

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 Mino 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,

and anthropological studies. *Fear and Trembling*, published originally in Tehran in 1968, is both a novel and a collection of short stories. Each of its six sections can be read as a self-contained piece, yet all of them enrich each other and work together, connected by themes, by the narrative form, and by a common source of inspiration. The setting is the Persian Gulf Coast with its harsh and dismal environment, which looks like a malign force dominating the lives of the characters and threatening their very existence. All the episodes take place in a primitive coastal village, where the inhabitants constantly feel the presence of evil spirits striving to possess them. It is safe to assume that the village, in spite of its total isolation, is a microcosm of the whole country, with its cultural complexity and political crosscurrents.

The author relies heavily on the allegorical mode to incarnate his central insights about contemporary issues in Iranian politics. The peasants recurrently face mysterious "intruders" who constitute a menace to their peace and security. For instance, in the second story, a mullah arrives suddenly at the village, where he marries the most desirable woman, who gives birth to a monstrous child, then dies with the baby moments later. The episode implicitly conveys a warning against manipulation by the mullahs who exploit poor and ignorant people in the name of religion. The writer's condemnation is directed against the Muslim clergy who abuse the people's trust and dominate them through hope and fear. In the light of historical events after the Khomeini Revolution, the allegorical piece seems perceptive and prophetic.

Similarly, in the third story, a woman from the coastal village is taken to Ishaq-i Hakim, or Isaac the Physician, to cure her from insanity with his healing powers. Focusing on the quackery of the "greedy Jew" who "is not pure of heart," the author exposes his pernicious exploitation of the villagers, which culminates in the woman's death as a result of his fatal treatment. The episode ends with the arrival of a splendid ship from Jerusalem to fetch the fraudulent quack. On the allegorical level, there is the political dimension, accentuating the danger of Israel's attempts to "seduce" the Third World through offers of technological and economic aid.

Perhaps the most significant allegory can be found in the sixth section, where the Westerners arrive on a magnificent ship and camp outside the village, initiating a striking process of degeneration and degradation. The peasants are transformed into greedy and bloated creatures, who become obsessed with the accumulation of material possessions, basically useless articles of no real value to them. Their innate virtues of kindness and compassion are replaced by perversion, egotism, and corruption, so that they start to prey on each other. In their blind attempts to assimilate foreign customs and ways of life, the villagers verge on the absurd, revealing their total failure to reconcile Western values with native mores. It is clear that the author intends to underline the detrimental effect of the cultural and technological invasion of the West on underdeveloped countries, which often leads to the distortion of national identity.

It should be noted that the veil of allegory in most of the stories is transparent enough for the reader to establish a legitimate relationship between the literal and symbolic levels of meaning. Shocked into attention by the mysterious events in various episodes, the reader's mind becomes dynamic enough to make the necessary adjustment between the realistic and allegorical planes of correspondence. The brief interval in which he makes this adjustment is the moment when the reader is artist, when his participation is most active, giving him a feeling of triumph that actually quickens response. I may add that the tone in *Fear and Trembling* is mostly prosaic, arid, without momentum, whose contrast with the experiences and feelings conveyed gives a prophetic importance to this flat writing. Evidently, the air of detachment in the book does not suggest a lack of concern, but rather the mastery of feeling which is required for the allegorical mode.

Professor Southgate is to be commended for her lucid translation and insightful critical introduction.