

Ganze ist! Und je grösser seine Sehnsucht ist, ein Ganzes zu sein, um so verfluchter steht er da, bis zum Verbluten ausgesetzt dem anderen Geschlecht." Felix Schaad, like Frisch's Don Juan, is the unhappy victim of twentieth-century woman's social and sexual liberation. Felix is in fact a frustrated romantic monogamist who overloads the marital sexual union with almost mystic significance. He thereby makes prosaic marriage so overtense that it becomes hellish. His seven wives betray and exploit him until he is left a quivering wreck.

In genre, Frisch's *Blaubart* is an uneasy mating of a mystery whodunnit with a pessimistic quest for existential meaning. In this respect, it is very much a pale sequel to Frisch's earlier novel *Stiller* (1954). *Stiller* also suffers from identity crisis, marital breakdown, and the threatening investigation of the public prosecutor concerning unsolved murders. In *Blaubart* the whodunnit aspect accentuates not only the mystery of who did murder Felix's sixth wife, the happy hooker Rosalinde, but also the mystery of Felix's elusive character. Frisch endeavors to keep the reader guessing on both issues until the very end and beyond.

Most of the novel takes the form of a legalistic cross-examination of witnesses. At times this technique becomes circumspect, repetitive, and even trivial. Each cross-examination is like a fragment of a jigsaw puzzle that is never really put together. The reality of actual courtroom scenes is freely interspersed with surreal fantasy as Felix Schaad's overdeveloped conscience cross-examines what is left of his libido and sublimation mechanism. This application of dry legalistic jargon to Felix's dreams and his libido should have produced more humor that it does in this somewhat self-important novel. Frisch's analysis of Felix's sexual problems owes a great deal to Sigmund Freud just as his analysis of Felix's guilt obsession shows the influence of Franz Kafka's *Der Prozess*. In the end, *Blaubart* can best be seen as a fairly poker-faced farce on bourgeois sexual neuroses in the 1980s. Marital and sexual malfunctions are seen by Frisch as the symptoms of a society that is narcissistically frigid and without direction or idealistic commitment. The comic dupe is Bluebeard himself, Felix Schaad as the oversensitive male seeking his elusive salvation in self-inflicted guilt. In fact he saves no one, least of all himself.

William Walsh

R. K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation

Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982. Pp. 169

Reviewed by: Cynthia vanden Driesen

Professor Walsh's contribution to the somewhat inchoate field of "Commonwealth Literature," and towards the stimulation of a wider interest in the work of the Indian novelist R. K. Narayan is well known. In 1964, Walsh's essay on Narayan ("Sweet Mangoes and Malt Vinegar," in *A Human Idiom*) noted some of the distinctive features of Narayan's art: the "pure and limpid English," the inimitable flavor of his Indian locale, the advantage of his concentration on the Indian middle class, his preoccupation with the theme of spiritual maturity, and his ability to combine moral analysis with a gentle ironic comic sense. Walsh's *Commonwealth Literature* (1973) and *Readings in Commonwealth Literature* (ed. W. Walsh, 1974) contained an abbreviated version of this same essay. In 1970, Walsh had supplemented his work on Narayan with a detailed analysis of two novels, *The Man-Eater of Malgrudi* and *The Sweet Vendor* in his chapter on Narayan in *A Manifold Voice* (1970). The dustjacket of his latest book promises a further contribution: the author is to "weigh and evaluate" the entire canon of Narayan's work; and "events which have shaped his life...[are to be] discussed alongside his development as a writer."

The fulfillment of the latter part of this promise is confined mostly to the opening chapter. This consists of a biographical outline based, as Walsh admits, "pretty well exclusively" (p. 6) on Narayan's *My Days* (1974). Its value is dubious; a reading of the original autobiographical sketch might at least have conveyed more directly the flavor of the author's personality. Beyond the repetition of Narayan's own admission of the connection between his own experience of widowerhood and the events of *The English Teacher*, the relationship between the writer's life and his work is hardly explored.

The next chapter proceeds to a discussion of the novels in a simple chronological sequence. Walsh appears to limit himself mainly to a summary of the story line, omitting to pursue the interesting possibilities suggested by the strongly autobiographical quality which makes for much of the appeal and interest of these early novels. L. D. Rubin shows how this quality in a novel manifests itself "by the way the story is written, by the kind of details, by the value placed on certain events . . . obviously being remembered and recaptured" (*The Self Recaptured*, *The Kenyon Review*; 1963). Other possibilities, such as how the author's alteration of literal truth (the autobiographical novel's advantage over autobiography) permits deeper truths of character, or the inner pattern of events to emerge more clearly, need to be explored. (See L. D. Pascal's discussion of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* in "The Autobiographical Novel and the Autobiography," *Essays in Criticism*; 1959.) In *Swami and Friends*, for instance, Narayan renders the grandmother (Swami's only ally) a powerless figure, when in real life she was an autocrat; and Swami is portrayed as a solitary figure, when Narayan had been one of a family of five. The changes help focus on the loneliness of the child figure poised against a largely inimical adult world. On the other hand, Narayan's too close adherence to biographical fact in *The English Teacher* works towards restricting the novel's evocative power.

In the next chapter, continuing his chronological progression, Walsh provides a useful analysis of the structural deficiency in *Mr. Sampath*, though with *The Financial Expert* and *Waiting for the Mahatma* the comment tends towards a paraphrase of main events. Generalizations are not sufficiently backed by critical analysis. For instance, the portrait of Gandhi is described as an achievement, "a persuasively human figure who can have this immense spiritual significance" (p. 92), but how this is achieved is not elucidated. Walsh appears to apologize for the prolific quotations: "If I have dwelt on the episode of Granny's funeral, it is not because I see it as an excruciating comic piece . . ." (p. 92). Simple chronology appears to be Walsh's main reason for grouping these works together. Thematic links and facets of technique are not highlighted. Yet each is centered on a cardinal sin listed in the Gita—lust, greed, and anger, and each carries a strong suggestion of parable. A consideration of Narayan's varying success in humanizing both characters and conflicts could have provided an interesting exercise.

In Chapter 4, chronological progress is temporarily abandoned. Walsh deals here with the short stories—written at several different periods—and the translations from the epics, which postdate all the novels except his last. Commentary on the short stories is limited mainly to a summary of the plots. Walsh makes the interesting point that the oblique resonance underlying the novels is "more poetic" than his contemporary versions of the Indian epics, but the contrast between their relatively undistinguished quality and his best work is not pursued.

Chapter 5, "Arrivals," reproduces an analysis of *The Guide* which has appeared before in three of Walsh's earlier essays on Narayan. The discussion in Chapter 6, of *The Man-Eater* and *The Sweet Vendor* are also familiar (see *A Human Idiom*). Walsh describes Narayan's last novel, *The Painter of Signs* as "both slim and packed" (p. 153). Its slimness is self-evident; as its "packed quality," there is little testimony. The echoes from *Waiting for the Mahatma* are not remarked, yet Raman and Daisy, their relationship, and even their picaresque wanderings, are reminiscent of Sriram and Bharati. Daisy is more of a caricature than Bharati, an automaton whose sudden capitulation to Raman and equally sudden recovery remain an enigma. Walsh merely comments: ". . . they become lovers—clinching testimony to the thoroughness with which the spirit of contemporaneity has penetrated Malgudi and even the author himself" (p. 160).

The phrase actually draws attention to the fact that, generally, Walsh's study, despite its promise, does not probe the deeper developments of the writer's own sensibility. In his conclusion, he praises the "inner tranquillity" of this writer, but part of Narayan's distinction derives from his deep awareness of the conflict between the older traditional ways and the forces of modernization in Indian life. It is a complex and sensitive state which combines reverence for the old ways with an ironic awareness of its inadequacies; faith and hope in their powers of survival, not untinged with anxiety. In the early works, the traditional Indian culture is basically unthreatened. So the youthful rebel returns to accept his elder's rulings, or the resentful wife to accept her lord. Latterly though, the old retreat before the young, and unabashed young women proclaim their rights. In *The Sweet Vendor*, a note of uncertainty is muted, but clear. Jagan, the adherent of the old order, as though recognizing that the outer world has moved beyond his grasp, retires to a life of contemplation. After a break of ten years (during which Narayan himself was engaged in a form of contemplation—the translation of the traditional Indian epics), he returned, in *The Painter of Signs*, to a fresh encounter with the

contemporary Indian scene. Significantly, again the traditional figure is put to flight. One realizes that the exodus of grandmothers, mothers, and aunts is an established motif—they are routed by the militant unorthodoxy of the young. Narayan's own inept handling of the two "modern" young Indians of the novel, makes this one of the slightest of his works, though Professor Walsh's comments remain consistently kind.

The tone of the whole study is very much one of appreciation. When a rare critical comment is made, Professor Walsh sounds almost apologetic: "The clue to the failure, or if that is too strong, to the lack of success in this novel . . ." (p. 70). Even in those novels when Narayan seems to make too simple a retreat into purely Indian philosophical panaceas to solve the dilemmas of his characters (*The English Teacher* or *The Sweet Vendor*), the problems are barely indicated. Walsh is occasionally betrayed into some inconsistencies as when he refers to the "wambling Tagore-like mysticism" (p. 58) or "the eccentric activity" of spiritualism in his discussion of *The English Teacher*, yet finds it all "corrected by the gusto and the Dickensian flavour" (p. 60) of isolated passages of writing.

For so appreciative a critic of Narayan's work, Professor Walsh seems curiously neglectful of one aspect of the strength of these novels—their uninsistent but pervasive symbolism. To provide a rather mechanical listing: rivers are associated with spiritual rebirth; shrines (even ruined ones) with redemptive grace; trees, gardens, and flowers are associated with harmony and peace; peasants and villages stand for traditional values; old women are the guardians of family sanctities. To ignore the recurrence of these motifs is to miss one element in their evocative power, for the strength of these symbols derive from their deeply Indian and yet universal quality. Another omission is the neglect throughout to give the page references to the numerous quotations from Narayan's works. The references to the works of Katherine Mansfield and Patrick White do not seem particularly apposite.

The book could be a useful acquisition to those who might wish to have all Walsh's commentaries on Narayan under the one title. To those already familiar with these, it is doubtful whether this book adds very much more to his earlier contribution.

Barbara Hardy

PARTICULARITIES: READINGS IN GEORGE ELIOT

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Reviewed by: Daniel P. Deneau

After writing several outstanding articles on George Eliot, in 1959 Professor Barbara Hardy published *The Novels of George Eliot*, the first major study, and a belated one, of the formal aspects or artistry of George Eliot's fiction. Since 1959 Hardy has published several books on nineteenth-century novelists and, of course, has continued to write and lecture on George Eliot. The present book, appropriately entitled *Particularities* and called "a miscellany" by its author (p. 9), is a collection of ten essays (five on *Middlemarch* exclusively) previously published or delivered as lectures (or delivered and then published) by Hardy between 1964 and 1980. Possibly there was a personal as well as professional reason for the publication of the book: *Particularities* is dedicated to the memory of Ernest Dawson Hardy (1918-1977); and, given Barbara Hardy's career, perhaps only a hardcover book on George Eliot would have been a suitable memorial. If reviewers and readers ignore the dedication and notice that only three chapters have not appeared in print before, they may argue that Hardy should have published or republished the material only in the simplest paperback form. But indeed there is no deception: the book contains "Acknowledgments" and an "Introduction," and each essay is carefully dated.

In her "Introduction" Hardy endeavors to explain her changing approach to George Eliot. Beginning as a formalist, she has not adopted the stance of a militant feminist willing to distort George Eliot's life and fiction, nor has she started to anchor her criticism with footnotes