

argues that Joyce recognized a connection between literary and sexual pleasures. Joyce's play with language and that language's central sexual theme is proof of the fact.

There is much rich reading to be had in Brown's book, but the act of reading *James Joyce and His Sexuality* could have been made far more pleasurable. At one point, Brown translates an abstruse passage from the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*. Joyce had written: "Both indurated by early domestic training and an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance professed their disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social, and ethical doctrines. Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism" (quoted in Brown 16). Brown translates: "They disbelieve in religion but believe in sex" (16). Brown's occasionally painful prose--seventy-eight word sentences that make up single paragraphs--would have benefited from similar editing.

Esther Fuchs

## *ISRAELI MYTHOGYNIES: WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY HEBREW FICTION*

Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. Pp. 147

Reviewed by Miriam Roshwald

Esther Fuchs looks at contemporary Israeli literature from a feminist critic's vantage point. Her approach is determined by some basic premises of the feminist theory. The sine qua non of feminist philosophy is that woman, in our male dominated, or androcentric world, is by definition the Other. As the victimized object of "one of the most oppressive ideologies of all time-- patriarchy" (12), she is represented by the male writer as an inferior in every respect--mentally, emotionally, and morally. Armed with these unassailable axioms, Ms. Fuchs turns her objective critic's eye to the Hebrew letters. Focusing mainly on two of Israel's most prominent contemporary writers, A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, she comes up with conclusions which hover between the peevish and the absurd.

Both authors under discussion are deeply preoccupied with Israel's impasse with her Arab neighbors and with the corrosive effect this bloody impasse has wreaked on the national as well as individual soul. Both authors probe mercilessly into the rot, cant, self-delusion, and despair which inimical reality, together with human corruptibility, have wrought in the collective and individual psyche. Compromise of once hallowed Zionist and socialist ideals, defection from the pioneering commitment to a simple life and closeness to land, the onset of urbanization with all its attendant ills of materialism, are exposed and caricatured in every one of these writers' works. The phantom haunting modern man everywhere--alienation--is only compounded in this embattled society by the memory of the Holocaust, endemic sense of insecurity, and dissatisfaction with itself. The disturbing literature which tries to translate the nagging sense of malaise reads often more like an allegorical parable than a mimetic representation of reality. The ugly self-image which emerges--of both the male and female protagonist--reflects a bitter sense of guilt and failure. The heroes, or rather antiheroes, who fill the pages of contemporary Israeli fiction are marked by a stigma of spiritual impotence, profound disorientation, fragmented sense of identity, and self-destructive, semi-conscious hostility. Esther Fuchs, an intelligent and capable critic, knows all that, but she chooses to isolate one component and to make it the exclusive criterion by which to pass judgment on this fiction, namely, the woman.

As Ms. Fuchs would have it, the male Israeli writer is a foresworn enemy of the woman. A.B. Yehoshua, who often employs surrealist techniques in which his heroes act in a compulsive, automaton-like twilight of semi-consciousness, is accused by Ms. Fuchs of denying his female figures the gift of rational thinking, a sense of public and family responsibility, and of depicting them as "seductive objects of desire" who "drain the male subject of energy and gradually lure him to self-destruction" (38-39). Later, as an after-

thought and ungracious concession to an alternate interpretation--a view held by the majority of critics-- she admits that, "At best, they [Yehoshua's women protagonists] serve as symbolic representations of a beloved but treacherous country, a land resistant to the desperate wooing of her sons and lovers" (56-57). And in connection with Yehoshua's two major novels, she concedes that "In *The Lover*, as well as in *Late Divorce*, Yehoshua does go beyond the stereotypic confines . . . and wrests his female characters from their previous marginality" (57).

If Yehoshua's females are marked by a lack of consciousness, Ms. Fuchs faults Oz for depriving them of a conscience. They are incapable "to distinguish right from wrong," (61) they serve as a complement of "the attempt of the external forces to intrude into the society and destroy it," (60) and they act as "direct or indirect cause of malaise in the civilized context" (60). In short, Ms. Fuchs indicts Oz of making his heroines the scapegoats for all the misfortunes of Israeli society--"the real "national and political" enemy" (24). This strident accusation is, nevertheless, punctured by flashes of common sense and moderation: "This is not to say that Oz's authorial irony spares . . . male counterparts of his destructive heroines . . .," (60). "It is possible to interpret Hana Gonen [the heroine of *My Michael*] as a symbolic representation of Israel" (85) and *Elsewhere Perhaps* has often been taken as a national allegory" (75). If the alternate views are valid, then, perhaps, Ms. Fuchs's arguments of the rampant misogyny in Israeli fiction are not, after all, all that unassailable.

Ms. Fuchs devotes a third of her book to the analysis and unstinting endorsement of Amalia Kahana-Carmon's literary contribution to Israeli letters--her unique, stylistic inventiveness, but primarily, her interest in the "female condition": "By restoring conscience and consciousness to the mimetic aspect of the female image and by studying its complexities, she is challenging the androcentric tendency to present woman as a void, a sexual object or a male adjunct . . . her gynographies create a plausible illusion of femaleness as Selfhood" (92).

Tony Tanner

## JANE AUSTEN

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986. Pp. ix + 291. \$20.00

Reviewed by Bruce Stovel

Tony Tanner's *Jane Austen* is both about and in a Great Tradition. Tanner sees Austen as a social and moral realist in the Great Tradition of English fiction; the index reveals that Tanner alludes most frequently to James, Eliot, Richardson, and Charlotte Bronte among English novelists (and mostly to Tolstoy among the non-English). Furthermore, the book is itself in a Dryden-Johnson-Coleridge-Arnold-Eliot-Leavis Great Tradition of English literary criticism. The critic in this tradition speaks, not as a scholar to other scholars, but as a specialist mediating to the non-specialist; he celebrates the value of literature by translating its fascinating but opaque particulars into terms the ordinary reader can grasp and apply to his or her own life. At its best, this kind of criticism, by recreating the elegance and eloquence of the literature it celebrates, raises the reader's imaginative awareness to something approaching that of the author being discussed; all too often, however, the original text is simplified and fitted into a tidy, socially useful thesis.

Tanner's book has both the virtues and defects of its critical pedigree. The common reader--someone reading Austen's novels for the first time, the typical undergraduate, for instance--will be greatly helped; the specialist, while admiring individual *aperçus*, will find the book much less useful.

To begin with the virtues, Tanner, trained at Cambridge (the university of Leavis and I.A. Richards) and currently Reader in English at Cambridge, demonstrates the value of