

The question then, is, who will find this study useful? Rubin's reading of Babel is worthwhile, and it is undoubtedly the strongest part of *Jewish Gangsters*. Specialists in American Jewish writing may want to reconsider the work of Gold, Fuchs, and Ornitz, but Rubin does not succeed in placing them in a broader context, which might have linked this reconsideration to better known criticism and fiction. Missed opportunities abound: Rubin fails to set her authors' work alongside a tradition of American experimental writing; she fails to give a truly enlightening sense of the role of crime in American daily life; she does not examine in depth the fascinating link between Jewish screen gangsters and those on the page; and she does not complete her portrait of the revolutionary imagination that motivated leftist novelists of the 1920s and '30s. In *Jewish Gangsters* Rubin insists too strongly on focusing on the details of the novels of Fuchs, Gold, and Ornitz, which do not generally reward the reader.

More fascinating undeveloped material lurks between the lines of Rubin's study. Samuel Ornitz is remembered today not for his fiction, but for his principled stand as one of the Hollywood Ten before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. With the recent death of Ring Lardner Jr., this generation of leftist culture heroes has passed more or less into the mists of the past, and Rubin might have made more of Ornitz's decision to draw jail time rather than name names in 1950.

The other undeveloped motif in *Jewish Gangsters* — possibly the most glaring one — is the lack of careful consideration of the grotesque figure of Meyer Wolfsheim in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. For Americans, this fictionalized version of the Jewish gangster Arnold Rothstein, who was said to have fixed the 1919 World Series, is a far likelier archetypal figure than Babel's Benya Krik. In the 1920s and '30s, hardly an American knew of Babel, while minions must have worked at their own portraits of gangsters — in film and on the page — with Fitzgerald's haunting lines in the back of their minds:

The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people — "with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe" (qtd. in Rubin 7).

NORMAN RAVVIN

Helen Vendler. *Seamus Heaney*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000. Pp. xvi, 188. \$12.95.

First published in 1998, this systematic exploration of the poetry of Seamus Heaney remains the most readable, informative, and authoritative introduction to the work of this Nobel Laureate. Following a brief chronology of Heaney's life and work up to the publication of *The Spirit*

Level (1996), Vendler explores Heaney's poetry under seven headings: "Anonymities" (*Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark, Wintering Out*); "Archaeologies" (*North*); "Anthropologies" (*Field Work*); "Alterities and Alter Egos" (from *Death of a Naturalist* to *Station Island*); "Allegories" (*The Haw Lantern*); "Airiness" (*Seeing Things*); and "An Afterward" (*The Spirit Level*). One of the many strengths of this study is the fact that each section is followed by a brief epilogue, "Second Thoughts," which gives a foretaste of the ways in which Heaney will, later in his career, address the concerns of that section. These "Second Thoughts" underscore one of Heaney's strengths as a poet: his self-corrective habit, a habit exhibited by an earlier Irish Nobel Laureate, W. B. Yeats.

Vendler's reading of Heaney is informed by an impressive understanding of the incredibly convoluted socio political ethos of Northern Ireland and of the island as a whole. She even notices when the ethos trips the poet himself, as it does in the title of "Dockery." Since the subject of the poem is a Protestant shipyard worker, and dockers were, traditionally, Catholics, the title should have been "Shipwright," traditionally a Protestant occupation. However, this easy familiarity with her subject may have lead Vendler to overlook a potential problem for her readers, a problem which is one of Heaney's major "preoccupations" as a poet from the publication of his first volume, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), to his translation of *Beowulf* (2000).

In addition to "Standard" English, Heaney consciously makes use of both forms of Irish English (Ulster English and Hiberno-English) in his work. Vendler seem to assume that the many Irish English idioms in the poems she discusses pose no difficulty for readers, and does not indicate that they are a major concern for Heaney. In *The Redress of Poetry*, in his discussion of his substitution of the Standard English verb "worked" for his initial choice of the mid-Ulster "wrought" in one of his earliest poems, "Follower," in *Death of a Naturalist*, he observes: "once you think twice about a local usage you have been displaced from it, and your right to it has been contested by the official linguistic censor with whom another part of you is secretly in league" (63). A feeling of what, in *Preoccupations*, he calls "cultural anxiety" (137) induced by his use of dialect is evident in the concluding lines of his poem "Making Strange" in *Station Island*: "I found myself driving the stranger/ through my own country, adept/ at dialect, reciting my pride/ in all that I knew, that began to make strange/ at that same recitation" (32-33).

Heaney was forced to grapple with the question of dialect in a very practical context when he accepted an invitation to translate *Beowulf* for the seventh edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (2000). Since the translation has an international pedagogical purpose, he first had to consider whether or not it was appropriate to use dialect, and then, if he decided to use it, to what extent. In his discussion of the translation in *The Times Literary Supplement*, he reveals that he, like

Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, had to overcome the experience of "cultural cringe," a form of "cultural anxiety," and make the "transition from linguistic fret to linguistic offensive" (14). So, dialect appears in the translation, but he uses it sparingly and only where appropriate. The care with which he selected it for inclusion is suggested by the most common dialect word "bawn" (< Irish *báb-hún*, a cattle keep or fortress), which appears four times, and the calque "gap of danger" (< Irish *beárna baoghail*), which appears twice. Both have their genesis in Ireland's turbulent history and are therefore appropriate to the turbulent world of *Beowulf*. Since the meaning of "gap of danger" is clear from its contexts, he does not provide a translator's note, but his note for "bawn," reveals its appropriateness: "Fortified outwork of a court or castle. The word was used by English planters in Ulster [and elsewhere in Ireland] to describe the fortified dwellings they erected on lands confiscated from the Irish" (43). Heaney is, of course, fully aware of the irony implicit in his translator's notes. In his *TL*S discussion he notes, wryly: "At certain points, it is the very translation that has to be translated for the benefit of the worldwide audience of English-speakers to whom the anthology is directed" (16).

It is clear from the outset of her study that Vendler has little time for those critics who insist on reading Heaney from a political perspective. His work has been "interrogated" and faulted by Nationalists, Unionists and Feminists, and it is in her response to these hostile critics that she articulates the most important aspect of her reading: "Heaney's adversary critics read the poems as statements of a political position, with which they quarrel. To read lyric poems as if they were expository essays is a fundamental philosophical mistake; and part of the purpose of this book is to read the poems as the provisional symbolic structures that they are" (9). Vendler, tactfully, refrains from identifying the three political perspectives from which Heaney is usually attacked, but she does return to the issue in her concluding paragraph, which is worth quoting in its entirety:

It should be remembered that the only thing to which the genre of the lyric obliges its poet is to represent his own situation and his responses to it in adequate imaginative language. Since even his most strenuous critics never seem to doubt that Heaney has shown them how he sees his situation and how his feelings respond to it, they—even in arguing against what they take to be his views—are the best witness to his imaginative success. Their demand that he see predicaments of politics or gender as they would, or have the same feelings about them as they do is, of course, unanswerable; that is not a demand one can make of art. (175)

To all of this, Stephen Dedalus, would, in the light of his theory of art, say a fervent "Amen!"

RICHARD WALL

WORKS CITED

- Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf*. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. W. H. Abrams et al. 7th ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 2000. 32-99.
- . "The Drag of the Golden Chain." *Times Literary Supplement* 12 Nov. 1999: 14.
- . *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*. New York: Farrar, 1980.
- . *The Redress of Poetry*. London: Faber, 1995.
- . *Station Island*. London: Faber, 1984.