

A Dot on the Map has its flaws. Some of the opaque stories, with their shifting tenses and stylistic oddities, betray Sait's notorious carelessness which can be quite irritating at times. The apologetics that such pieces are designed to reflect the flaws of human life through a pattern of anarchy, verges on the absurd. Besides, in terms of lucidity and vividness, the styles of different translators lack consistency and uniformity. Some of them tend to use American slang and colloquialisms, as well as a few remnants of the hippie lingo of the 1960s, which adulterate the atmosphere of the local environment. A superb work of fiction, nevertheless.

Benedict Chiaka Njoku

THE FOUR NOVELS OF CHINUA ACHEBE

New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1984. Pp. 200

Reviewed by Kalu Ogbaa

Njoku's book is loosely divided into six segments which include an introduction, four chapters (each devoted to each of the four novels), and a final segment titled "Chinua Achebe: A Postscript." The chapters are, however, not balanced in terms of length and contents, an imbalance that reveals that the author appears to understand *A Man of the People* and *Arrow of God* more than he does *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. As one considers the total contents of the book, one is baffled, for, right from the introduction through "A Postscript," Njoku neither states the object of the study nor indicates his critical bent; and both failures make it impossible for readers to realize what contributions, if any, he is making to the existing scholarship on Achebe's writings. On page six, for example, he attempts to distinguish the physical world from the fictional; but he hardly makes a good case of the argument before leading inductively into asserting that "the novelist creates an imperfect and fictionalized world in which people live, move, interact and have their existence." Again, without explaining what he means by that, he goes on to the next page to make statements that sound like conclusions to the study and that create a quality of open-endedness in his critical style.

The same weakness is continued in "A Postscript." In fact, one would have thought that the segment serves as a conclusion to the study but instead its contents reveal that it is a continuation of the introduction. A postscript, indeed! The unstated critical direction in the introduction as well as the critic's not-too-discreet use of critical terms seriously affect his overall analysis and argument of important issues of Achebe's novels (see, for instance, p. 7). Such critical inaccuracies abound in the study, and they result in erroneous interpretations of incidents and concepts of the novels, such as the wrestling matches, traditional Igbo religion and cosmology, leadership problems, and the role and meaning of *chi*. Also, Njoku compounds his grammatical errors with irritating typographical errors.

As it is, Njoku's *The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe* is a total disappointment, for, instead of being an improvement on Killam's *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* which came out fifteen years before, or an advancement of the scholarly discussions of Achebe's writings that exist in Carroll's, Wren's, and Innes and Lindfors's studies and critical perspectives (some of which he cites frequently and sometimes very poorly), it does a lot of harm to the novels that Njoku attempts to evaluate and a great disservice to his native Igbo whose fictional culture and civilization he has failed to interpret very well to non-Igbo readers.

Wayne B. Stengel

THE SHAPE OF ART IN THE SHORT STORIES OF DONALD BARTHELME

Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Pp. 227, \$22.50

Reviewed by Catherine D. Farmer

Wayne B. Stengel's study of the short stories of Donald Barthelme is based upon this premise: "Reading the range of Barthelme's writing as it has appeared in his eight collections . . . yields evidence of a unity of idea and technique that establishes him as a writer of consistent vision and serious intent" (p. 5). That premise, which Stengel effectively proves in

his book, is in direct opposition to the opinion expressed by Joyce Carol Oates in her June 4, 1972, *New York Times Book Review*, which stereotyped Barthelme's fiction as "fragments": "... his brain is fragments" (p. 29). Stengel states that critics such as Oates view Barthelme's writing as "facetious or trivial—hardly worthy of critical examination [because] . . . these critics consider only a limited number of stories and fail to investigate enough varieties to offer a case for the artistic coherence of his writing" (p. 5).

Stengel remedies this ill-informed approach to Barthelme through the form and content of his book, which develops a typology or classification procedure that considers "the one hundred plus tales that make up the whole" by dividing them into sixteen types or categories with "sixteen junctures of theme and process [each of which] suggests a method of description that embraces the major part of Barthelme's short-story writing" (pp. 5, 7). Stengel establishes a sixteen-division grid. The horizontal axis deals with Processes, according to Tone (Humor, Futility, Stasis, Affirmation); Process of Development (Play, Effort to Know, Repetition, Creation); Subject (Underground Man, the Collage, Education, the Artist). The vertical axis of the grid is an organization of Topics and forms his chapter divisions: the Self, examined through Identity Stories; Communication, developed through Dialogue Stories; Society, or Social Fabric Stories; and Art Objects, seen through what he terms Objects of Speculation Stories.

Each of Stengel's four chapters discusses stories that illustrate Barthelme's main concerns—Self, Communication, Society, and Art Objects—developing them through the interplay of the sixteen junctures of his schematized plan. Not only is this a departure from previous Barthelme criticism, it is the first effort to develop a complete typology for viewing his stories *and* is the first criticism to view almost the totality of Barthelme's short stories. Stengel has succeeded in bringing together the great themes and methods of an American "fragmatic," and he has made of these pleasing fragments a most pleasing *whole*.

A brief overview of Stengel's chapters proves him to be correct in stating that Barthelme is "a writer of consistent vision and serious intent." In Chapter I, he examines fourteen short stories, touching on all the Processes mentioned in describing his schematization but bringing out particularly well Barthelme's attention to *signs* and *clues*, the "formalized lies" of literary and societal convention; he shows ways in which these signs have betrayed us, thus causing problems of identification for characters and readers. His most comprehensive treatment of this is through discussion of "Me and Miss Mandible," which concerns a thirty-five-year-old insurance adjuster sent back to the sixth grade by his boss so that he can find out where he "went wrong." He learns his failure is due to his attempts to *apply* accepted signs to reality. Chapter II deals with the Dialogue Stories, examining eight stories and focusing on Barthelme's question-and-answer technique, his use of diagrammatic art, clichés, Jazz rhythms and musical terms, and a Joycean level of allusion. Stengel shows that Barthelme is concerned with the utter failure of communication between men ("Margins" and "The Explanation") and the implied failure of man's communication with God ("The Catechist" and "The Leap"). In Chapter III, the Society Stories, Stengel deals with twelve stories, two of which can be taken as representative of the chapter: "To London and Rome" and "Petpetua." "To London and Rome" pictures a young married couple whom Stengel calls "a surrealistic Tom and Daisy Buchanan" (p. 113) whose wealth enables them to buy and furnish their own luxurious world—much more than a microcosm. It is a flat story told in a "reductionist outline" manner that consists of one column of dialogue and an accompanying column of stage directions complete with described and interpreted pauses. "Petpetua" follows the exploits of a woman who attempts to break out of the conformity of society; Petpetua succeeds only in perpetuating the conformity of her rebellion. In "The Captured Woman," "Edward and Pia," and "A Few Moments of Waking and Sleeping," we see the characters' efforts—not uniformly successful—to remake society to please themselves. Chapter IV is a discussion of twelve short stories in which Stengel examines Barthelme's views on the place and meaning of art in contemporary culture. "The Police Band" and "The Policemen's Ball" seem to prove that art is incapable of quelling the societal unrest that erupts in riots and other antisocial activity. "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" and "The Genius" examine public figures as art objects; Stengel states here that the human personality proves too complex to be a true art object—too many facets for exploration. "The Glass Mountain," "At the Tolstoy Museum," and "The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace" are addressed to artists and, according to Stengel, they deal with problems unique to modern art: the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between sign or symbol and audience response, the need for the modern artist to break away from the claustrophobic

influence of the art of the past, and the torment of the modern artist in having to pander to sensationalism or experience the flight of pigeons (his public) from the palace (his art).

Surely, these brief descriptions of Barthelme's concerns show him to be "a writer of consistent vision and serious intent," as Stengel contends. It is my contention that the form and content of Stengel's work function to bring together Barthelme's admitted fragments, forming a most edifying *whole*.

Charles Stanley Ross

VLADIMIR NABOKOV: LIFE, WORK, AND CRITICISM

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1985. Pp. 47.

Reviewed by June Perry Levine

Charles Stanley Ross's brief introduction to Nabokov follows the format of the other studies in the expanding series of York Press guides to major authors: a biography (4 pp.), a chronological list of major works (5 pp.), a discussion of seventeen of Nabokov's novels (22 pp.), remarks on critical response (3 pp.), and an annotated bibliography of secondary sources (7 pp.).

What is the appropriate audience for this introduction? Clearly, it is not the general reader, for whom the quick trip through Nabokov's titles would be more rushed than those tours advertising "eleven European capitals in ten days." Nor do I think that undergraduates reading *Lolita* or *Pale Fire* in a contemporary fiction course will find themselves lead through any particular novel sufficiently to have a better understanding of the whole. The scholarly apparatus suggests that *Vladimir Nabokov* is designed as an aid to graduate students working in the area, but any serious student will have to use Field's bibliography and Schuman's reference guide, supplemented by Parker's research newsletter, because of the limitations of Ross's lists. Finally, whether this slim volume can be of help to the teacher of Nabokov's fiction depends on one's view of the pedagogical efficacy of the overview lecture. The center of Ross's book, the chapter on the major works is of interest and usefulness in direct proportion to the number of Nabokov's novels that the teacher has previously read. However, the more firsthand experience the teacher has with Nabokov's work, the less the need for the guide.

My calling into question the nature of the enterprise is not meant to disparage Professor Ross's command of his material, which is impressive. The biography offers an accurate account of Nabokov's life and some of the thematic preoccupations that grew out of it. The discussions of the novels, although limited to a page or two for each, is sound and stimulating, although I think a better procedure would have been to arrange this chapter thematically according to Nabokov's major concerns and to use the individual works to illustrate the issues. The weakest section of the study is the one on "Nabokov and His Critics," a melange of Nabokov's own critical writing, a passing glance at some books devoted to Nabokov, and Ross's own views, including his ambivalence about the relation of Nabokov's life to his art: not relevant, says Ross, yet he gives some of his precious space to this apparent dead end. *Vladimir Nabokov* is written lucidly (despite the use of "faunt" for "flout" on p. 32). My reservations about this volume reflect dismay at the increasing number of publishing ventures designed to provide short cuts to literary study by encouraging people to read about authors when their time would be better spent concentrating on the author's writings. The limitations of these very short but wide-ranging examinations of prolific major authors may exceed their usefulness.

Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi

FEAR AND TREMBLING

Translated by Minoo Southgate

Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984. Pp. xxx + 121

Reviewed by Saad El-Gabalawy

Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi is Iran's most important contemporary writer, now living as an expatriate in Paris, where he has found refuge from tyranny and repression in his native country. His voluminous works, which deal preeminently with interrelated sociopolitical and psychological problems, include over forty novels, collections of short stories, plays, film scripts,