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## Book Reviews

Anna Rutherford

*University of Aarhus, Denmark*

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## **Abstract**

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Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, eds., *Cowries and Kobos: The West African Oral Tale and Short Story*. Aarhus: Dangaroo Press, 1981. 177 pp. Dkr45.00.

There are several available anthologies on short West African narrative, but *Cowries and Kobos* charts new territory through its juxtaposition of the oral tale and the short story and its inclusion of critical commentary by a broad spectrum of scholars along with the fiction itself. It should provide a useful introduction to the area for the general reader, a valuable source book for the student and material to stimulate critical debate for the academic.

The range of material is extensive: the volume includes eight oral tales, two extracts from Onitsha market pamphlets, nine short stories from Anglophone and Francophone literatures and a dozen short critical essays. Donald Cosentino's general introduction speaks of the collection's affording the opportunity 'to appreciate the God's plenty of West African traditional and modern storytelling' and this is certainly the impression with which one is left after reading it.

The choice of oral tales focuses on Nigerian cultures. A fine introduction by Helen Chukwuma provides a succinct taxonomy of the types of tale prevalent in the region and is complemented by Neil Skinner's remarks on the Hausa *tatsuniya*. Chukwuma shows how the tale differs from more literary narrative in its employment of dramatic and musical elements and in its reliance on audience participation, particularly in shout-and-response sequences. The abrupt moral transitions of the tales and their lack of realistic characterisation further distinguish them from short stories and establish their value as *mythic* representations of the 'truths' of their societies. Chukwuma's analysis of the form of the animal tale argues that it is constructed, not around a single central heroic figure, but rather around a contest between two protagonists who compete to outdo one another in trickery. In contrast, the human tale does focus on the individual and usually involves some kind of reworking of the myth of the hero.

In the general introduction Cosentino also stresses the ritual, mythic quality of the oral tale and he sees it as a 'closed artistic system' which does not interact with the genre of the short story. For him the dimensions of the folktale are cosmic and each particular performance evokes the traditions of the whole of the people's culture, whereas the short story is fragmentary, an import from the developed world and a form in which 'truth' is only glimpsed through the individual 'epiphany'.

Such a distinction is helpful, especially for those who are new to the field, but it poses problems. They arise partly because the view of the short story, derived from the Joycean approach to the form, is delimiting, but more seriously because to regard the two genres as quite discrete is to imply that the West African short story writer is completely alienated from the traditional narrative modes of his society. Clearly the transition from

communal oral storytelling to individual written composition suggests that the writer has lost the role of griot or oral repository of his people's culture and adopted that of Western literary artist. But committed West African writers in the post-independence period frequently see themselves as assuming communal responsibilities akin to those of the traditional artist. Those whose work contributes to the process of national reconstruction may reasonably claim to be latter day equivalents of the griot rather than quasi-Western artists dramatising the 'epiphanies' of an individual sensibility.

Elsewhere in *Couries and Kobos* the interplay between the two genres becomes clearer. Kirsten Holst Petersen's introduction to the short story deals with its relationship to the oral tale more satisfactorily. Though she subscribes to Cosentino's basic distinction between the two forms, she makes necessary qualifications, particularly by seeing the various uses to which the short story is put as a product of the cultural fragmentation of contemporary Africa and suggesting the possibility of the form's helping to 'humanize' the march of 'progress' on the continent.

The fusion of traditional and modern narrative styles can also be seen in several of the stories themselves. It is particularly apparent in Francis Bebey's 'Edda's Marriage', in which the narrator is a villager caught between traditional and colonial worlds, and Chinua Achebe's 'Vengeful Creditor', in which the authorial voice sides firmly with community values. In such instances, where the short story writer adopts a socially committed narrative stance which can be seen as a post-independence equivalent of the griot's tribal responsibility, the interaction between genres makes for cross-cultural fertilisation (part of the humanizing process of which Petersen writes?) rather than the abandonment of the traditional for the modern.

In addition to providing a fine general introduction to short West African narrative and material to stimulate critical debate of the above kind, *Couries and Kobos* also offers a number of excellent short prefaces to particular writers and topics, among them Ama Ata Aidoo, Sembene Ousmane, Francis Bebey, Achebe as short story writer and the short story in *Présence Africaine*. Two themes which are particularly well represented and discussed are the lure of bourgeois values in the post-independence period and the woman's predicament in contemporary West Africa. The latter theme is interestingly introduced by Anna Rutherford's preface to Cyprian Ekwensi's 'Fashion Girl', in which she discusses the changes in social relationships brought about by urbanisation and sees Ekwensi, for all his 'male double standards', as expressing the raw realities of this new situation, in which the woman's role undergoes dramatic transformations. Other stories carry more obvious feminist messages: Ama Ata Aidoo's 'Two Sisters' presents a character who, like Ekwensi's fashion girl, succumbs to the temptations offered by the new bourgeoisie by becoming the mistress of a 'big man', but also portrays the other side of the coin, since this character's sister is a deceived wife and ultimately both emerge as victims of a corrupt social order; Sembene Ousmane's 'Her Three Days' attacks the subjugation of women in a polygamous Islamic society.

The two extracts from Onitsha chapbooks may initially appear to be at odds with the general scheme of the volume as neither is, properly speaking, narrative fiction. Ogalì Ogalì's 'Veronica My Daughter' is drama; Okenwa Olisah's 'No Condition is Permanent' aphoristic and philosophical homily. Yet their inclusion seems appropriate, for they reflect the breaking down of genres in this middle area of Nigerian popular narrative and 'Veronica My Daughter' affords an excellent example of the collision between different value-systems, underlined by the different linguistic registers through which the characters are dramatised.

*Cowries and Kobos* is the fifth volume in Dangaroo Press's Commonwealth Series. The high production standards one is coming to expect of Dangaroo publications are maintained and in this instance the illustrations, by Adebisi Akanji and others, are a particular delight.

JOHN THIEME

Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage. Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. 194 pp. Can.\$25.00.

Leslie Monkman has written a book that students of Canadian literature have been waiting for ever since the conspicuous appearance of the Canadian Indian on the literary scene in and around 1970. As we see in Monkman's book, the Indian was never entirely absent from Canadian literature although he was certainly relegated to the fringes. However, by 1973 he appeared as the most dominant topic in Canadian letters. That year saw the publication of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*, Peter Such's *Riverrun*, W.O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point*, and Sharon Pollock's *Walsh* just to mention some of the best known and among which *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *Gone Indian* have already acquired the status of modern Canadian classics. Monkman does not try to explain this sudden outburst of primitivism which may be seen as a parallel to a similar phenomenon a decade earlier in the USA (see e.g. Leslie A. Fiedler, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968)); that would demand extensive historical and sociological studies which would be outside the scope of this book.

Leslie Monkman examines literary material ranging from 1766 (Robert Rogers' *Ponteach, or The Savages of America*) to 1977 (Rudy Wiebe's *The Scorched Wood People* and Robertson Davies' *Pontiac and the Green Man*). The basic argument of the book is that the Indian in Canadian literature was always important when the white man wanted to say something about himself and to define his own culture. The Indian was not dealt with for his own sake but supplied the white man with well defined enemies and heroes or became the illustration of certain concepts.

Chapter Two discusses the Indian as antagonist. Numerous examples are offered in which the Indian is seen as a savage pagan who should be tamed along with the wilderness in which he lived. The Indian stands for chaos and darkness in contrast to white order which was administered with evangelical fervour. Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832) is given as an example of a work which goes beyond the simplistic association of savagery with the Indian; it points out that both races carry within themselves a potential for savagery and cruelty.

In Chapter Three Monkman deals with the image of the Indian and his culture as superior to the white man and his culture. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), W.O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* (1973), and Margaret Laurence's *Manawaka* cycle all emphasize the positive aspects of Indian culture. We find in these works a pastoral yearning for simplicity where the Indian and his relation to nature, his natural religion, become attractive, because it seems to offer a worth-while

alternative to alienated modern white civilization. Monkman substantiates his argument by suggestive readings of Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939), W.O. Mitchell, and Margaret Laurence.

Chapter Four, 'Death of the Indian', looks at another use of the Indian. Well into this century the Indian seemed to belong to a dying race and as such he became a *memento mori* to the white man. The Indians are treated as casualties of history, just like other great cultures; their extinction is inevitable irrespective of their heroic struggle. These works strike an elegiac note that we find prevalent in the 'ubi sunt' poems of the late middle ages. Peter Such's *Riverrun* (1973) which recreates the final extinction of the Beothuk tribe in Newfoundland is a good example of a work which carries meaning beyond the historical incident described.

The following chapter on 'Indian Heroes' is really an extension of the chapter 'Indian Alternatives'. Monkman considers the popularity of the two white Indians Pauline Johnson and Grey Owl and discusses in detail what he calls 'mediating Messiahs', i.e. Tecumseh, Big Bear, and Louis Riel, all of them good chiefs and leaders who appear in the works of Don Gutteridge, John Coulter, and Rudy Wiebe. Each of them is seen, in the semi-fictitious versions at hand, to harbour a potential, a kind of truth and honesty, that has been lost in modern white society. White civilization is measured against these prophet-like giants and found wanting. Especially the half-breed, Louis Riel, seems to have stirred the imagination of many writers. As a cultural mediator between the two races he no doubt symbolizes what many Canadian intellectuals would like to see: a kind of unity in diversity. Here, and in the last chapter, 'Indian Myths and Legends' in white Canadian literature, in particular in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) and Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (1973), Leslie Monkman offers material for a discussion of one of the most controversial uses of the Indian and his culture by contemporary white artists.

As a non-Canadian I feel that in time the Indians will react strongly against the subtle manipulation of their great men and the taking over of their myths and legends, just as they will most certainly react against the almost pathetic plea for ancestor-sharing that is found in some writers. They cannot help seeing this as a new subtle way of exploitation and a variety of the earlier policy of assimilation. Professor Monkman's book is well written and stimulating and it will prove its value not only as a manual on the Indian in Canadian literature, but it will also serve as a starting point for urgent discussions on the future relationship between the red and white cultures.

JØRN CARLSEN

Bruce Bennett (ed.), *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature*. Longman Cheshire, 1981. Aust.\$25.00.

*Cross Currents* is an uneven, stimulating compilation which enlarges our understanding of Australian culture in a number of ways. Periodicals have played an important part in the development of literature in Australia. Some, like the *Bulletin* and *Tabloid Story*, have been instrumental in fostering certain modes in periods of literary growth: others

have sustained small groups of writers and readers through dry seasons. For poets and short fiction writers they are essential: the first, and often the only, avenues of publication. Without magazines the arts of poetry and short-story writing would not have evolved the way they did in Australia. A well-known example is enough to illustrate this. Modernist innovations were assimilated in Australian painting, in the novel and even in music, but apparently resisted in poetry. This seeming paradox can be partly explained by the fact that, unlike painters, novelists and composers, poets had to find their audience through magazines whose editors, after the collapse of *Angry Penguins* in the wake of the Ern Malley affair, were cautious about being trapped like Max Harris, if they were not, like James McAuley, triumphantly hostile to modernism.

Bruce Bennett's idea of examining the role of periodicals in Australian literary history was a good one, though the resulting book, despite the inclusion of good historical studies, like Elizabeth Webby's on literary journalism before the *Bulletin* and Craig Munro's account of P.R. Stephenson and the *Australian Mercury*, is largely a compilation of sources in which the connections and interpretations of literary history remain implicit. Not that this is a bad thing; on the contrary, it makes it a useful volume for students of Australian literature, who will find that it stimulates new ideas and opens up unexplored regions for further investigation.

At the heart of the book are a series of accounts and recollections by editors or contributors, of a range of Australian periodicals from the *Bulletin* to *Tabloid Story*. The angle of approach and focus of attention in these is extremely varied. A.G. Stephens is represented by the diary which he kept during his years at the *Bulletin*, and for a couple of short periods later, in an edition by Leon Cantrell; Jack Lindsay reflects critically on his espousal of his father's ideas in *Vision*; Peter Cowan recalls the importance of *Angry Penguins* to a young writer in the forties, and manages to put the whole venture in perspective at last; the founding and survival of *Meanjin* is surveyed by Lynne Strahan and Chris Wallace-Crabbe; Stephen Murray-Smith describes his long personal involvement with *Overland*; Patrick Morgan struggles with the complexities and seeming contradictions in James McAuley's thought, to show how it shaped *Quadrant*, within the guiding principles of the International Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the story of *Tabloid Story* is retold by Michael Wilding.

There are other riches besides these, including an analysis of Douglas Stewart's editorship of the *Bulletin*, by Tom Shapcott, in which he employs his skills as an accountant, as well as his insight as a poet, to demonstrate how Stewart transformed the Red Page into a forum for modern Australian poetry, while retaining an unsurprising predilection for his own verses. Peter Pierce supplies a witty review of some of the little magazines of the seventies which is so guardedly allusive at times that I find it difficult to follow the intricacies of local poetic warfare; John McLaren contributes an interesting selective analysis of reviewing in newspapers and periodicals in the post-war decades, including some comments on *Australian Book Review*, which he edits.

All these, together with the historical and interpretive contributions, add up to a book with a multiplicity of directions. It is not simply a survey, a collection of literary memoirs, a history of literary magazines, or an account of literature in Australian periodicals, but it touches all these approaches and many more. Bruce Bennett has tried to capitalize on this variety by creating a book which amplifies previous studies of Australian literary magazines without repeating them. This is mainly successful. However, despite the fact that completeness was not attempted, and would have been impossible, one notable gap, and a couple of points on which wider coverage might have been expected, suggest an im-

pression that the book was compiled from what was readily available (though most contributions were apparently commissioned for this collection).

The successes have already been intimated. They result from the stimulating effect of this juxtaposition of varied material. For example, it suggests the basis for an investigation into the long, but fluctuating awareness of North American culture in Australia. Elizabeth Webby picks up numerous references to American literature in the early periodicals, some of which, like the *Journal of Australia* looked forward to the day when Australia would produce poets of the stature of Bryant, Longfellow or Halleck, a hope very richly fulfilled.

During the nineteenth century, the time lag separating Australians from America seemed to be less than it was later. On Elizabeth Webby's evidence, the works of authors like Poe, Emerson, Melville and Whitman were read and discussed in the colonies in the decades before 1880, and a few American writers, notably Bret Harte, were very influential. Citing an unpublished Ph.D. thesis by G.D. Ailwood Keel, she suggests that the *Bulletin* itself may have been modelled on American journals. Yet Chris Wallace-Crabbe relates of the mid-1950s that 'it is hard to believe how unavailable' American books then were. He is writing, of course, from the perspective of the 1980s, when in the wake of the little magazines of the seventies, the United States again exercises a strong influence on Australian culture. It would be fascinating to know more about its ebb and flow.

Of related interest is the history of modernism in Australia, on which this collection offers some tantalising insights. Modernist innovations had, of course, only a limited success in Britain, while on this matter the United States and Australia were completely opposed to each other. The 1920s are sometimes considered the American years in western culture because of the way writers and artists in the U.S. took over modernism and developed it for their own purposes, so that it became the hallmark, and in its present degenerate form, the cliché, of American art. In precisely the same decade, the publication of *Vision* inaugurated a determined resistance to modernism in eastern Australia which persisted through *Quadrant* until the present day. Perhaps it was only ever centred in Sydney, but from wherever it emanated, it saw off the whole modernist attack, fast, spin and donkey-drop, with the inscrutable doggedness of Len McKay in his heyday, leaving Australia poetry about to notch up the slowest century in the history of the art.

This leads to another consideration implicit in this collection: the role of regional distinctions and rivalries in the development of Australian culture. This is mentioned by Peter Cowan and Bruce Bennett in their account of the founding and survival of *Westerly*. They see the magazine as falling on the 'forum' side of the informal distinction running through this book, between magazines issued with explicit or implicit manifestos, like *Angry Penguins* or *Quadrant*, and those which provide a forum for various literary styles and opinions, but *Westerly* also has a quite necessary regional bias. Indeed the provision of a balanced forum is perhaps an appropriate western counter to the deplorable tendency of editors and intellectuals from the capital of New South Wales to identify their domain with Australia.

*Southerly*, another long-surviving 'forum' magazine, has sometimes been the vehicle for such pronouncements. Stuart Lee, in his measured presidential review of the magazine, comments on its Sydney associations, in its title, its editors (especially the second, dubbed by his biographer 'a man of Sydney'), and in its shifting relationship with the Sydney Branch of the English Association. All these have contributed a bias to the magazine which its guise as a 'forum' does not conceal.

However, the best contribution *Cross Currents* makes to understanding regionalism in Australia is the context it provides for the short lives and sudden deaths of the Jindyworobak movement and *Angry Penguins*. I had not realized before how tempting it is to see them as victims of regional rivalry. Both were demolished from Sydney; Jindyworobak through a heavy barrage from the pages of *Southerly*, *Angry Penguins* through a plot too well known to need rehearsing. They had almost nothing in common, except their origin in Adelaide and, for a short time, Max Harris. They were, in fact, mutually hostile, and could have been safely left to destroy each other.

Bruce Bennett suggests they were both extreme movements. His book provides evidence to doubt that view. The perception underlying the Jindyworobak idea goes deep in Australia, and, indeed, in any culture which inherits a culture 'out of sych. with its environment', as the Canadian poet Margaret Atwood once put it. Elizabeth Webby, cites an example from 1867, by a pseudonymous author in the *Australian Monthly Magazine*:

'... a young and new nation should seek to imprint early a novel type of thought; that it should in literature, as in policy, fling off the trammels of the systems elsewhere adopted, and give to its actions and thinking a style. And in poetry this must be done by at once flinging aside recollections of other scenery, and selecting both imagery and subjects from our own climate, natural objects, and population...'

This is very similar to what Rex Ingamells would have regarded as a respect for 'environmental values', an idea which is extreme only in the travesty of it promulgated by his critics. Ingamells' weakest verses certainly left themselves open to mockery. The Jindyworobaks were not particularly accomplished young poets, but neither were their critics, at the time. The ridicule from Sydney did not actually stifle the Jindyworobak movement, but it was successful in suppressing its analysis of Australian culture, and putting a caricature in its place.

The attack on *Angry Penguins* was, of course, completely successful and one of the major achievements in the campaign against modernism in Australian poetry. It succeeded in implanting the idea that *Angry Penguins* purveyed an extreme form of poetic gibberish, which is far from the truth, as Peter Cowan demonstrates in an account which points out the solid achievements of the magazine in the forties. For a young writer like himself, not from the eastern seaboard, *Angry Penguins* offered discoveries and created hopes which had to be abandoned after its collapse.

What is interesting about both these cases is that two ventures by very young South Australian poets were effectively crushed before they had time to develop very far. It is also interesting that for about three decades the judgements from Sydney were accepted, giving their authors half a lifetime to develop their own poetry to its modest level of success.

These reflections indicate some of the ways this rewarding book provokes discussion. It is likely to arouse much more, for almost every essay individually, or in connection with some of the others, points to areas yet to be explored, or suggests connections and interpretations still to be developed. Herein lies the book's success.

Its chief lapse is the inexplicable omission of any discussion of *Australian Letters*, which is only mentioned twice, in passing. In its time, this periodical was equally important with *Meanjin* and *Overland* (and, in fact, all three were once available on a joint subscription concession). *Australian Letters* was broader in its literary and cultural range, and less doctrinaire than *Quadrant*, founded a few months earlier. It was notable

for the recognition and support it gave to Patrick White and Randolph Stow in the face of notorious carping from Sydney, and for its inclusion of essays on various aspects of what is now called 'popular culture', for example, on Australian wine (before it became the trendiest of topics), on beer; on Jack Davey, Bill Harney, and the shark fisherman Jim Cowell; notably, for Randolph Stow's essay on *Cole's Funny Picture Book* and Hal Porter's splendid evocation in prose, with sketches, of Gippsland country towns.

Max Harris's editorship, with Bryn Davies and Geoffrey Dutton, was, as far as I know, his last involvement with a literary magazine (discounting the first *Australian Book Review*), and *Australian Letters* showed some interesting continuities and changes in his views as they developed from *Angry Penguins* and *Ern Malley's Journal*. Like the earlier magazines with which he was associated, *Australian Letters* had an 'overseas' orientation, but this was complicated by the fact that its editors were also alert to what was distinctive in Australian culture. Harris never believed this would be some variant of what he called 'outbackery'. He found what he was looking for in the work of certain Australian painters, especially Nolan and Arthur Boyd, whose paintings combined an innovative openness of mode with the discovery of Australian subjects and the creation of myths and legends for the white settlers of the continent. The literary counterpart of this, for Harris, was the fiction of Patrick White and Randolph Stow. Some of his own poems, written in the first years of *Australian Letters*, like 'Sturt at Depot Glen' and 'The Death of Bert Sassanowsky', were an attempt to contribute to this strain in Australian culture.

*Australian Letters*, like earlier ventures by Max Harris, placed a strong emphasis on the visual arts, which was exploited with great distinction in the series of Australian poems illustrated by Australian artists published in the magazine. This reflected at least one significant change in Harris's attitude, for he generously included McAuley in the series. Since all the artists represented had by that time absorbed some of the innovations of contemporary art and McAuley was matched with Leonard French, it would be interesting to know what the opponent of modernism had to say about that.

*Australian Letters* deserves some credit for sustaining literature from the late fifties through to the period of new growth at the end of the sixties. Like many of Harris's projects, and other Australian little magazines, it generated off-shoots, like the annual collection *Verses in Australia*. This unpretentious publication records a transitional phase in Australian writing, when some of the poets now established were building their reputations.

After *Australian Letters* Max Harris started the first *Australian Book Review*. This was in many ways a livelier journal than its successor; less comprehensive and thorough, but on the whole more entertainingly written. My only other quibble with *Cross Currents* is that John McLaren might have given the first *ABR* fuller treatment in his piece on reviewing in Australia.

*Cross Currents* is a beautifully made book, with a stunning dust jacket, but it contains editorial lapses apparent even to a casual examination. These include misplaced footnotes like those on page 201 which attribute to Vivian Smith a book called *Australian Cultural Elites*, and the words of John Docker to John Docker. The index has been compiled by someone with a prejudice against the literature of the past. It lists none of the American writers mentioned in Elizabeth Webby's essay, like Longfellow, Emerson, Poe or Bret Harte. It does not even list D.H. Lawrence, an important figure in the essay on *Vision*, and also to the Jindyworobaks. However, it does mention many of the American writers currently in vogue, for example Charles Bukowski, Robert Duncan, somebody called Glaway Kinnell, Jerome Klinkowitz and Richard Kostelanetz, amongst others. Some of these will no doubt be remembered as vividly as the Bryant and Halleck

who were cited as models for Australian poetry in the 1850s. The index has entries for a C.M.H. Clark, as well as for Manning Clark, and in addition to Patrick White, includes a Pat White, who turns out to be the author of *The Ploughman*. It appears that the Nobel laureate has at last been successful in divesting himself of his juvenilia.

BRUCE A. CLUNIES ROSS

## 'RELEARNING THAT COUNTRY' —

Les A. Murray, *The Vernacular Republic*, Poems 1961-81. Canongate, Edinburgh.

Les A. Murray, *Equanimities*. Razorback Press, Copenhagen, Denmark.

It's strange how orthodoxies develop. These days there seems to be a general feeling in the British Isles, that the most vital English-language poets around are Messrs Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney. This may or may not be true but the assessment makes scant reference to the literatures of the big continents where English is spoken. Canadian and Australian poets are very little known in Britain.

Les A. Murray spent a year in Scotland on a writers' exchange scheme. The publication of his selected poems by the Edinburgh-based 'Canongate', in paperback, now makes his work readily available here. Previously my only knowledge of his work was through periodicals such as *Kunapipi* and the Edinburgh-based *Cencrastus*. The latter printed 'Their Cities, Their Universities'. This poem shows how important Murray's family background is to him. He serves it well, with an accurate visual focus: 'The scrolls of their fiddles curl at me...' Recent and true history in a photograph. His ear is as good, as shown in line-lengths that have rhythms of speech and some direct quotes: 'Scotland is a place Dad goes to when he drinks rum.'

In their concerns with family, farms and people in relation to landscapes, Murray and Heaney have much in common. But the unabashed acceptance of the vernacular into his art, making a quality of roughness where the rhythms are heard as rough, is Murray's own tool: 'drought this year. Yes. Like trying to farm the road.'

This is a quote in italics but he also absorbs the spoken into a more worked line, and it can be gentle: 'They say pigs see the wind. You think that's right?' Here is a sensitivity to contrast with 'all that smart city life'.

The same poet has his own sophisticated moments, many of them to be found in his neat, three short-lined aphorisms. Some of the longer poems in short and wrought lines also stay with you: 'The Incendiary Method' for example. He is also capable of, and sometimes takes delight in, close-worked language, studded with exotic words. He can overdo it. 'SMLE' is a far-ranging poem, unified by the imagery of the rifle, but some individual lines seem to me too tricky: 'gill-furrows ravaged by specks/ their fins fibrillate.' Yet this example is followed by the simple and superb: 'They are swimming away in their muscles...'

Throughout this book is a healthy restlessness, in setting and in language. Murray can range from Gallipoli, to a curry-restaurant in Cardiff or to his Gaelic inheritance. As a

Hebridean, I found his 'Gaelic Poems' and evocations of a Uist ancestry a bit romantic, but always there are some perfect lines: 'lamplight and wireless/ as I grew older.'

It is a huge body of work to come to terms with, all in one closely-printed volume and for that reason I think I gained more pleasure out of the Razorback Press's chapbook. Here the type, layout, and paper that asks for your touch, give space to what seems to me some of the finest poems from Murray's collection.

There is the craftsman's delight in unusual words with strong sound: 'spoor, glibbed, cusps, talus, grit'. This invites comparison with the language of Heaney's 'Field Work': 'purling, slug-horn, inwit, polder, stooking'. In 'Equanimities' the vocabulary and the varying, but usually ample, rhythms carry a sense of man affecting and being affected by, the nature he has not yet built-on. The poems have a religious scope but little to do with dogmas or millennia: 'there is only love: there are no Arcadias'. This line occurs in the speculative 'Equanimity' which ranges in the different layers of light and life above a suburb. Peace and patience are very different from inertia and compromise. The more mystical side is rooted in photographic accuracy: 'at telephone-wire/height above the carports...'

People work at the edge of the sea, the forest, the grasslands. Nature is far from passive. People use chain-saws on forest but 'whipstick saplings' are themselves out 'to shade the rest to death'. The kestrels in 'The Grassfire Stanzas' are quick to seize on 'the hopping outskirts' set moving by the men who carry 'smoke wrapped in bark'.

Only the suiciders who come by taxi to the edge at South Head seem quite sure why they've come but Murray has caught the curious and exciting need to walk out as far as we can go, on the prow of a continent.

IAN STEPHEN

## JEAN RHYNS: ENCORE UNE FOIS

Helen Nebeker, *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage*. Montreal: Eden Press, 1981. 224 pages, paperback \$8.95.

Helen Nebeker has picked up the gauntlet that Jean Rhys threw down in *Voyage in the Dark* when Rhys had Maudie say, 'I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another'. Discussing Zola's *Nana*, Maudie and the heroine of *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna Morgan, are about to set forth their own version of the life of a tart — a woman's version, the reply to a man's book about a tart. Nebeker takes the process a step farther in her book about Jean Rhys, *Woman in Passage*, because she has produced the first full-length study of Rhys' fiction by a woman. And in her book Nebeker responds to what she sees as distortions of Rhys' fiction by the male authors of earlier Rhys studies: Elgin Mellow, Thomas Staley and Louis James.

*Voyage in the Dark* serves as Nebeker's key to the riddles buried in Rhys' fiction — riddles that Nebeker believes are too easily glossed over by what is becoming a conventional reading of Rhys' novels as one long chronological case history of a generic heroine.

Probing after deeper levels of protagonistic self-discovery, Nebeker uses an uncompromising Jungian methodology to strip away the narrative sequence of Rhys' five novels to the discovery of an ancient fertility goddess who lies behind the hapless heroines of the Rhysian canon. Like the heroines of the novels, the primordial goddess (personified as Anna Morgan) has been frustrated in her procreative functions through male domination and manipulation; hence, *Woman in Passage* emerges as a passionately feminist reading of Rhys' fiction. The energy with which Nebeker delivers her feminist interpretation certainly surpasses Staley's somewhat topical allusions to 'the female condition', and her delving for mythopoeic archetypes is far more consistent than Peter Wolfe's generally psychoanalytic attempt to define structure and symbolism in his *Jean Rhys* published by Twayne.

Nebeker, who is Professor of English at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, specializes (as do Wolfe and Staley) in contemporary British and American Literature. It is not surprising that Nebeker, Wolfe and Staley, writing from universities in the United States (Wolfe is at the University of Missouri, Staley is at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma), tend not to place Rhys' fiction in the context of Commonwealth Literature. The cultural point-of-view in Nebeker's book insists upon the Victorian ethic of nineteenth and early twentieth century England rather than upon either the emanations of continental European attitudes found in Rhys' earlier novels or the expressions of West Indian concerns found in the novels and short stories. It seems almost a consequence of Nebeker's criticism of Victorian social and sexual mores that her book ends with an analysis of Charlotte Brontë's Victorian novel *Jane Eyre* rather than with the more usual analysis of Rhys' own *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Although Nebeker's scholarship is impeccable, her book would be improved by a less exclamatory style and a less dogged application of onomastics ('the magic of naming') to both major and minor characters in all the novels. Her search for Jungian archetypes seems to work best with *Wide Sargasso Sea*; there is less justification and defense in the *Wide Sargasso Sea* chapter than in some other chapters where apologies interrupt the literary analysis, introducing a suspicion of strain. In fact, Nebeker's defensive tone brings to mind the strategies of eighteenth and nineteenth century women writers, suggesting that Nebeker views herself as a potential victim of a male-dominated literary mode. It is sad that she is so consciously defensive when embarking upon an exegesis that she knows is feminist and that she undertakes through means associated with other feminist writers such as Phyllis Chesler. It appears that Helen Nebeker herself is like Jean Rhys: a woman in passage.

Professor Nebeker presented excerpts from her book on Rhys at the Jean Rhys Commemorative Colloquium held in New York City during the 1981 meetings of the Modern Language Association. Denied admission as a special session at the 1980 MLA meetings in Houston, Texas, the Jean Rhys Commemorative Colloquium gained admission in 1981 as a result of growing recognition in the United States of Rhys' literary stature. Chaired by Anne Shirley Buchanan of the University of Minnesota, the international panel included Dutch scholar Martien Kappers den Hollander of the University of Amsterdam who is working on Rhys' 'Dutch Connection' and Canadian scholar Joan Givner of the University of Regina who presented results of her work with the Jean Rhys letters at the University of Tulsa. In addition, Elaine Campbell of Regis College, Massachusetts, discussed Rhys' 'West Indian Connection'; Paul Delany of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia compared Rhys' version of the Rhys-Ford affair in *Quartet* with those of Edward de Neve in *Barred* and Stella Bowen in *Draun from Life*; Marsha Cummins of Bronx Community

College in New York City presented a formal paper on 'The Effect of a Double Focus' in Rhys' novels; and Eleanor Gordon of the University of Illinois, Chicago, summarized a paper on 'Female Archetype and Myth in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*'.

ELAINE CAMPBELL

Earl Lovelace, *The Wine of Astonishment*. Andre Deutsch, London, 1982. 146 pp.

One of the major strengths of Earl Lovelace's work is his ability to deal with that most elusive quality, the spirit of a community, in encouragingly direct terms. Despite the frequently distressing nature of his tales of exploitation and persecution, his work is ultimately a celebration of the spirit of his fellow Trinidadians. The prevailing pessimism of his renowned fellow countryman, V.S. Naipaul, with whose early novels Lovelace's fiction has been compared, is missing in Lovelace's work. Exile is not one of the options his characters consider and so confrontation becomes inevitable, bringing with it that shred of hope that dignifies their struggle against the depredations of years of colonial rule.

Lovelace's latest novel, his fourth, takes as its theme the banning of the Spiritual Baptist Church in Trinidad. Within this apparently narrow framework, Lovelace manages to catalogue and dramatise many of the complex problems that have beset Trinidad in the twentieth century. The specific effects of the American presence on the island during World War Two are conveyed alongside more fundamental political truths, i.e. that no member of the population can escape the effects of political actions. The election of Ivan Morton, the local boy made good, by the villagers of Bonasse, and his subsequent self-imposed alienation from their interests proves to be an alarming object lesson in self-serving political ambition complicated by years of cultural imperialism. When Bee, the Church leader, goes to plead with Morton for the restoration of the Church's legitimacy he is told 'We can't change our colour ... but we can change our attitude. We can't be white, but we can act white.' The expression of cultural values is an integral part of the characters' need to find and maintain an identity under the most adverse conditions, a theme common to many West Indian novels. The values and roles depicted in *The Wine of Astonishment* are largely traditional; passive endurance and stolidity, while seen as female strengths, are often viewed by the community as male weaknesses. The warrior-ideal still prevails, although the transmutation of macho consciousness is apparent in the influence of American culture. But when stickfighting is banned the description of mock battles with handkerchiefs becomes a symbol for the emasculation of a whole society. At this point Bolo, the champion stickfighter, emerges as a Christ-like figure whose sacrifice will remind the villagers of their drift away from what small shreds of identity they once had. But it is a typically futile gesture; frustration and humiliation explode into self-destructive violence. Whether this is because the action came too late or it was inappropriate in their changed society is not made clear. Lovelace prefers to describe rather than preach, as when the warrior loses his girl to the man of education with a fountain pen in his pocket, but we may infer that there is something simultaneously wasteful and yet necessary in Bolo's actions. More explicit is the sug-

gestion that the spirit of community, although curbed, cannot be destroyed. Self-expression and communal celebration, the essential concomitants of liberty, may therefore reappear in the spirit of the steel band after the so-called 'heathen worship' has been all but crushed.

Technically and stylistically *The Wine of Astonishment* provides ample evidence of Lovelace's growing assurance as a writer. The first person narrator, Eva, mother of five and wife of the church leader, is a convincing portrayal of that stolidity that comes from hard work and belief in God. The story is confidently conveyed in dialect and one is reminded of the particular qualities of that technique when practised by such writers as Reid and Selvon; its immediacy, the avoidance of overt didacticism and the seemingly effortless shift from everyday speech to highly lyrical language. The writing also echoes the oral tradition of the black West Indian, a further reminder of the cultural heritage, when Eva describes events not witnessed at first hand but described to her. Accordingly this mythological quality in the narration creates an ambience that counterbalances some of Lovelace's excesses; for example, the tendency to make his symbols too explicit. There is a similar heavy-handedness in his use of irony but this is more than compensated for by an overriding sympathy for his characters that increases the reader's involvement. Lovelace's previous work, *The Dragon Can't Dance*, was an ambitious and generally successful quest for the spirit of the Trinidadian community. *The Wine of Astonishment*, although seemingly narrower in scope, is however a far richer and more thought provoking work, giving evidence that Lovelace's stature as a major West Indian novelist is now confirmed.

PHILLIP LANGRAN

C.K. Stead, *In the Glass Case*, Essays on New Zealand Literature. Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1981. 293 pp. NZ\$16.90.

It is a great satisfaction to have such a collection of essays for, although Bill Pearson's *Fretful Sleepers* (Heinemann, Auckland, 1973) was a landmark, it contained essays other than on New Zealand literature. Stead's volume is broad in outlook: it is divided into three sections which deal successively with the novel, poetry and finally a poet's perspective on New Zealand. The whole constitutes a valuable study of the writer/poet Stead while at the same it brings together a number of very perspicacious articles by the same critic.

Any reader who wishes to have a comprehensive view of the New Zealand literary scene would do well to begin by reading *In the Glass Case*. He will find both the classics and a number of lesser-known novelists and poets. Stead also discusses the works of authors who have not enjoyed the success they deserve at home, e.g. Sylvia Ashton-Warner.

Stead sets out and concludes by underlining the importance of personal involvement and the authenticity of the experience. He writes with discernment and is sometimes biting critical. He has no patience with those who pass judgement on works which, in his opinion, they have not really read in depth (Fleur Adcock's introduction to the issue of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Spinster* is the case in point).

In his search for the personal touch in any writer, Stead is especially sensitive to words, language and style. This sensibility leads him to rate Katherine Mansfield, Allen Curnow, Maurice Duggan and Janet Frame high on his list of preferences. Yet, as he points out, style cannot illuminate a lack of personal experience or its suppression in the writing, for style is, in effect, an artist's 'sense of life'. Consequently Karl Stead finds it difficult to sympathise with Flaubert, Fleur Adcock and, at times, Baxter.

Stead's analyses of pieces by other poets is as interesting for the examination of his own poems as for the works under consideration. This, I feel, is particularly true in his articles on Fairburn and Brasch. Stead is attracted to the spontaneous inspiration that Fairburn decries and for this reason R.A.K. Mason pleases; although Stead is able to recognise the value of Brasch's work he cannot really appreciate it.

The third section of this critical collection illustrates the specificity of New Zealand literature in general — the continuing preoccupation with isolation and distance, with images of arrival and departure tends to be less important because of the advent of improved travel liaisons but it is precisely this sensation of aloneness which has contributed to form a literary circle with all the advantages of contact and interchange as well as the inconveniences of inbreeding and promiscuity.

The great number of writers present on the Auckland University Campus as well as the library's collection of New Zealand texts 'in the glass case' were to have a decisive influence on the young Karl Stead. In turn it is certain that this collection of essays will be an important influence on future generations of students of New Zealand literature.

CAROLE DURIX

Patricia Grace, *The Dream Sleepers and Other Stories*. Longman Paul, 1980.

From the beginning a painstaking writer, Patricia Grace has continued to refine her technique. In this book, she is rather like a painter who has moved into her abstract period. Her last book, the novel *Mutuwhenua* (1978), was a departure from her natural field, the short story; if her novel was not altogether successful, Grace seems to have learned much from having somewhat misapplied her talents. In *The Dream Sleepers* she turns from sustained narrative and character development and concentrates on the sketch.

Grace deals mostly with simple scenes and situations, in accordance with her aim to present to a condescending and excluding Pakeha society the Maori way of life with its simple dignity. She does that by showing the Maori in the common activities of human life: going to school, playing children's games, growing into adolescence, dating, marrying, becoming pregnant and giving birth, growing old and meeting death. Most of her stories are set in rural areas, and the sea is never far away (Grace herself lives on the coast near Wellington). For the children life means taking care of the garden, looking after the cows, going fishing, and, less willingly, going to school. It is an idyllic life, and Grace herself is happiest in the idyll. There are few scenes of tension in her stories — perhaps too few, for she may to some degree be deferring to the White racist notion of the Maori as warm and simple people.

There are only two stories of the total twelve dealing with the striking difference in the values and the rights and privileges of the two races within New Zealand society: 'Letters from Whetu' and 'Journey'. Despite Grace's infrequent treatment of such themes (though she could not have avoided them altogether in recording the Maori experience), these stories are the strongest and most memorable in the collection. Perhaps because she was ill at ease in dealing with areas of racial tension, she is more than usually conscious of her technique in these stories. 'Letters from Whetu' consists of a series of letters by a Maori highschool boy, the Whetu of the title, written in class to fill in the school day; they are full of disgruntled comments upon the teachers as posturing or rambling on and upon the courses of study. Whetu's blotting out of the classes going on around him in favour of memory and anticipation of times spent with his Maori friends by the sea represents a rejection of Pakeha values by an intelligent Maori who is capable of disturbing Pakeha faith in their greater intelligence and stability if he wishes to. But he is no longer willing to graduate as an 'honourable statistic' of his race and go on to a dull office job (with, no doubt, limited chances of Maori promotion). Whetu's full name, Whetu o te Moana, was given to him in a gesture of obeisance to Pakeha culture — it translates Star of the Sea, one of the Catholic titles of the Virgin — but he himself is about to throw off the layers of Pakeha culture with which he has been swathed and opt for a Maori way of life in closer contact with the land and sea. But on the threshold of his adult life he faces not freedom but a life where he will have to face intensifying and multiplying racial tensions, and that is why this story is so disturbing.

'Journey' tells of a trip to the city by an old Maori man to convince Pakeha officials to allow his family to retain their land, which has been reclassified for restricted development and in time is to be taken over by the government. He begins the trip with a faith in the reasonableness of his position and in Pakeha willingness to reverse an eminently reversible decision, but returns with his faith shattered. Not only is he unsuccessful in his mission, but he learns at the meeting that the fertile land that has fed his family for so long is to become a parking lot, while the rocky land nearby is zoned for housing. In deepest defeat he cries out to his family at the end that he does not want to be buried on his land and suffer his bones to be disturbed later, but wants to be cremated.

We do not directly see the old man's meeting with the officials in this story, but learn of it as he relives the incident on the trip home. In this way Grace is able to reduce emphasis on his rage and concentrate instead on his sorrow and helplessness. The title of the story, too, deflects attention from the frustration of the meeting, directing it to the anticipation of the journey.

The last five stories in *The Dream Sleepers* — 'Kepa', 'The Pictures', 'Drifting', 'White-bait', and 'Kip' — form a sort of long short story. This sequence of five stories allows us to see Grace's chief weaknesses and strengths in miniature. One is aware of a thinness of narrative content in Grace's stories, in this third book even more than in her first book (*Waiariki*), and of a weakness in portraying character development. Her talent is for short sketches, which she infuses with a great deal of charm and vitality. They glow with her Maori characters' fellowship and keen enjoyment of activities associated with the land and the sea. Grace's stories are deliberately limited in scope; at their best they attain a lyricism seldom matched in New Zealand literature.

ROSE MARIE BESTON