

What the researchers have actually achieved with their topic is admittedly far more important than what they might have done if they had inclined to the reviewer's perspective, or had they at least chosen a precise title. Adopting the structure and style of German dissertations, the authors have examined their selected texts with positivistic thoroughness. Categories and subcategories of data, derived both from a close reading of the primary texts and from broad familiarity with secondary literature, offer the reader "empirical" evidence. Special chapters deal with such topics as "the communicative process in science fiction" (complete with flow charts), offer a "historical functional analysis instead of a genealogy," and provide a discourse on narrative perspective in terms of "fictionality and its claim to reality" (rather than the traditional distinction between reality and verisimilitude). To this has been appended a selective bibliography of 16 "important" anthologies, 38 "important novels" (only four of which are listed as having been translated into German), eleven bibliographies and reference works, and some three and one-half pages of secondary literature. Little is served in summarizing here what *Science Fiction* communicates. Indeed to attempt to do so would necessitate extrapolating information from a plethora of independent aperçus. The authors themselves provide no conclusions. Nor indeed do they provide new insights or syntheses in this piecemeal treatment of a topic which invited urbanity and imagination. Here jargon is rife. To speak with one of Prokop's characters in the above-noted novel: "Johnny hat wahrscheinlich eine gewaltige Entdeckung gemacht, die—nein, ich werde es dir nicht sagen. Es soll hier in meinem Kopf begraben bleiben. Niemand soll es erfahren. Niemand." The generalist to whom the book is directed will be dissuaded by ponderous academic jargon; the specialist will prefer the critical works which *Science Fiction* so richly cites.

Michael Hadley

D. A. MILLER

*Narrative and Its Discontents:
Problems of Closure in the
Traditional Novel*

Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1981. Pp. 300. \$20.00

MARIANNA TORGOVNICK

Closure in the Novel

Princeton: Princeton University
Press, 1981. Pp. 238. \$16.50

George Eliot remarked in a letter to John Blackwood that "conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation." Today, of course, the fashionable word is *closure*, not *conclusion* or *ending*. Called by whatever specific name one wishes, this major problem, the subject of two memorable books in the late 1960's (Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* and Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure*), now appears to be generating intense interest: in 1978 *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* entitled one of its issues *Narrative Endings*; and in 1981 a single university press, Princeton, has published two full-length studies of the problem.

D. A. Miller's *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* began as a doctoral dissertation at Yale, makes use of fashionable terminology ("signifier," "signified," "binary opposition," etc.), and here and there refers to fashionable names (Roland Barthes seems to be a favorite). Miller devotes one chapter to Jane Austen's works, excluding *Northanger Abbey*; one to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*; and one to Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *Lucien Leuwen*, the latter labeled "a long, patchy novel that Stendhal never finished." Miller is concerned with "nonnarratable elements," those which are incapable of generating a story or which have "no narrative future," and, conversely, with the "narratable," "instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise." "The narratable inherently lacks finality," and traditional novels, though they "build toward closure . . . are never fully or finally governed by it"—in other words, there is a "tension" or "conflict" "within the novel, between the principles of production and

the claims of closure to a resolved meaning." Matters are made much more complex by Miller's claim that the three novelists discussed make use of different clausal principles: if I dare to state the matter briefly, Jane Austen ends by suppressing the narratable, George Eliot by cloaking it in ambiguity, and Stendhal by preserving it. In Jane Austen the matter is one of values: the disapproved are finally displaced by the approved. On the other hand, *Middlemarch* "is largely a world of processes that can only be suspended by acts of 'make-believe.' Closure thus becomes an impossibility on principle, even as it urgently takes place." And indeed "Stendhal is the most devious case of all," for in his fiction there is "a constantly reenacted recovery of openendedness." Much, perhaps all, of this is sound and valuable, and at times is well supported by specific comments—say, those on "psychological kinks" in Austen's characters being "sources of narratability" and on the "Finale" of *Middlemarch*.

Given the fact that *Problems in Closure*, in one form or another, has been tested by a number of prominent academics (see Miller's "Preface," p. xv), I hesitate to record my honest impressions. Clearly the book has been constructed by a very subtle mind, but—a good deal of the commentary seems tangential; the long chapters seem to drift, and I even wonder if Miller had adopted his thesis when he wrote his chapter on Stendhal. At times the analysis is torturous, partly because of the specificity and partly because of the prose, which some may consider sophisticated but others marred by jargon or needless complexity (brief examples from pp. 122-23 may suffice: "Socially given reality has the function of a nonnarratable base from which narratable derogations—in the form of ideological threats—can be isolated." "Once the nonnarratable base is shown to be *produced*, to have a *dynamic* of self-maintenance, then a potential affinity with its narratable opposite begins to emerge. Indeed, it starts to seem as though such a nonnarratable base existed only by virtue of suppressing and projecting its latent narratability."). Though questions about presentation or development seem more pertinent than those about essential substance, I must register some puzzlement about the autonomous status which Miller seems to assign to both the community and the characters in *Middlemarch* (for instance, see pp. 117, 120, 145, 149); and in some cases I wonder if old ideas are dressed up

in trendy and far-from-plain garb. In general, academics interested in the problem of closure but not particularly in the novels chosen by Miller may wish to read his "Preface" and "Afterword" and the first half of his chapter on Jane Austen.

For Marianna Torgovnick closure is "the process by which a novel reaches an adequate and appropriate conclusion" (p. 6), and in her discussion of eleven novels—*Middlemarch*, *Bleak House*, *War and Peace* (plus some comments on *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*), *The Scarlet Letter*, *Vanity Fair*, *L'Education sentimentale*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Golden Bowl*, *Light in August*, and *The Waves*—she employs several sets of sensible and not surprising terms, notably those indicating "clausal strategies" or ways of describing "the relationship of ending to beginning and middle" (circularity, parallelism, incompleteness, tangential, linkage). Her mentor appears to be the old sage Aristotle, not such newcomers as structuralists, poststructuralists or deconstructionists, reader-response critics, or the like. Possibly some readers will dismiss her book as "naïve" and "theoretically negligible" (notes made during my first reading), but others may be pleased by her "exceptional clarity" and "good sense" (results of my second reading). After beginning with terms that could be used in a mechanical way in simplistic criticism, in her essays on individual novels Torgovnick proceeds judiciously and in her conclusion warns against rattling off terms rather than analyzing attentively. The following caution also may be eminently sensible: "To create a taxonomy that would cover every possible variation in clausal pattern, technique, or strategy would require a system more cumbersome and more elaborate than the Ptolemaic view of the universe in its last days. Instead, I have chosen to retain a workable, coherent, straightforward system responsive to the texts it describes" (p. 198-99). On the other hand—the ambivalence is inescapable!—Torgovnick's book could have been called *Endings* or *Appropriate Endings* rather than *Closure*; she analyzes concluding movements of novels, looking, it seems, for "thematic coherence" or "thematic resolution" (and, it also seems to me, favoring circular and parallel endings, as well as affirmative ones). But must closure occur only in endings? Should reader-response criticism be dismissed in a single footnote? Or must one always search for "coherence" and ignore contradictory details or whole conflicting patterns? Although such off-

hand questions may not be the right ones, I fear that Torgovnick's book, which does have "practical advantages" (as she points out) and breath, lacks sufficient depth. Incidentally, she does reflect briefly on the seemingly endless continuum of life and the inevitable (and always arbitrary?) ending of a fiction (see pp. 208-09).

As for the individual essays, some are very good—clear, sensitive, and so on—and some merely adequate. All are free from eccentricities or highfalutin and dubious arguments. Although Torgovnick does not point out the fact, her dissertation was entitled "Novelistic Conclusions: Epilogues in Nineteenth-Century Novels" (1976), and no doubt the present study is a revised and expanded version of this earlier work. Ironically, her essays on nineteenth-century classics seem the weakest in the volume, especially those on *Middlemarch* and *Vanity Fair*. On the other hand, she writes beautifully about the "gestural code" in *The Golden Bowl*, and offers a wonderfully orchestrated and compelling essay on the "oceanic" motif and the six-word epilogue in *The Waves*. Additional essays on *Crime and Punishment* and *Sons and Lovers* would have been welcome, obviously novels with, to say the least, challenging "closural strategies."

It now seems clear why Princeton has published two related books in a single year: the ideal book would contain virtues divided by Miller and Torgovnick. Miller's study is theoretically more robust, and certainly more *au courant*, than Torgovnick's, but his intricacies and prose are wearisome. Torgovnick, if old-fashioned by some standards, does offer a clear and useful study of varied texts.

Daniel P. Deneau

DOROTHY SEIDMAN BILIK
*Immigrant-Survivors: Post-Holocaust
Consciousness in Recent Jewish
American Fiction*
Middletown, Connecticut:
Wesleyan University Press, 1981.
Pp. 216. \$15.95

This book is an attempt to demonstrate that in the recent American-Jewish fiction there emerged a subgenre in which the immigrant-survivor is the central character

and "an effective embodiment of post-Holocaust consciousness." In contrast to the previous preoccupation with the Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe and his struggle to "make it" in the new country—make it economically, culturally and socially—the stress in the more recent fiction is on the Jewish immigrant as a survivor. Whereas the previous theme was in danger of exhaustion and decline into self-parody, the resurgent interest in the Jewish immigrant in the role of a survivor provides the Jewish writer with a means of confronting the greatest catastrophe of the Jewish people and a way of reaffirming a commitment to a common Jewish destiny.

Ms. Bilik chooses for her analysis of this new role assigned to the immigrant-survivor works of several writers, each of whom is discussed in a separate chapter. Bernard Malamud who "embodies post-Holocaust sensibility in the very insubstantiality of his immigrant remnants," created in his Susskind and Salzmans, Mendel and Manishevitz, Yakov Bok and Morris Bober a gallery of "secular saints and comic Jobs" (p. 77). Edward Wallant, unlike the other writers, shows "ambivalence toward his central character and toward the Holocaust experience" (p. 98). Susan Fromberg Schaeffer employs in her book *Anya* various literary devices, such as fairy-tale elements, to put a distance between the horror of the Holocaust and the idealized character of her protagonists. This method rather than weaken the effect, only accentuates the evil of reality and the wantonness of destruction. It emphasizes the kind of "life as it ought to have been" (p. 111). I. B. Singer, the most deeply versed in the Jewish lore of the present assembly of writers, has little consolation to offer or wisdom to derive from the Holocaust. There are no symbols, metaphors, or insights; only a grim summary of man: "My theory is that the human species is getting worse, not better. I believe, so to speak, in an evolution in reverse. The last man on earth will be both a criminal and a madman" (quoted by Bilik on p. 128 from Singer's *Enemies*, p. 150).

Saul Bellow, the most philosophical of the present writers, creates in Sammler an intellectual and an aesthete, a man who synthesizes many cultures. Sammler is an explorer of the human soul and of the moral paradoxes with which man is confronted. The bestialities to which Sammler has been subjected he brushes aside ironically as mindless brutality and refuses to assimilate "all that dreadful, comical, in-