

reconcile such an interpretation of Simon's narrators with the author's frequent and vehement disclaimers about the psychological or philosophical importance of his novels.

Doris Y. Kadish

### JEANNETTE KING

*Tragedy in the Victorian Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Pp. 182. \$14.95.

In this book Jeannette King describes some Victorian attempts to cross traditional ideas of heroic tragedy with realistic portrayals of everyday life, in particular the efforts of George Eliot, Hardy, and James. Her first three chapters deal with some of the critical background to their work, and the final chapters study representative novels usually selected from early, middle, and late periods in each novelist's career.

The book's central thesis is that tragedy is defined by its dramatic structure as much as by its themes, and any cross-fertilization of tragedy with the novel may produce an unsatisfactory hybrid. Tragedy idealizes human greatness, whereas the novel attempts to depict life as it really is; tragedy represents a sequence of events, complete, Aristotle says, in itself, while the novel shows the continuity of life, implying what occurs after the curtain has fallen. It follows that George Eliot, Hardy, and James faced difficult problems, both theoretical and practical, in trying to create a tragedy of modern, everyday life. Tragedy in these novels is a condition instead of an action: life, not death, is tragic. Dr. King goes on to argue that the lives of ordinary characters are blighted by various deterministic influences—human relationships, institutions, and heredity. Women in particular, she says, are made to be passive and weak, and so represent as a special case the tragic condition of men as well as women for all three novelists.

From the discussion of particular novels, Dr. King draws her conclusions about the achievement of each writer. She finds that the claims of continuing life in George Eliot overpower the effect of tragedy and, as a result, tragedy is shown to be only a part of life. In contrast, Hardy was influenced by Shakespearean as well as Greek models, and adapted the novel's themes and structure to the traditional idea of dramatic tragedy. In the most rewarding of these chapters, she shows how James, in turn, recognized and exploited the parallel conflicts between the artificial structure of tragedy and the continuing life of the novel on the one hand and his characters' choice between a life of purpose and a life of freedom on the other.

The problem this book raises is more complex than Dr. King seems to allow, probably too vast for any one book to manage. Nevertheless, one really expects to find some indication that the Victorians were not the first to create this hybrid; apart from one reference to Richardson's *Clarissa*, no attention is paid to eighteenth-century domestic tragedy and its influence on fiction. Similarly, Aristotle and a few quotations from Shakespeare are an unduly limited basis for Victorian tragedy, blended as it was with melodrama and clumsy pathos arising from outrages against lower- and middle-class dignity. Dr. King's book is useful within its limits, but those limits prevent it from fulfilling the claim of its short title, *Tragedy in the Victorian Novel*.

John Miller

### GIOVANNA CAPONE

*Canada, Il Villaggio della Terra: Letteratura Canadese di Lingua Inglese.*

Bologna: Pàtron Editore, 1978. Pp. 213.

This book, the first of its kind to be published in Italy, proposes to survey the Canadian literary imagination in both its chronological development and in its central themes, as expressed by some of the major writers in English. Approximately half the study is centered on fiction.