than discussed. Ingham's discussion of "arrative syntax" and her claims about the narratorial voices in the novels she discusses would have benefitted from some reading in standard and feminist narrative theory: her Bibliography omits reference to any of Booth, Chatman, Felman, Genette, Lanser, Prince, Rimmon-Kenan, Winnett. And the same goes for "women's language," motherhood, and representations of the fallen woman. These subjects have been widely discussed by feminists, sociologists, historians and philosophers in addition to literary critics: much recent work could be helpful to Ingham's study.

This book is frustrating to read; its prose is mechanical and unmelodic. Yet Ingham is working in a fascinating area. The novels she discusses are indeed fertile ground for any discussion of class and gender representation, the gendered and subversive uses of language, the strategic use of narrative voice and narrative structure — to name a few. But Ingham's book kept reminding me of the plate-spinner from the Ed Sullivan show: darting frantically back and forth, he kept a frenzy of china plates madly spinning on poles. In the same way, this book darts back and forth: language, gender, class, transformation, narrators, syntax are each poised on the top of a slender, unstable pole. Unhappily, such acrobatics do not make for a very satisfying intellectual experience.

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Alan L. McLeod, ed. *Commonwealth and American Nobel Laureates in Literature: Essays in Criticism*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1998. Pp. xv, 200. 390 Rupees.

Commonwealth and American Nobel Laureates in Literature: Essays in Criticism is a collection of sixteen essays, with a preface and introduction

by the editor, Alan L. McLeod. The essays were selected from papers given at a conference organized and hosted by the Institute of Commonwealth and American Studies and English Language, at the University of Mysore, India, in 1996 on the works of Nobel literature laureates. The essays employ a diversity of critical approaches: formalist, dialogic, humanist, archetypal, thematic, sociological, biographical, and feminist. Apart from the first and the last, these essays are devoted to the works of seven of the thirteen Commonwealth and American Nobel Prize winners for literature. Nine essays, three each, are devoted to the work of Rabindranath Tagore, Patrick White, and Toni Morrison; two essays are devoted to Wole Soyinka's; and one each to the work of Saul Bellow, Ernest Hemingway, and Eugene O'Neill.

One of the objectives of the first three pieces in the collection — the preface, the introduction, and the first essay, Marian McLeod's "The Award Ceremonies for the Commonwealth and American Nobel Laureates in Literature" — is to inform the reader of the impact of the initial and revised criteria for awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature. One of these criteria requires that the literature prize winners address the Academy on their writing. Marian McLeod's essay is centred on this criterion and is devoted primarily to examining the Nobel speeches of some of the Commonwealth and American recipients. The merit of this essay lies, for me, in the intellectual debates that such speeches sparked about literature in those instances when they generated debate.

All three essays on Tagore's works are by Indian scholars, and they treat the works as extensions of reality. V. Ayothi and S. Chandrasekaran's "Rabindranath Tagore and Subramania Bharati as Feminists," and Shyam Prasad Swain's "Tagore's Binodi: The White Lotus of Love" analyze Tagore's depiction of the plight of India's women. Both essays examine Tagore's women characters in the broader context of Indian society and are overwhelmingly humanistic. Radhiga Priyhadharshim's "The Royal Metaphor in the Plays of Rabindranath Tagore" analyzes Tagore's plays by focusing on their archetypes. This approach is effective inasmuch as the plays depict phenomena that are primarily numinal.

The single essay devoted to Eugene O'Neill's work, Madhu Mehrota's "Eugene O'Neill and the Other Side of Materialism," is thematic, exploring O'Neill's plays as critiques of capitalist greed. It is a good essay, but, like many of the essays in this collection, it requires nuancing so that the reader does not feel that all of O'Neill's plays are critiques of materialism.

Judith Hen's essay on Hemingway falls in the category of biography and literary history. It adds more to the diversity of the collection than to our knowledge of Hemingway or the influence of Paris on the work

of American writers who lived there during the first quarter of twentieth century.

In Shobha Rajpai's "Evasion of Relations in Saul Bellow's Novels," Indian and Occidental world views do not so much clash as enter into an uncomfortable zone. The essay begins with the statement that "true intimacy demands honesty, and a lasting relationship demands some surrender of the self" (124), and it ends with "Bellow is one of the major American novelists and he cannot evade the responsibility to lead modern man towards a better world" (132). These statements may be a reflection, in the main, of the different expectations Indian and Occidental societies have of their artists. Artists do not usually manacle themselves with manifestos. Moreover, in the West, existentialism competes with the more moralist brands of philosophy, and literary artists as diverse as Henrik Ibsen, Albert Camus, and Richard Wright (to name a few) have felt free to create protagonists that are more or less existentialist. Besides, within the confines of marriage, attempts to define "honesty," insofar as it is limited by the couple's needs and self-awareness, can be quite bedeviling. This essay is nevertheless a thoughtful exploration of the theme of marital relationships in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* and *Herzog*.

Of the three essays devoted to Patrick White's work, one is humanistic, another is structuralist-formalist, and the third is dialogic. C. Vimala Rao's "Themes in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*" focuses on White as a moral visionary and *A Fringe of Leaves* as a vehicle for exploring both the idea, stated outright by Miss Scrimshaw, that life is a series of blunders rather than any clear design from which we may get out whole if we are lucky, and the falsity that is inherent in concepts like savage and civilized. This essay, fine for the most part, is marred by an excessive recounting of plot. H. H. Anniah Gowda's "Patrick White as Playwright" focuses on a neglected aspect of White's corpus: the plays. It examines some nine of White's plays, and, in the process, shows the interlinking of White's themes and preoccupations across the genres he employed. It brings into focus the critical response to the plays and explains why many of the plays are dramatic failures. It remains a valuable essay insofar as it fills a gap in the criticism of White's works. Cynthia Van Driesen's "Bakhtinian Polyphones in Patrick White's Texts" is a thorough, well-researched essay that accomplishes a great deal in very little space. Its long preface, explaining how arduous it was to convince the Swedish Academy that White was deserving of the Nobel Prize, introduces us to the conflicts among White's critics that arise because of the multi-faceted visions present in White's works. She employs a summary of the criticism of White's work to show the diametrically opposed responses White's art provokes, and it uses the summary as a further basis for arguing that White's texts are "quintessentially polyphonic." The rest of the essay is devoted to showing the extent to which characters in *Voss* and *A Fringe*

of *Leaves* express multiple and conflicting perceptions of reality in a multiplicity of voices.

Both essays on Soyinka's works emphasize the polyphonous character of Soyinka's fiction, in the case of Anjali Roy, and the fiction and autobiographies, in the case of Norman R. Carey. Roy's is the superior essay. Although it raises more issues than it can successfully analyze, it is more focused and more fully aware of the cosmogony that informs Soyinka's creative imagination. My quarrel with it is its manner of envisaging unity. Because the units of a novel may appear discrete does not necessarily mean that they are. For several critics *The Interpreters* achieves its unity in Kola's painting. Another way of understanding the novel's unity is to see each of the main characters as an "interpreter" of (a fictional) Nigerian ontology. This inevitably leads to a reflection on the convergences and divergences of the "interpreters'" interpretations, and it requires a critic sufficiently conversant with the allusions and metonyms present in the text. Regarding the other essay, "Religion in Wole Soyinka's Writing: A Bakhtinian Approach," the Bakhtinian polyphonous elements that Carey identifies in Soyinka's representation of religion, are, for me, depictions of the syncretism as well as the tensions engendered by the meeting of traditional Yoruba belief and Christianity. This is not to imply that Carey's terms are incorrect or invalid. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Carey misreads the tone of some of the passages from *The Interpreters* on which he bases parts of his argument; some passages that he interprets as literal may be satirical.

The three essays on Morrison's work are, in my opinion, flawed. Satish C. Aikant's "Memory, Text and Subtext: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" is a disparate mass of reflections that are useful only for someone unfamiliar with *Beloved*. Because of Aikant's vast sweep and numerous concerns, most of the topics raised are denied the analysis they deserve. A striking example is his citation of the advice Baby Suggs proffers to the community of escaped and freed slaves — to love themselves — but his failure to explore the broader narrative implications of such advice, especially its ironic import when Baby Sugg's own sanity is shattered by her daughter-in-law's horrific act of infanticide undertaken to prevent her child from becoming a slave. Love of self, then, the whole narrative shows, is no comprehensive antidote for the evils and trauma of slavery. Valsa Koshi's "Survival Strategies of Toni Morrison's Male Characters" is a more unified essay than Aikant's. Its thesis, which it traces in six of Morrison's novels, is that her male characters are "castrated, stymied, emasculated, and psychically fragmented" and "are for the most part grotesque" (164). It is a thesis that needs nuancing inasmuch as it does not adequately account for the male characters driven by revolutionary zeal in *Song of Solomon*, and Claudia's father in *The Bluest Eye*.

The third essay on Morrison, Dominic Savio's "'Sula': Black Feminist Ideology," is not so much an essay that explores implicit black feminist thought in *Sula* but rather an interesting characterological study that works best as an examination of the polarities of revolt and conformity in *Sula*.

An interesting feature of this collection, and one that drew me to it, is that nine of the essays are by Indian scholars, explained perhaps by the fact of the conference setting. It is a truism that our cultural conditioning influences our world view and our sense of the aesthetic. It is therefore fascinating to observe the conclusions that are drawn by critics of one culture evaluating the aesthetic products of another. Of striking note here is a marked predisposition by the Indian scholars to see works of the imagination as extensions of lived human reality.

The challenge to the editor of a collection such as this, that deals with the works of several authors from different cultures, is how to unify it. That the authors treated are all recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature could be said to be unifying. Perhaps. Given this fact, this reviewer, faced with his own challenge, felt obliged to examine each essay on its own merit.

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