

earthly splendor. Yet she herself is desolate and lost and in quest of a revelation. Ironically, Hertz, the enigmatic Hebrew poet who intrigues her and from whom she expects some ultimate answers, refuses to take her seriously and remains silent. In the end Mirel leaves her house, husband, and town, and simply disappears.

Mirel the disconsolate and destructive, willful and independent, is a bold divergent from the Yiddish literature of the time. True, Tevye's daughters were as determined and individualistic as Mirel, and more constructively so. It is precisely this sympathetic presentation of her single-minded aestheticism, untempered by charity and reverence for life, which makes her quite unique and which must have prompted some critics, such as Samuel Niger, to call the novel not really "Jewish." (See Martin's "Introduction," p. xviii and footnote 4.)

Stylistically too the novel treads new paths. Following the then prevalent school of impressionism, Bergelson adopts the style with uncontested success. In the words of Bernard Martin: "The impressionistic form of his novel . . . was by no means original with him . . . But Bergelson introduced stylistic devices of his own admirably suited to his artistic purposes. Among them are the virtually complete avoidance of dialogue and the substitution for it of indirect quotation, the constant repetition of phrases and complete sentences, and the frequent use of passive verb forms" (p. xviii).

The translation into English is extremely readable and yet conveys admirably the peculiar idiom and linguistic interpretation of a world secluded in itself. The poetic qualities of this novel are masterfully transmitted into a foreign language. The small town sadness, juxtaposed against the humble splendors of nature, combine into a singular blend when projected through a Jewish sensibility, a sensibility steeped in ancient tradition and yet keenly aware of new influences.

When All Is Said And Done is a major artistic accomplishment and Bernard Martin should be commended for his labor of love.

Miriam Roshwald

NINA BAYM

Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978. Pp. 315.

Nina Baym treats woman's fiction as a genre which ran its course in America from 1820 until 1870 and whose golden years were in the 1850s. For Baym, woman's fiction is written by women, about women for women and essentially describes woman's trials and eventual triumph. She points out, more than once but unfortunately with no documentation, that the reading public in America expanded vastly before the Civil War and most readers were women. Baym comes to the defense of these "popular" writers, too often lumped together as "scribbling women" by Hawthorne and later commentators, as novelists whose work fulfilled the needs of the people who read them.

Although each writer is obviously different, each of these novels is basically a bildungsroman without the psychological character development inherent to that genre. Basically, each story deals with the progress of a young woman, often starting with the heroine as a young child, as she encounters misfortune after misfortune (caused by external events and not character flaw) which, instead of breaking her will, strengthens ("perfects" is the word most used by these authors according to Baym) her already "good" character. At the end, she usually marries a cheerful, hard-working, energetic man, often a minister, who respects her and accepts her as an equal. Thus, the typical heroine has a character of goodness and strength: she does not have to struggle over which road to take. She triumphs and she gets the prize.

Baym quite correctly points out that the reader of these novels was more interested in the heroine than in the hero and was more attracted to the novel that had "local color" and dealt with situations that the reader knew first hand—running a farm, domestic problems and financial difficulties—than those placed in the category of gothic romances whose settings and dilemmas were unknown to her. The reader of these novels was able

to understand the female characters as they both came from the middle class. The occupations of the heroine showed the interest in the development of education for women. Like many of the authors themselves, the heroines were governesses, teachers and even authors. This was an identification and not simple escapism.

Baym has done an excellent job of compiling brief lives of the various authors (often stranger than the fiction they created) and by giving future scholars and historians the plots of the major novels and information concerning the publication (in several cases the work first appeared in serial form and when published later in book form was given a different title.) She has performed a genuine service, in particular with the chronological biography which analyzes succinctly the literary criticism and social history concerning this period and the way in which the women's rights movement is treating it. *Woman's Fiction* is a first-rate reference for more than one discipline.

If the research and analysis are impeccable, one must quarrel with the organization of the book and question some of the conclusions. The first chapter is called "Introduction and Conclusions" which is confusing as one is presented with abstract statements before having the chance to read either about the authors or their work. The conclusions are more in the realm of social observation than that of literary criticism. One is as intrigued as Baym to know why this genre had the incredible success that it had, but her afterthought, "A note on popularity," is not at all enlightening. It would have been helpful, too, if she had put this genre into its literary perspective. Surely these novels are *romans de transition*; they provided a necessary step towards the work of Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Edith Wharton whose heroines encountered problems as well but whose personalities underwent change during the course of the novel. A note on the continuation of this tradition in later American literature would also have been welcome (e.g. Edna Ferber's *So Big*, 1924, fulfills all the obligations of this genre as set down by Baym). Further, it would have been important for Baym to mention the particularly American flavor of these heroines who are molded by the Puritan ethic of hard work, who choose duty over pleasure, and who are in control of themselves as well as others. Their triumph at the end of their

trials must be seen as another manifestation of the American success story.

In the beginning of her book Baym says she has not unearthed a George Eliot or found another *Scarlet Letter* but she has produced a source book, valuable for historians and critics alike, from her concern for an incredible generation of writers and readers.

E. Mayberry Senter

LLOYD R. FREE, ED.

Laclos: Critical Approaches to Les Liaisons dangereuses
Studia Humanitatis
Washington, DC: Catholic Univ.
of America Press, 1978. Pp. XII+
300, \$17.00.

As if to atone for nearly two centuries of neglect, many academic critics have written perceptively and well of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in the last twenty years. This new volume boosts the 1978 score by another seven articles, many of them significant contributions to our understanding of a perennially fascinating text. Only two essays seem to be relatively weak: those by Eric Rabkin and Ronald Rosbottom, who say little that could be called new, although ironically they are the only writers who claim to be setting the world right (the latter irritatingly, even offensively).

Rosbottom's essay crushes the nut (already open, one would have thought) of the Valmont-Merteuil relationship under the sledgehammer of communication theory. For a while it looks as if Lloyd Free and Elizabeth Douvan are going to attempt a different marriage of the old and new, and interpret the *Liaisons* in the light of Women's Liberation, but in spite of the misleading title ("*LD* and contemporary consciousness"), what we have is a well-argued account of Laclos's understanding of female psychology: less a case of Laclos's anticipation of the twentieth century than of twentieth-century theory catching up with an eighteenth-century writer's profound intuition.