

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).

Presumptuous Girls' early and concluding chapters are strongest. In between, Zeman copes with problems of social class and religious concerns, both of which cause her some difficulty. Zeman claims that "The novel in English is a middle-class affair" (p. 73), and she attempts, incorrectly, to include U. S. novels in the generalization. In fact, her references to novels and writers from the United States, which frequently seem to have been inserted as an afterthought, seem curiously inappropriate in context, and might better have been omitted. There are more than plenty British novels by women for her to cover. Zeman's discussion of religious attitudes among women writers is superficial, focusing most closely on the Brontës and George Eliot.

With one other exception, Zeman's work seems carefully documented and fully supported. This one exception is her willingness to conjecture anachronistically about an author's beliefs. Commenting on the self-sacrifice demanded of the contemporary housewife, Zeman concludes that "Jane Austen would most strongly have disapproved the immorality of all this . . ." (p. 144).

Best of all about *Presumptuous Girls* and one of many qualities that make the book worth reading is Zeman's delightful wit. Her metaphor for the English middle class, "a huge well-lit aviary, with its multi-coloured inhabitants fluttering in a semblance of freedom among the higher and lower branches and perches" (p. 73), is aptly drawn, especially since she mourns that "middle class" should ever have been "used as a term of abuse" (p. 73). Humor frequently emphasizes the good sense of Zeman's remarks. For instance, she writes that "Even in 1848, a wife whose attitude to motherhood was expressed by remarking 'God has given me a soul to educate for Heaven' should not have been surprised if her husband spent most of his time away from home" (p. 53). Finally, Zeman uses humor to examine problems objectively yet sympathetically. In describing the rising consciousness of adolescent females in the nineteenth century, Zeman puts it this way: "They must have been a nuisance; great girls wandering about in the night air looking at the stars instead of staying warm indoors and keeping things cheerful; writing diaries and wanting to read bits of them aloud; lurking in their rooms; complaining of being bored; wanting intense conversations with their ad-

mirers; expecting their admirers to be interested in their views" (p. 32).

Mary Beth Pringle

ISAK DINESEN

Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. Pp. 338. \$10.00.

Dinesen lovers will rejoice over *Carnival*, a collection of eleven Dinesen stories that either have been out of print or never before published. All but three of them were written originally in English, and those three have been sensitively translated by P. M. Mitchell and W. D. Paden. The stories, spanning half a century of creative effort, are of mixed quality, but all bear the inimitable Dinesen touch. All the familiar Dinesen themes are there: the double, the reality of the imagination, sorcery, the fusion of impulse and action, and above all, the joyful surrender to merciless destiny.

Two stories written in 1909 anticipate Dinesen's skill at plot twists. "The de Cats Family" develops the idea that a respectable family needs a black sheep to keep it respectable, and "Uncle Theodore" tells of an impoverished young nobleman who "invents" a rich uncle who turns out to be real. Both stories have a charm and clarity that is unfortunately missing from "Carnival," the title piece. This story of eight people who pool their incomes and then draw lots so that the winner may live for a year as he pleases is too contrived and digressive.

"The Last Day," originally intended to be included in *Winter's Tales* (see *IFR*, 3, 1976, 57-61), is more in the Dinesen stride. In this story-within-a-story, a dying old man and an exiled young man learn of love and loyalty from another of Dinesen's provocative young heroines. Two similar heroines appear in "Uncle Seneca" and "The Fat Man," both mystery stories; the first about Jack the Ripper, "an immortal name which ought to have a person to it" (p. 209), the second about a child murderer who is tricked into a tacit confession.