

power to save the community. Women in *The Healers*, she points out, are "more complete, private and public persons" (65), and, indeed, in this final novel the female as parasite has vanished and has been replaced by a more positive, prophetic, and wholesome figure.

The essays Wright has compiled offer the reader a thorough exploration of Armah's fictional world, its genesis, its distinctive flavour, its multifaceted colours, its controversial themes, its metaphorical and symbolic resonances. The essays also offer the reader a wide range of styles, from the turgid, unpleasantly academic prose of Chidi Amuta's essay, "Portraits of the Contemporary Artist in Armah's Novels," to the simpler, lucid, and more concise prose of, say, Busia, Lindfors, and Griffiths. On the whole this is a worthwhile collection of essays. Wright has not confined his selection to commentaries that analyze and elucidate Armah's strengths; the other side is also represented, and the secondary sources and critical material, which include PhD dissertations, listed in the bibliography are a gold mine for explorers of Armah's admittedly controversial, but compelling, fiction.

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Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, eds. *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. pp. 271. \$49.95; \$15.95 pb.

It is difficult to get a handle on precisely what this book is supposed to be. The main title suggests a concern with that nexus of strategies called high theory, especially theory regarding shifting positionality and ideas of the self. The subtitle invites a Janus-like view of a way of working: "making" summons images of getting something started in the first place and it also names that ongoing process by which the something continues to get done. History and current operations both figure here. "Feminist literary criticism" is a big enough can of worms that whole books have been devoted to spelling out the myriad ways in which it can work.

But few of the writers involved in this project stick with any of the above issues for very long. All responded to a call for papers treating the experiences that had made them feminists and feminist scholars—exploring how feminism had affected their writing, teaching, professional associations, and personal relationships; considering where feminism intersected with race, ethnicity, and gender (how could "class" be left off a Routledge list?); discussing what differentiated first-generation feminist scholars from their younger colleagues; and speculating on the future of feminism in light of its current challenges.

The result is a curious kind of ethnography. With perhaps a half-dozen exceptions, none of these essays is unusually provocative or informative, except possibly for a wholly uninitiated reader. Few are representative of the kind of work on which these scholars have made

their reputations. (*The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, for example, contains essays by four of the contributors, showing their critical acumen and interventionist strategies.) Taken together, however, the articles in *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism* provide a telling portrait of a narrow slice of the feminist community (or communities) that got interested and angry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, visible and powerful in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Like most ethnographies, this text invites a consideration of the positionality and narrative strategies of the observers. Since most of the writers are also their own subjects of examination, the rhetoric of revelation ought to be of particular interest. Unfortunately, there is a predictable sameness to many of these stories. Despite Rachel Blau DePlessis's weighty recognition of "the feminist cultural project" as "[n]o more and no less than the re-seeing of every text, every author (male and female), every canonical work, every thing written, every world view, every discourse, every image, every structure, from a gender perspective" (102)—something echoed by others, in their own words, in the collection—there is little sense that these writers care to do much about alternative means of emplotment, much less about Teresa de Lauretis's suggestion in *Alice Doesn't* that narrative itself may be inherently masculine.

There is a friendly, almost magazine profile tone to many of these essays. Smart daughters of professional fathers and plucky or frustrated mothers discover literature as a means of escape in childhood and replay their desire for daddy's approval with a population of male professors and advisors looking for ego-building reflections in a pair of dewy, young eyes. Half the contributors attended Stanford, Columbia, or the University of California. Many started out in English Renaissance literature, and those who aren't in English are in French. Many mention a particular anti-war demonstration, black radicalism, consciousness-raising groups, Doris Lessing, and sexual politics as keys to their revised views of their world. Identification and identity politics, despite their loss of status in the wake of poststructuralist critiques, hold no shame for many of these critics. Gayle Greene loves contemporary women's fiction for "the way it can empower women, the way it empowered me" (10). Barbara Christian read Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as "not just a text, [but] . . . an accurate and dynamic embodiment both of the possibilities and improbabilities of my own life" (197). Weariness at midlife provides the closure for several of these stories. Carolyn Porter frets that "[w]e now have, many of us, a room of our own, but we have no time to spend there, and no energy left for productive work even if we could find the time" (179). Nancy Miller misses the "passion of community" of the 1970s and finds herself "more at ease reviewing (even teaching) the history of feminist past than imagining its future" (42). Nostalgia runs like a low-grade infection throughout the book.

There is, of course, disagreement among the contributors on certain points, often around the theory-versus-“real life” standoff. Greene urges “reaching people outside academia who might actually read our books if they were more interesting” (19); Jerry Aline Flieger believes “theory is not inimical to action and to ethics, but can help provide a base for choices we make” (263). Bonnie Zimmerman insists on experience (something she defines as “always constituted by others” [118]) as the source of the most galvanizing feminist thinking; Molly Hite tartly notes that “being a feminist literary scholar is in many respects a matter of keeping abreast of the current repudiations” (125).

Two of the essays smartly refuse the territory (and mapping thereof) shared by many of the others. Linda S. Kauffman, whose fragmentary remarks about her childhood mention selling Bibles and working as a janitor with her father until he turned to booze and gambling (forcing Kauffman—still a minor—and her mother into waitressing and then homelessness). Kauffman jumps narrative ship (forcing the reader to sink or swim) to take up the issue that “what is happening ‘inside our hearts’ is as much subject to convention as are discussions of epistemology” (138). She slams colleagues “whose concept of politics is bounded in a nutshell: the seminar table and fellowship panel” (138). “Exhausted genres” are not the answer to a “politically exhausted culture.” Kauffman scorns the “blind belief that we are all intrinsically interesting, unique, [and] that we deserve to be happy,” adding “I never thought feminism was about happiness. I thought it was about justice” (143).

Shirley Geok-lin Lim learned about multiple identities and shifting positionalities long before she encountered Western feminism. As a child in Malaysia she grasped, even before she had words for it, that what we call feminism is open to critique. Her mother left the family (self-fulfilment or cruel abandonment?) but the father who stayed to raise the children demonstrated his love with beatings and the enforced familial hierarchy dictated by Confucianism. Ironically, the nuns at the strict convent school presented an image of independence. They were unburdened with children, commanded respect, and taught a theology in which ideals were made in Heaven, not the family. Lim calls her cultural world “multilogical.” She criticizes a post-colonialist discourse in which more white, privileged women (Olive Schreiner and Jean Rhys, for instance) are offered as the voices of the Third World; yet she joins the discourse graciously despite the tokenism she often senses in invitations to speak or write.

Elizabeth Ermath works out an intelligent definition of “personal” as being communally constructed, but existing somewhere between the merely biological “individual” and the completely shared “public.” (She also offers one of the neater definitions of “feminist” in this collection: “a woman who can resist the many temptations to fall into competition with other women for favored slave status” [233]). Ann

Rosalind Jones presents a lively debate on the pleasures and pitfalls on both sides of the French deconstruction/Yankee can-do standoff, although I'm not sure she intended the francophobe pun in her title, "Imaginary Gardens With Real Frogs in Them."

This book is a patchwork-quilt testament to a generation that braved the front lines without guidance. If it is short on suggestions for the next step, it is a reminder of a time when putting one career foot in front of the other was virtually unheard of for intellectual, independent women. It is a look at some who not only learned to walk, but invented a whole choreography.

DOROTHY CHANSKY

Bruce King, ed. *The Commonwealth Novel Since 1960*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1991. pp. xi, 268. £45.00

Bruce King is an experienced hand at putting together collections of informational/critical essays on what is variously called Commonwealth Literature(s), Postcolonial Writing, World Literature in English, and the New Literatures in English. In this recent anthology of essays by various hands, he offers a useful, though uneven, survey of fiction writing since 1960, organized by region, supplemented by a group of comparative essays that cross regions and cultures. In addition to essays on what used to be called the settler colonies—Canada, Australia, New Zealand—and on the traditionally significant areas of South Africa, India, and the West Indies, there are brief essays here on Malaysia and Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Oceania (the Pacific); furthermore, there are separate essays on West and East Africa. The "Movements and Directions" section attends to significant topics such as feminism, indigenous fiction writing, the complication (and competition?) of postmodernism, and the questions of nationalism and regionalism. The volume will surely be useful to anyone needing a preliminary map of the field, and those who no longer need such a map should still find it stimulating, if not consistently so.

The organizational mapping of the major part of the book by country/region is useful but presents problems, given the incredible proliferation of material since 1960. How do you sketch in a context, flesh out a viable synthetic theme, and provide an adequately annotated—and representative, if not complete—list, all within fifteen pages? It's quite a challenge, and one to which not all contributors rise. In (critically) fairly conventional terms, Kofi Owusu covers West Africa, placing recent writers in the context of the "*histoire* of postcolonial societies which felt 'no longer at ease' after 'things [had] fallen apart'" (147) initiated by Achebe; but his essay hardly does justice to contemporary feminist presence in the literature. Kirsten Holst Petersen writing on South Africa—Gordimer, La Guma, Head, Coetzee, Brink, and Ndebele—provides good information in terms of both