

Review essay) in praise of Cheever's "unsentimental compassion," George Greene, and Frederick R. Karl's essay on Cheever's continuities of American Romanticism and the pastoral tradition (though perhaps a consideration of Peckham's seminal article on Romanticism in *PMLA*, 1951, would strengthen Professor Karl's argument). Also useful are essays by Theo D'haen, linking Cheever with the romance tradition in the development of the American novel, particularly the myth employed by Cooper and Hawthorne of America as Edenic paradise regained, and by Samuel Coale (perhaps better represented by a selection from his fine 1977 book on Cheever), comparing Cheever with Hawthorne, although both might have considered H. T. Harmsel's 1972 article in *Studies in Short Fiction* on relationships between "Young Goodman Brown" and "The Enormous Radio."

Closely related to the work on Cheever's affirmative themes are articles discussing the theme of the relationship of America's past to its present by Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., Stephen C. Moore, Scott Donaldson, and Robert M. Slabey. Professor Burhans indicates the significance of the Cheever narrator who feels that "we seemed to be dancing on the grave of social coherence" (p. 116) as expressive of Cheever's statement that, by the mid-1950s "something has gone very wrong" in our culture; "I come back again to [the image of] the quagmire and the torn sky" (p. 110). Burhans finds particularly compelling Cheever's concern both with the vast changes characterizing the contemporary world and the frighteningly accelerated rate of such changes. Moore sees that though Cheever's characters are typically confronted with the loss of ideals and traditions, they persist in attempting self-definition as their only hope of meaningful life. In two closely reasoned and very well written essays, Professors Donaldson and Slabey consider such existential concerns in terms of the journey motif and (specifically in Slabey's important essay) the relationship between Cheever's "swimmer" and Washington Irving's archetypal Rip. Slabey writes, "Cheever follows in the line of fabulist and mythopoetic writers, participating in the chief business of American fiction—the creation of American Reality" (p. 190).

Professor Collins does not ignore the great later novels, *Bullet Park* and *Falconer*, although most essays in the volume treat either the stories or the Wapshot novels. Fine articles on *Falconer* appear by Gardner and by Joseph McElroy; Professors Donaldson, Waldeland, and John Gardner (in a second essay from the *New York Times Book Review* in 1971) explore the importance to Cheever's canon—and to American fiction—of *Bullet Park*. Gardner's insightful and provocative essay on witchcraft and chance in Cheever's most demanding novel both sends us back to Pascal and points ahead to further inquiry.

A few critics find Cheever sometimes guilty of "logical swim-bladders" of his own, notably Cynthia Ozick in an amusing 1964 article that takes Cheever to task for crudities in formal structure (convincingly countered, I think, in the essays by Hunt and Waldeland) and sentimentality. We recall Strothers Burt's 1943 warning that Cheever might stumble via "a hardening into an especial style that might become an affectation" (p. 24), and Ihab Hassan's cavils in his *Radical Innocence* of 1961; Ozick finds insincerity in Cheever's style in her memorable, "Oh, it is hard to be a Yankee—if only the Wapshots were . . . then Wapsteins—how they might then truly suffer!" (p. 66). Certainly more specific criticism is needed on Cheever's style, perhaps taking direction from Moore's careful differentiation between Cheever's language and tone and that of the typical *New Yorker* story, or Hunt's indication of the similarities between Cheever's style and modern poetry. (Joan Didion noted both humor and pathos, rather than sentimentality, in Cheever's Auden-like atmosphere: "Lost in a haunted wood/children afraid of the night who have never been happy or good"; p. 68.)

Most of these critics agree with Gardner that Cheever's "stark and subtle correspondences," his "uneasy courage and compassion, sink in and in, like a curative spell" (p. 261). Of Cheever's restorative humanism and of his major place in American fiction there seems no doubt; in the editor's words, "truly fortunate are those of us who read through his words of a brighter, deeper, more significant, more human, more passionate, and more visible world, of both chaos and of triumph over chaos" (p. 19).

Driss Chraibi

*MOTHER COMES OF AGE*

Translated from *La Civilisation, Ma Mère!* . . . by Hugh

Harter

Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984. Pp. 121

Reviewed by Saad El-Gabalawy

Like V. S. Naipaul, Driss Chraibi is intensely aware of the cultural dilemma created by colonialism, which engenders the schizophrenic sensibility of many enlightened individuals in the Third World, who are deeply rooted in the traditions of their native countries but fascinated by the brave new world of Western civilization. Born in Morocco, he is now considered a Francophile who has totally assimilated the culture of the colonial force which

invaded his mind, without undermining his sense of loyalty to the mother country. (It is interesting to note that Ben Bella, the leader of the Algerian Revolution expressed himself eloquently in French, whereas his Arabic was atrocious.) In many of his works, all written in French, Chraïbi explores the basic division in the human psyche caused by wavering between two disparate cultures, but belonging to neither.

In his first and most iconoclastic work of fiction, *La Passé Simple* (1954), the enlightened son rejects the ossified patriarchal system in Morocco, which tends to demoralize and dehumanize women. This is reflected in his violent rebellion against the tyranny of the father, who represents traditional Islamic values, based on repression and denial. The mother is literally a slave in the house, sequestered behind barred windows, to serve the needs and desires of the master who has total control over her destiny. While the son absorbs French culture and embraces Occidental ways of life, his mother languishes within the confines of her small world, without any hope of release. Overwhelmed by a deep sense of degradation and humiliation, she commits suicide to escape from the taboos and constraints imposed upon her by Islamic customs.

*Mother Comes of Age* (1972) represents a dramatic departure from Chraïbi's approach in the early novel, offering hope instead of despair, life instead of death. Mother finds her salvation in education, which is the basic theme of the book. The story of her emancipation, through a long journey of discovery and renewal, is narrated by her two sons, who have guided her gently on the path to the modern world. At the beginning, Mama conveys the voice of the Islamic tradition when she forbids her children to use the language of the "barbarians" or wear "heathen clothes" (p. 12). But she gradually discovers that "Those Europeans certainly do have heads on their shoulders" (p. 35). The change in her outlook leads to a tireless search for identity, together with a new passion for knowledge. With striking intelligence and unshaken determination, Mother becomes an indomitable character, moving from ignorance to knowledge, from innocence to experience, from submissiveness to defiance, from mental childhood to intellectual maturity. Through learning, she attains political and social awareness, so that she participates vehemently, perhaps too vehemently, in the struggle to liberate women from the shackles of tradition and male domination. In the last scene, we see Mama on her way to France to explore the Western world and "open up new horizons" (p. 120).

The novelist portrays her journey of discovery with wit, humor, and tenderness. There is, for instance, the poignant scene based on reversal of roles, where the younger son rocks his mother to sleep, when she is assailed by anguish and doubt. There are also comic moments, particularly in the episode where Mama is "scared to death" by the mystifying gadgets and appliances which start to invade her world. Besides, Chraïbi recurrently adopts significant symbols which enrich the meaning of the novel. It is not unreasonable in this regard to suggest that the protagonist is intended to be a microcosm of the mother country, emerging from the darkness of the feudal and colonial system into the light of freedom and progress. Further, as the translator observes in his perceptive introduction, there is a symbol of baptism when Mother visits the park for the first time and dangles her feet in the brook. In the scene where she buries her old possessions and crowns their tomb with an orange tree, the writer seems to symbolize the death of the old self and the birth of a new life. The novel is slightly marred, however, by the explicit didactic element in the last section, which abounds with slogans and platitudes about the repression and liberation of women. This part lacks subtlety and sophistication. Mother loses some of her charm when she sounds like a loud feminist, preaching the doctrine of freedom and equality.

The language of the translation deserves special praise. While remaining faithful to the spirit of the original, Professor Hugh Harter has managed to avoid the pitfalls of literal translation, which sometimes verges on the absurd. Using a highly dynamic style, he has produced a lucid and readable version that will likely appeal to English-speaking readers who like to explore the flux of Oriental modes of life. For those interested in the struggle against oppressive traditions, the novel provides valuable insights, transcending the limitations of time and place.