DARKO SUVIN

Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Pp. xviii + 317. Paper $8.95.

Over the past few years, science fiction has attracted to itself a number of apologists, critics, and historians, but there has not been a substantial work that attempted to provide a philosophical basis of this literary genre. Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is such an attempt, and this work gives a foundation to a range of fiction that is at once varied in subject matter and uneven in quality.

Professor Suvin has contributed extensively to the corpus of criticism of science fiction both in his native Yugoslavian and in English; his interests range from Russian speculative fiction to American Utopias; he has, moreover, an unusual command of the disparate threads that make up the historic tapestry of speculative and science fiction. The author is thus well qualified to approach the ambitious and perhaps dangerous task that this book attempts. Whether the book becomes the definitive word on the subject will depend largely not upon Suvin's insights, but upon his own style. Robert Scholes has written that "This is the most serious, learned, and energetic work yet written on the history of science fiction"; the reader will decide for himself how much illumination is possible in the umbrageous forest of terms that Suvin has appropriated to his "poetics."

In his Preface, the author offers the following definition of science fiction: "Basically, SF is a developed oxymoron, a realistic unreality . . . the space of a potent estrangement, validated by the pathos and prestige of the basic cognitive norms of our times" (p. viii). The text is divided into two parts: poetics and history. Part One presents Suvin's definitions and includes chapters entitled "Estrangement and Cognition," "SF and the Genological Jungle." "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia," and "SF and the Novum." The author here provides a new and enlightening insight into the relationship between utopian and science fiction, concluding that "For all its adventure, romance, popularization, and wondrousness, SF can finally be written only between the utopian and anti-utopian horizons" (p. 62). "SF and the Novum" is a *tour de force* of academic criticism; so much so that one wonders whether at times Suvin may not be indulging himself in ludic pasquinade.

Three-quarters of this book is devoted to introductions to various unconnected points in the history of science fiction. Here Suvin brings together his experience and penetrating observation to give the book its most admirable qualities. Taking as his topics those that have been dealt with extensively by others, Suvin's erudition yet manages to comment freshly upon "The Alternate Island," Mary Shelley, and H. G. Wells. One chapter, "Russian SF and its Utopian Tradition," provides material not within the scope of most Western critics. The connections drawn between the literary traditions and the political events during the past hundred years are provocative.

A final word must be said of Professor Suvin's bibliography: it excellently reinforces the material and the various questions debated in the text. It also indicates, if the rest of the book did not, the broad critical foundations upon which this work is based.

William Prouty

JOHN M. ELLIS

Narration in the German Novelle: Theory and Interpretation
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. 219.

This book originally appeared in 1974; the preface is dated October 1971; all items in the Bibliography—with one exception—are dated 1970 or earlier.

The first and longest chapter "is concerned with the general theory of this undertaking" (p. vii); the following eight chapters are each devoted to the interpretation of an individual *Novelle.* The author discusses: Kleist's *Das Erdbeben in Chili,* Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert,* E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Rat Krespel,* Grillparzer's *Der arme*

Spielmann, Keller's *Die drei gerechten Kammacher,* Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter,* Hauptmann's *Bahnwärter Thiel* and Kafka's *Das Urteil.*

Professor Ellis does not accept the conventional concept of *Novelle,* neither as to period nor as to definition. With refreshing straightforwardness he states in his introduction: "It is doubtful whether the search for defining features of the Novelle has ever been of much assistance for the interpretation of the texts themselves; equally doubtful is whether it has furthered understanding of individual texts to examine them in the light of concepts such as 'Realism' " (pp. 25-26). The first chapter of the book is, therefore, largely devoted to pointing out—quite convincingly—the shortcomings of earlier attempts at definition and periodisation of the genre. Ellis does not offer a definition of his own; rather, he wants "to demonstrate that to examine individual Novellen with conscious and systematic attention to their narrative structures *does* further understanding of them" (p. 26). In this, he does succeed. All eight examples serve to show that narration is important not only technically but also thematically; in this respect Ellis's book is part of the mainstream of recent research into the relationship between narrator(s) and reader(s). The bibliography should have been brought up to date, but otherwise Professor Ellis's book is still well worth reading.

Ingrid Schuster

PAUL BRUSS
Conrad's Early Sea Fiction: The Novelist as Navigator
Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979, Pp. 185. $13.50 US

This study, which aims "to expose and elaborate upon some of the fundamental professional and sometimes metaphysical assumptions that underlie Conrad's use of navigational metaphor," makes no attempt to explain "the nuances of nautical situations and their appropriate terminology" in Conrad's early sea fiction (p. 9). Professor Bruss would, from the initial chapter, "isolate, first, Conrad's reflections upon his own initiations at sea and, second, the major attitudes that underlie his reflecting and, presumably, his fictionalizing upon life at sea" (p. 16). A few passages from *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), *A Personal Record* (1912), *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921), and *Last Essays* (1926) are isolated to describe "the thrust" (p. 30) of Conrad's attitudes, thus summarized: "(1) supremacy of sails to steam, (2) sailing as a fine art and tradition, and (3) the significance of work as salvation" (p. 22). In accordance with his purpose, Professor Bruss rivets his gaze on the text of *The Nigger of the NARCISSUS,* "Karain," "Youth," *Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim,* "Typhoon," "Falk," and "The End of the Tether." Nowhere in this study does he refer to the professional nautical texts available to mariners without the fiction; nor does he mention any of Conrad's literary antecedents. A few of Conrad's other tales are mentioned, but only in passing, and there is but one reference to a Conrad letter (and that taken from a secondary source).

The striving for fidelity to the text of each of the eight tales is the study's great virtue. The perception of "an essential irony at every juncture" (p. 62) in "Youth," for example, refutes readings of the tale as a merely sentimental recollection. Professor Bruss's commentary on "Typhoon" serves to deflate "any potential view of MacWhirr as Conrad's hero of strength" (p. 125): as the text makes plain, but which many critics have failed to see, it is MacWhirr's duty to avoid the typhoon. And a close reading of "The End of the Tether" shows that Captain Whalley of the steamer SOFALA is not the sentimental, innocent, and noble hero he is sometimes taken to be. But it is in its examination of the structure of "Karain" that *Conrad's Early Sea Fiction* knows its finest moment. The commentator's language here speaks simply and eloquently: "The first half of the tale centers upon Karain's activity by day (chapter 1), his activity by night (chapter 2), and finally, his arrival at the schooner amid the black thunderstorm (chapter 3); the second half, upon Karain's haphazard journey in the wilderness (chapter 4), his bewildering expectations of the narrator (chapter 5), and finally his regaining of the dawn via a new charm (chapter 6). These movements from light to black storm (chapters 1-3) and then—ironically—from the wilderness to light (chapters 4-6) clearly underscore the narrator's acute understanding of the