

tal one: "Nin's view of the design of the quest is more precise and focused but not substantially different than Robbe-Grillet's, for like him, she views the quest as a viable format for the novel by which man can achieve some understanding of his experience" (p. 75).

Early in this study Deduck points out that both Nin and Robbe-Grillet formulated their fictional theories in an attempt to explain their individual novels. Similarly, in the larger view, fictional theory should be dependent on the particular manifestations of fiction which spawned it. Deduck's study, however, seems to work toward the construction of a coherent twentieth-century stance on realism at the expense of the particular fiction itself. The similarities between Robbe-Grillet and Nin—negative and broad as they are—could have been drawn among other experimental authors, thus avoiding the specific problems of juxtaposing these two writers whose differences, both in theory and in fiction, are more marked than their affinities. Any time that the generalizations of theory obscure the unique characteristics of the fiction that gave them life, those generalizations must be viewed with suspicion.

Margaret Simonton

E. BRETON DE NIJS

Faded Portraits

Trans. Donald and Elsie Sturtevant

Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982. Pp. 176. \$15.00.

As the original Dutch title (*Vergeelde portretten uit een Indisch familiealbum*, 1954) suggests, *Faded Portraits* is a fictionalized family chronicle of Dutch colonialists in what was called "the Indies." Its opening chapter describes the death in 1940 of the sixty-year-old Sophie de Pauly, the aunt of the first-person narrator, E. B. de Nijs (pseudonym of Rob Nieuwenhuys). In the following chapters, through the technique of flashbacks, the narrator describes the life of Aunt Sophie—her frustrated longing for love, her failure to preserve the "purity" of the family

name. In short, when de Nijs's aunts, uncles and parents "were alive, they represented a dying class." Clearly, the novel can be read as a metaphor for the death of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia as well as for the liberation of the narrator from the tight family clan into which he was born.

In the epilogue, the narrator once more turns to death and reflects that now (1953), ten years after he wrote the first chapter, all the members (with the exception of one uncle) of Aunt Sophie's generation have died and that his own generation lives "uprooted" and "aimless" in the Netherlands. The narrator remembers his particular family with the observing and admiring eyes of a small child, yet places their actions within the more general pathological pattern of colonialism.

As if paging through a not-always-chronologically-arranged family album, the narrator describes a class obsessed with skin color, manners, and family ties. Sophie's younger brother, Alex, lives on a plantation with a "native" woman, Titi. Of course, his sisters consider "that woman" to be their inferior—no matter what their brother's relationship to her may be. Titi is only on rare occasions allowed to be in the front part of Sophie's house, and even when Alex lies dead in his sister's house, a sobbing Titi is taken to the servant quarters. Sophie and her sister Christine are appalled that Alex has children by "that woman," but insist that they be allowed to give "the girls" a proper European upbringing. For, as Aunt Sophie argues, though they have dark skin, they are "not natives after all, but De Paulys" (p. 134). Thus develops the antagonistic and spiteful relationship between the aunts and "the girls," a relationship that culminates in the strange behavior of the girls as Aunt Sophie is dying. "They had coolly continued to sit around the radio, while the sound of the dying woman could be heard all the way to the rear veranda." When the Aunt does die, the girls "neither shed a tear nor showed any sorrow: they merely stood there rigidly and were noticeably relieved when they were allowed to leave the room again."

Sophie's attitude to her dark-skinned nieces is based on contempt for their mother as a member of an inferior class. As the Aunt claims to teach them "European" manners, thereby alienating them from their mother and the native population, she constantly reminds them and everyone else of the hopelessness of her task. Sophie's patronizing feelings for the children of her brother contrast sharply with her admira-

tion for Kitty, the fair-haired, blue-eyed daughter of her sister. Before Kitty was born, Aunt Sophie worried a great deal about the skin color of the expected baby. "The image of her [Aunt Sophie's] grandmother emerged from the distant past, a dark woman she had seen several times in the outbuildings when she was a girl of six or seven." When Kitty "proved to be a sweet *white* and *blond* baby," Aunt Sophie is overjoyed. "This time her grandfather's European blood had not been denied, thank God, because it really seemed as if a dark complexion and dark hair had established itself forever in the family" (p. 87).

Faded Portraits shows that these "mixed" families were cut off from any significant contact with the people they ruled so tyrannically. Only those who belonged to the family counted; conversations dwelled on little else but family gossip; and because one had no meaningful contact outside the family, marriages within the family were not uncommon. Only as a university student is the narrator confronted with a different perspective. Studying in Leiden, he meets another "loner," a Javanese student. "What he said shocked me. I had lived so long in the protective society of Europeans, where I had been brought up with the idea of the obvious justice of Dutch rule, that it was completely new to me to hear this same rule quite as obviously called unjust" (p. 112).

Behind the narrator's sober tone with which he describes his aunt (and his implied relationship to her) is the attempt to create a continuity between his own past, his youth, his colonial background, and his present situation that is based on a total rejection of that past and of his family. He calls himself "an outsider beyond recall." The novel is written with a great deal of generosity to his family and to the colonialist pattern of expectations and relationships, for the narrator understands that if it had not been for accident and history he would, most likely, have accommodated himself to that pattern as everyone of his parents' generation had done.

Nieuwenhuys began his novel on scraps of toiletpaper in the Japanese concentration camp in which he was interned from 1943 to 1945 and finished it in the Netherlands ten years later. A first-person narrator and a pseudonym have enabled him to use highly personal experiences creatively, for much of the material used in the novel parallels events and people in his own life. Since Nieuwenhuys has stated that *Faded Portraits* could be read as his autobiography, we may

assume that what the narrator says about himself to be true for Nieuwenhuys: "A memorialist . . . is what I am instead of a writer of fiction" (p. 60). Nieuwenhuys's intent, however, is not to create an autobiography of a member of the literati. "I have removed all literary aspects from my language and have tried to imitate the spoken style . . . in order to be in tune with myself," he writes later in *Oost-Indische Spiegel* (Amsterdam: Em. Querido, 1978; p. 571). This direct and objective tone is beautifully preserved in the English translation by Donald and Elsje Sturtevant. E. M. Beekman has enriched *Faded Portraits* with a highly informative introduction, has provided copious notes that refer to the history and the culture, and has translated numerous Malay words that are used by the author and preserved in the English translation. As the third volume in a planned twelve-volume Library of the Indies, *Faded Portraits* enables a much wider public to become acquainted with this superbly expressed encounter with colonialism.

Hilda van Neck-Yoder

JOHN R. REED
The Natural History of H. G. Wells
Athens, Ohio: Ohio University
Press, 1982. Pp. 294.

This "natural history" proposes that H. G. Wells had a coherent "world view" and that his view was "rooted" in "private fears and desires." By a nicely enclosed circularity, it is argued in turn that these inner forces "found expression in powerful sets of images" which reinforced Wells's "intellectual constructions" (p.ix). The syntax of John Reed's erudite study well accommodates the vision of a wholly integrated Wells he argues for. An no other historian of the Wells *fact* has shown a more intimate familiarity with the entire *oeuvre* of this author who, for more than a half-century, wrote an average of three books per year. Professor Reed addresses no fewer than 158 of Wells's creations.