

1981

Book reviews, Journals

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Abstract

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Book Reviews

B.R. Whiting, *Winter for Quiet*. Viale di Trastevere 259 Press, Rome, 1979. 35 pages. Lir. 2,000.

To read B.R. Whiting's *Winter for Quiet* is to be rather scandalized that so fine a poet should be so little known. But the blame lies perhaps with Whiting's own wanderings which took him from his native Australia to India where he served in both the British army and the Bengali civil service, becoming Casey's, Mountbatten's, and briefly Gandhi's bodyguard, and then to Italy where he now divides his time between Rome and a Tuscan boating community. Boating appears to be his abiding love; and his latest collection is a series of poems about the sea as the small-boat sailor comes to love and fear it.

Whiting is fascinated both with the wildness of the sea and the precise technology that seeks to oppose it:

For an object whose height is known in advance
Take a Sextant angle, measuring,
Enter the Table and read off the distance —
But in the mist we went by reckoning.

I knew the rotten tooth, half eaten away,
The tower called Le Prêtre and the mile of reef
known as les moines, and sailing confidently
Set a course to pass between rock and cliff;

In cold grey air the oily swell was clear
And suddenly boiled a swirl, right by the lee,
Where a granite hand reached near —
We were off, only by the scend of the sea —

Dead reckoning and in error...

(from 'Les Moines')

Elsewhere he describes how 'in the telescope of the sextant'

The sun becomes a bottle-green globe, sliding
About in one man's hand that cannot control
The horizon riding up and down and reading
Whatever he makes of it, and never still ...

... But when we put the nautical Tables down
The ancient Gods come out of the preterite —
Aphrodite rises above the dawn,
And Mars, one red small eye on the satellites.

(from 'In the Telescope of the Sextant')

Whiting's work shows equal respect for the crafts of sailor and poet (note those unobtrusive rhymes and half-rhymes). If he is to be classed among the Australians, the poet he most resembles is John Blight, not simply in his fascination with the sea but in such conceits as that of the superannuated boat loaded onto its trailer — 'the wreck calling the sailor where he must go/ Inland at last'.

In general, however, Whiting's analogies between the human and the natural world are controlled by more technical knowledge than Blight's. In this respect he can be associated with the important tradition (common to such very different Australian poets as A.D. Hope, Judith Wright, and Les Murray) of using modern evolutionary myth and biological knowledge as a way to make poetic sense of new regions:

Life is the slime at the meeting of land and sea;
Ancient sea-coasts long dry are betrayed
By the fossil line of the blue-green algae;
At the same rate as winter, rain, and flood,
Periwinkles wear away the rocks, slow filing,
Teeth on a ribbon the substance of insects' wings,
Persistent, proof against gales, a low profile;
The headland-breaking roller flings
Against the mussel beds a million tons
Green, dead weight and the wild smother
Where the immense backwash foams down —
They offer only silken threads for anchor —

(from 'A Low Profile')

MARK O'CONNOR

Journals

THE LITERARY CRITERION

Volume 15, Nos 3 and 4, is a special double issue on Australian Literature. It includes articles by A.D. Hope, Geoffrey Blainey, Vincent Buckley, Leonie Kramer, Chris

Wallace-Crabbe, Bob Brissenden, Frank Moorhouse, Brian Matthews, S.C. Harrex, Andrew Taylor, Barry Andrews, Dorothy Green, John Docker, Veronica Brady, Mark Macleod, Margaret Williamson, Ian Reid, and Alexander Craig. Copies are available from The Editor, *The Literary Criterion*, Dhvanyaloka, Mysore - 570 006, India. Rs.15.

ARIEL

There will be a special issue of *Ariel* on African literature which will be published in Summer 1981. The issue will deal with as many aspects of African literature in English as possible: with poetry, drama and criticism as well as fiction. It will also include a long review article on recent critical studies of the African novel as well as shorter notices. The scholarly and critical studies will be complemented with a selection of contemporary African poetry. *Ariel* is edited by Ian Adam, Department of English, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

THE COMMONWEALTH NOVEL IN ENGLISH

The editor of *Commonwealth Novel in English*, a biannual to appear in January and July, and which is to appear initially in January 1982, invites formal, sociological, and psycho-analytical criticism, checklists and bibliographies, book reviews etc. on the works of Commonwealth novelists; interviews are also solicited.

Contributors should send TWO copies of their manuscripts, the format of which should adhere to the *MLA Style Sheet* (Second Edition). All correspondence should be addressed to Sudhakar R. Jamkhandi, Editor, Department of English, University of Texas, Arlington, Texas, 76019, USA.

Annual subscription rates are as follows: — Students: \$4.00; Faculty: \$6.00; Institutions: \$8.00. Please add a postage fee of \$2.00 to all subscription fees. Magazines agencies may send to the Editor for bulk rates.

ACLALS BULLETIN

Members should soon receive the final issue from Queensland. The Bulletin then moves to Canada. Cecil Abrahams has asked me to inform readers that articles and reviews of books dealing with the national literatures in the Commonwealth will be gladly accepted. These items should be forwarded to Cecil Abrahams, Editor, Department of English, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec, Canada J1M 1Z7.

KOMPARATISTISCHE HEFTE

The Departments of English, French, and Comparative Literature at Bayreuth University, West Germany, have launched a bi-annual journal of General and Comparative Literature: KOMPARATISTISCHE HEFTE.

Two issues have appeared: No 1 (1980) Literary Relations between Europe and Africa, No 2 (1980) Forms and Functions of National Stereotypes in Literature.

Future issues include: No 3 (1981) Travelogues, No 4 (1981) Literary Translations, No 5 (1982) Mutual Influence of the Arts on One Another, No 6 (1982) Marginal Literatures, No 7 (1983) Literary Relations between Germany and France, No 8 (1983) Literary Relations between Europe and the Caribbean.

The editor invites scholarly contributions. Manuscripts may be submitted in English, French or German and should be double-spaced, with footnotes gathered at the end. Long quotations should be indented. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a summary (10-15 lines) in the two other languages. Correspondence, manuscripts and books for review should be sent to:

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In the Next Issue:

Nadine Gordimer on *Burger's Daughter*; interviews with Buchi Emecheta, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Derek Walcott; an Index to Katherine Mansfield References 1970-80; articles on V.S. Naipaul, Randolph Stow, modern South African poetry; autobiography Buchi Emecheta; graphics Ian Grainger.