

HANS WAGENER, ED.

Zeitkritische Romane des 20.

Jahrhunderts: Die Gesellschaft in der Kritik der deutschen Literatur

Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975. Pp. 392.

In his preface, Wagener says that, in the case of most authors, it would not be wise to differentiate between "Zeitkritik" on the one hand and "Gesellschaftskritik" on the other. The epoch covered in Wagener's book is subdivided into the following periods: 1. The Society of the "Kaiserreich," 2. The Weimar Republic, 3. The Third Reich, 4. The Immediate Postwar Period, 5. The Affluent Society since about 1965. Sixteen authors are considered: Heinrich Mann, Alfred Döblin, Leonhard Frank, Hermann Broch, Hans Fallada, Erich Kästner, Hermann Kesten, Anna Seghers, Ernst Glaeser, Stefan Andres, Wolfgang Koeppen, Max Frisch, Heinrich Böll, Martin Walser, Günter Grass, Uwe Johnson. The editor explains why he left out Bruno Traven, Robert Musil, and Joseph Roth: the latter two, for instance, were clearly more concerned with Austrian than with German society. Broch, on the other hand, while not being a German citizen, wrote mainly about German society and is, therefore, included; Frisch's case is a special one: his criticism of Swiss society applies to West-German society as well.

Having established his canon, Wagener had to find sixteen critics who would hand in their manuscripts by the deadline. He has succeeded in lining up an impressive number of experts; all essays are competent and some are outstanding; nevertheless, the sensitive reader is bound to feel that, here and there, a scholar is struggling hard to fulfil his commitment while silently cursing his author and himself. Ulrich Weisstein has written about Heinrich Mann again and again; by now he must find it difficult to say anything new. Several other scholars are in a similar position.

This reader has learnt most from two essays on authors who, today, are not in the limelight: Klaus Weissenberger on L. Frank and Thomas Koebner on Ernst Glaeser. Quite objective is Hartmut Steinecke on Hermann Broch; Broch—like other German authors between 1918 and 1945—was, at least politically, inefficient. If we compare him and others to writers like Upton Sinclair (who sold hundreds

of thousands of copies in the Germany of the 1920ies), we see how "tame," impractical, and hopelessly "weltfremd" those German novelists were. Many seem to have had no contact with the masses whatever; they wrote their books without giving a thought to the intellectual (or even stylistic) level of the people who—they thought—should be influenced by their works. Frank, Fallada, and Anna Seghers could—potentially—be understood by the masses; all others had little chance of reaching a large readership. Kästner began to produce popular literature only when it was too late.

Things changed after 1945. There is no doubt about the popularity and integrity of Frisch, Walser, Böll, and Grass; they are, in every respect, more sensitive and much more influential than their prewar colleagues; no wonder, they seem to survive the concerted attacks launched against them from the political right.

There are two points which should be mentioned. One: When Wagener speaks of Germany, he means—after 1945—West Germany only. Two: most critics are not "Literatursoziologen"—as Wagener points out himself. The terminology used in this book, therefore, is often not the best possible. All in all it is an excellent book, carefully edited, beautifully set and printed—a pleasure to read.

Ingrid Schuster

RUTH NICOLS

Song of the Pearl

Toronto: Macmillan, 1976.

Pp. 158. \$7.95.

This is Ruth Nicols's fourth book. Her first fiction work, *Ceremony of Innocence*, was also intended for adults, whereas *A Walk out of the World* and the award winning *The Marrow of the World* were primarily addressed to children.

The major theme of the book is the quest of the protagonist, Margaret Redmond of Toronto, for the secret of the profound love-hatred she feels for her uncle.

Aware that Freudianism in fiction has had its hey-day, Ruth Nicols does not resort to the heroine's childhood experiences in order to discover the roots of the involvement which ultimately leads her to an untimely death. Nor does she employ the much used and abused dream-vision technique. Instead, she adopts the framework of a journey beyond the physical death of the very woman whose self she wants to probe and explore. Indeed, if "Who was I?" and "Why did I love and hate my uncle?" are the major questions asked by Margaret Redmond, the different episodes of the journey mark out and carry forward her progression towards finding the answers. This arrangement gives the novelist scope for complexity, but what follows is rather a disappointment.

After dying of asthma, Margaret finds herself in a very earth-like heaven, travels extensively backward in chronological time, and discovers that she had also been Elisabeth Love in sixteenth century England; Zawumatec, a slave in the long houses of the Iroquois; and, regardless of sex, Tirigan, a warrior prince in ancient Summer. Thus, for those who are totally devoted to reincarnation, there are special rewards on almost every page. Those who do not share this belief will, however, find the book a hard morsel to swallow. Elisabeth hated her husband for his fickleness, Zawumatec hated her master for having enslaved her, and Tirigan hated Utuhegal for having deposed him. Hence, by Nicols's simple equation, Margaret hated her uncle who was the triple reincarnation of the husband, master, and usurper.

Ruth Nicols packs Margaret Redmond's observations into a bracing set of maxims. These pieces of wisdom not only heavily intersperse the narration, but also make the presence of the author herself regrettable conspicuous. Finally, solemnities such as "Paradise is to want for nothing" usher in a conclusion which, in the absence of an effective answer to the main question asked in the book, is both disarming and deflating. At the end of her journey, Margaret finds true love in the person of Paul, a young Chinese of the Tang dynasty. Both will be reborn, this time in the United States, will get married, live happily, and procreate. This, of course, leads to a possibility which may be appealing, but may not convince us all: death is no longer the inescapable end of human existence, but a blithe migration from one physical state to another.

This book has nothing to tell about the exploration of human passions or the subtle art of expressing and integrating them. For all her extensive journey, Margaret Redmond never becomes a full character, and, because of the insistence on actual reincarnation, the minor characters cannot be interpreted either as elements of a mythos, or as spiritual clues to the peculiar nature of the protagonist. No subtleties of psychological reading contribute anything to the reader's understanding of the human nature in general, or lead to his progression towards self-knowledge.

However, an impression of youthful enthusiasm is communicated in Ruth Nicols's descriptions of the heavenly landscape where the journey beyond death takes place. This author certainly has an eye for color and an ear for sound. The song of a bird, the rain on a roof, or the misty green of a valley at dawn are occasions for ecstasy. There are also a few noteworthy attempts at coaxing language to divulge its potential for meaning and rhythm.

Ruth Nicols is definitely an imaginative writer, yet the images she conceives have the effect not only to create feasts of illusion, but also to destroy illusion. When we probe the significance of the search for Margaret Redmond's self, the book becomes more improbable than the rudest sketch. *Song of the Pearl* is a promising book, but it is not yet the promise come true.

Ofelia Cohn-Sfetcu

MARTINE MAISANI-LEONARD
André Gide ou l'ironie de l'écriture
 Montreal: Les Presses de
 l'Université de Montréal, 1976.
 Pp. 273. \$13.75.

In the introduction to *André Gide ou l'ironie de l'écriture*, Madame Maisani-Léonard situates her approach to Gide's works at the level of the narrator and his style, which it is her task to demystify, in order to reveal the relationship between the narrator and his narration. Gide saw this relationship as a struggle between the