

(p. 50), he begins with the execution of his assignment. On his way to a certain but undisclosed destination, "something illogical" (p. 18) happens in his head which makes him forget everything about his important project.

The remainder of the booklet deals with the General's search for his original plan and describes the last moments of his life; a few adventurous and strange episodes from his picaresque life are also narrated either by his illegitimate daughter, or by his girl friend.

There is no doubt that *General Pies* is a witty and amusing tale; however, one has to add that neither the protagonist's aim, nor Mr. Thermerson's intention are clear to the reader. What this overdimensional character symbolizes or represents is not easy to guess; and what this intelligent author alludes to is not always clear and perceivable. Although certain serious issues are referred to (philosophy, p. 12; prophets and reformers, pp. 25, 29; racism and prejudice, p. 31; saviors and saints, p. 32; evolution and decency, pp. 33, 39; religion and *Realpolitik*, p. 34), and many ambiguous leitmotifs (the mackintosh, the one solitary bullet, the seagull, the stray dog, and many more) are introduced, the author's intellectual intention and the work's moral significance are not easy to discern; and maybe this is part of this book's appeal to the reader.

S. Elkhadem

ENRIQUE ANDERSON IMBERT
Los primeros cuentos del mundo
Buenos Aires: Ediciones Marymar,
1977, Pp. 315.

In *Los primeros cuentos del mundo* Professor Anderson Imbert has collected 255 of the world's earliest tales. Some of these date from approximately 2,000 B.C. and others are more recent: 1095 A.D. Clearly this is a vast undertaking, but the author limits the scope of the book by stating that he collected these stories "porque no

encontré ninguna obra que, en un solo volumen, satisficiera mi curiosidad por los primeros cuentos del mundo" (p. 5). The audience for whom the book is written is not a particularly scholarly one, but rather is made up of "lectores curiosos como yo y, como yo, no especializados en la antigüedad" (p. 5).

The quantity of material covered is best understood from the following summary of the contents. There are eleven chapters, each of which is devoted to a different group of tales after this fashion: tales from (1) the Near East; (2) Egypt; (3) Israel; (4) Greece; (5) Rome; (6) the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages; (7) India; (8) China; (9) Japan; (10) Persia; (11) Arabia. An analysis of any one of these groups of tales brings the critic into immediate conflict with one or more of the ten problems "de difícil solución" (p. 5) which Anderson Imbert outlines in his prologue.

These are as set out below: (1) The early tales are written in dead languages and not even the best translations in the world can be trusted. (2) There is a terminological problem in that many of these "tales" may be referred to, at least in Medieval Spanish, beneath one, or several, of the following headings: *ejemplo, fábula, apólogo, proverbio, castigo, hazana, consejo, balada, historieta, leyenda, novela*, etc. (p. 5). (3) The ancient tales do not fit into our modern definitions. (4) There may be a confusion between fiction and religion, particularly in the tales of Biblical origin. (5) The problem of oral tradition is almost insoluble. (6) The tales are called "early" or "first" because they show surprising complexity and can scarcely be called *primitive*, although some critics have attempted to do so. (7) Modern archaeology is making us undergo a constant revision of our knowledge of the culture of ancient civilizations. Hence, even seemingly basic facts may be subject to enormous changes. (8) There are many complications involved with both the selection and the ordering of the tales. (9) Many common themes abound, but there is no attempt to classify them or to relate them to any of the approved theme/motif indexes. (10) There is a transcription problem in that many of the ancient names have no adequate equivalent in Spanish.

The vastness of this material is a limiting factor. Many tales are so brief as to be

scarcely more than plot summaries. Few have more than one page dedicated to them. A personal disappointment is that the Golden Age of Welsh Literature receives less than eleven lines, the *Mabinogion* being the only truly Welsh work mentioned, probably on account of its links with the Arthurian legends. Clearly in a work of such a sweeping nature, it is almost impossible to cover everything, and perfectly unfair for a critic to complain that the stories from the *Mabinogion* do not come directly from the oral tradition—as Anderson Imbert claims (p. 224)—but rather from two earlier collections, the *Llyfr Gwyn Rhyddech* (the *White Book of Rhyddech*, written down about 1300-25) and the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (the *Red Book of Hergest*, of the period 1375-1425), which themselves, of course, stem from an earlier oral tradition! (For more details see *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones [London: Everyman's Library, 1949], rpt. 1975, Pp. ix-xli). It is also unfair of the critic to lament the absence of such famous Welsh bards as Aneirin or Taliesin when Professor Anderson Imbert has already stated that this is, after all, only a collection of “los cuentos que más me divertieron” (p. 5).

Finally, one must agree with the author when he claims that even the most reliable and authoritative translations cannot be trusted, for one of the most disappointing things in this book is the concentration upon plot and meaning to the obvious detriment of form and style. Clearly, form and style are usually lost in translation, but what a pity that it should be so. However, if one accepts Professor Anderson Imbert's book, *Los primeros cuentos del mundo*, upon the base which he proposes for it, then it makes interesting reading and is, indeed, one of the few works in which many of the world's early tales are gathered together in one volume.

Roger Moore

ANTHEA ZEMAN

Presumptuous Girls: Women and their World in the Serious Woman's Novel.
London: Weidenfeld and
Nicolson, 1977. Pp. 185. \$13.75.

Zeman's *Presumptuous Girls* takes its title from Henry James's remark about women writers that “Millions of presumptuous girls, intelligent, or not intelligent, daily affront their destiny.” Zeman's book concerns the intelligent ones and the products of their confrontations. For two hundred years these writers have performed “a function especially necessary to women: that of telling them accurately where they stood at a given moment” (p. 2). Their prose has not been revolutionary—in the way we usually use the word—but catalogs social rules pertaining to women for a particular period. Zeman calls their literature “an anthology of witnessess” (p. 11). Beginning with Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778), Zeman chronicles changes in attitudes toward marriage, career, social class, education, thwarted aspirations, sexuality, and friendship for women as reflected in women's novels.

The perspectives of women writers on such issues invariably resemble each other's more than those of their male novelist contemporaries. Zeman compares Richardson's depiction of the adolescent female, “innocence personified,” with Burney's “ignorance personified” (p. 13). She traces English attitudes toward moral and other issues. Edgeworth and Austen see “nothing wrong with a society in which a double standard existed,” so long as it is “understood and correctly made use of by women” (p. 27). Years later, Margaret Drabble's characters suffer for their freedom from marital and filial obligations but, nevertheless, competently achieve it.

Zeman also examines changes in English attitudes towards women's employment. Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth assume that middle or upper-class women are “absorbed into some related or connected household automatically” (p. 43) if they are not married off, whereas the Brontës portray women employed by individuals less educated than themselves. Elaine Feinstein (*The Circle*, 1970) depicts women whose abilities to work are based on their “willingness to be doing too many things [house care plus career] at the same time” (p. 71).