

interest in religious questions. This interest emerges fully in *The Watch That Ends the Night*, the novel which MacLulich regards as the pinnacle of MacLennan's achievement. While his analysis of the emotional problems depicted in the book is once again both illuminating and tactful, he neglects MacLennan's historical vision. After all, the writer is not content with describing only one phase of Canadian history but refers to the colonial past, the Great Depression, postwar Canada and international problems as well. In this sense it is misleading to say that MacLennan concentrated on private concerns in his best writings of the fifties and wrote once again as a historically minded observer and as a moralist in the sixties. Undoubtedly, however, MacLennan's didacticism and his tendency to subject plot and characterization to his schematic views of social and national development are more obtrusive in his last two novels and impair their effectiveness. What might be emphasized even more is the fact that in these final novels MacLennan reexamines his previous pronouncements on Canada's position in the world and is much less optimistic than before. While believing at the beginning of his career that a new cycle of history would begin on the North-American continent, he arrives at a diametrically opposed view in *Voices in Time*.

T. D. MacLulich is fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of MacLennan and has written a good introduction to this highly conservative and antimodernist writer.

Nadine Natov

MIKHAIL BULGAKOV.

Boston: Twayne, 1985. Pp. xii + 144

Reviewed by Victor Terras

The format of Twayne's World Authors Series prescribes the general organization of each volume: a chronology of the author's life, a biographic sketch, a survey of the author's works, a summary, notes and references, a selected annotated bibliography, and an index. This format makes some repetition unavoidable, particularly when the oeuvre is as intimately linked to the author's life story as in Bulgakov's case. Fortunately, Professor Natov's carefully researched observations on the genesis and biographic as well as historical background of each work are the strongest component of her book. Her treatment is also strong as regards the comparative aspect, so in the chapter on Bulgakov's *Molièriana*. It stands to reason that within the limited space available to her, Professor Natov could give only cursory attention to composition and style. She compensates for this by an expert knowledge of the Russian theater. Altogether, the book is meticulously researched and has much more of a scholarly apparatus than is usually the case in the Twayne series.

In a work addressed to a general audience, the chapter on *The Master and Margarita* must necessarily be the most important. Professor Natov's plot summary is exemplary, drawing a clear outline of what is essential to the meaning of the novel. Four plot levels are recognized: the satirical novel of manners depicting the Moscow of the 1930s; the diabolic phantasmagoria of the intrusion of Voland and his cohorts into this world; the tragic story of the Master and Margarita; and the Master's version of the passion of Christ. Professor Natov deftly demonstrates how all four levels are organically and intricately connected. The intrusion of the diabolic host, fantastic though it is, can be readily translated into a thinly disguised allusion to the rampant terror of Stalin's purges and their ramifications which engulfed Soviet life in the 1930s. The tragedy of the Master, in which Professor Natov recognizes many autobiographic traits, is firmly grounded in Soviet reality, yet also stands as a symbol of the *poète maudit*, suspended between the lofty heights of his creative striving as artist and a black abyss of evil which he is too weak to fight as a human being. The Master's story of Yeshua and Pontius Pilate, while a profound response to the eternal challenge of the Gospel, is also a projection of the Master's personality, as Professor Natov cogently emphasizes. Altogether, her insightful presentation allows one to recognize in Bulgakov's novel a masterful modern version of the romantic *Künstlerroman*. Such a resumption of the tradition of Russian Hoffmanniana, which in the nineteenth century featured the brilliant *Russian Nights* (1844) by V.

F. Odoevsky, is no isolated phenomenon, nor a surprising one in view of the existence and widespread influence of the Serapion Brotherhood in the 1920s.

Professor Natov's book is a solid contribution, doing an excellent job of giving the reader a maximum of useful information which will serve as a reliable basis for further reading and study of Bulgakov's works.

E.D. Blodgett

CONFIGURATION: ESSAYS ON THE CANADIAN LITERATURES.

Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1982. Pp. 224. \$9.95

Reviewed by Camille R. LaBossière

This book is literally grand. Ranging from Homer and Ovid, through the Chansons de geste and Dante, to contemporary South-American literature, E. D. Blodgett quests after a figural mode of reading justly adapted to the underlying nature of the interchanges and silences between various writers and literatures in Canada and authors from beyond her borders. The guiding figure for an understanding of that mode is pictured live in a conversation, an address of the Self to the Other. Itself a sequence of *essais* reflecting on each other, the volume does as it says. In a sense, it is like a symbolist novel or a good poem.

Comparative literature is "a metonymical art" (p. 14), Blodgett argues in the initial essay, "The Canadian Literatures as a Literary Problem." It is not a metaphorical art of the kind practised by Northrop Frye's theory of universal forms, for example, which enjoins a thorough unification and is therefore "fatal for the study of the Canadian literatures" (p. 14). Differences are set aside in Frye's theory, a limitation it shares with Ronald Sutherland's method of defining a mainstream of Canadian literature by thematic convergence. Blodgett argues otherwise, suggesting "frontier" as the kind of figure to permit and encourage the making of "a co-operative separatism" (p. 34). Without frontiers, there can be no genuine comparison, no dialogue respectful of the Other, only monologue, as he so rightly points out. In the end, Blodgett comes to propose the figure of a "threshold" as the place "where comparatists ought to be" (p. 35). It is there that Aquin and Borges meet, and where Ondaatje converses freely with Márquez. This, of course, is not to exclude other forms of a *tertium comparationis*, wherein authors from different Canadian literatures can speak to each other without going abroad, as the third essay, on Hébert and Munro, eloquently testifies.

Ancillary to Blodgett's purpose is his tentative articulation of "the role that German writing has played in the formation of Canadian literature" (p. 8). Faithful to his conception of comparison by metonymy, he sets German works in the midst of a commonwealth of others in "Fictions of Ethnicity in Prairie Writing," which is followed by a study of MacLennan's and Rilke's treatment of the Orpheus myth and a masterful demonstration of the *Neuromantik* in Grove.

Commentary on Grove's *Master of the Mill* launches the sixth essay, "Cold Pastorals." Since the pastoral is "one of the dominant patterns of the Canadian novel" (p. 154), as Blodgett reckons, its study can take the reader far along toward an understanding of what it means to be "Canadian." The sweep across a range of novels leads to the observation that, in the Canadian novel, "pastoral is only a fiction" in the sense that it "moves through landscapes of abstraction to reach solutions that are only in appearance more concrete" (p. 180). Scrutiny of this mode extends into the final essay, "Gone West to Geometry's Country," where the traveler in Canadian fiction is said to come to the experience "of finding one's self lost" (p. 215), a conclusion as paradoxical as it is illuminating.

The "Postscript" proposes that "the Canadian literatures elaborate a profoundly idealistic attitude" (p. 222). The literatures, then, are reflections of an ongoing search for an ever-elusive country in the mind. There are no categorical validities for thinking nor stationary points of reference to chart a course by in that endless journey to an ideal end. What is certain and palpable is that *Configuration* sets a new and high standard for the comparative studies of the Canadian literatures that will follow.