

paid for their insularity in underdevelopment, depopulation, unemployment, unsanitary conditions and disease. When "Essay" consults the oracle about his career he is told to "find Asabula," and that same day arrives home to find waiting for him a letter from a new American penfriend, postmarked "Ashtabula, Ohio." Years later, when the penfriend turns up unexpectedly in Isara at the height of the kingship crisis, the teacher greets him with the words "Welcome to Ashtabula," and the significance is clear: his native world is now itself part of the larger modern order represented by the Ohian Ashtabula. The oracle's instruction to Isara, through the schoolmaster, is an injunction to find a niche in that order, to discover its place in the world, until which time it will be more than a disease-infested wilderness. Thus the "voyage" is a journey home, but to discover that "home" is now the world: in this circular journey the circle is always expanding, the perspectives widening. As the farsighted Pa Josiah says to his son, "We all pray that our children go farther than we did."

Isara is not without its flaws. The humor of nicknames is at times pedantic and confusing, some of the circle's debates suffer from an ego-preening sterility, and the glossary of Yoruba words is erratic. But the book's sprawling narrative teems with life and its exuberant portrait-gallery of entrepreneurs, eccentrics, and rogues is done with great craft and care. *Isara* is a beautiful and evocative portrait of a society in transition, a loving reimagining of things past.

Geoffrey Davis, ed.

CRISIS AND CREATIVITY IN THE NEW LITERATURES IN ENGLISH: CANADA

Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990. Pp. 253. \$35.00

Reviewed by Alex Knoenagel

In 1988, the universities of Aachen and Liège jointly organized a conference with the title "Crisis and Conflict in the New Literatures in English." Some of the papers relating to Canadian literature as well as some Canadian prose and poetry have now been published under the title *Crisis and Creativity*. This change of title is quite intriguing since it suggests a conflict-free climate of creativity as the environment of Canadian literature, and thus conforms to one of the conventional stereotypes about Canadian life and culture.

The essays collected in the book suggest, however, that "Conflict and Creativity" might have been a more appropriate title. Several of the essays deal with the literary treatment of conflicts in Canadian life—such as the feelings of suppression experienced by women and visible minorities, and the attempts to recover an original history against the prescripts of direct or indirect colonial masters—but the fact that these conflicts are being successfully thematized in creative literature suggests that the crisis diagnosed by the organizers of the conference is, at least as far as Canadian culture is concerned, being overcome by creativity.

The fourteen essays collected here present a wide selection of interests and approaches to texts ranging from the center of the canon (Atwood, Laurence) to its very margins (Edith Eaton, Antonio D'Alfonso). Surprisingly, if one remembers the book's title, there are even three essays concerned with Quebecois literature included in the collection.

Reading these essays, one is frequently being reminded that these are conference papers. Frequently, the essays appear quite inconsequential; the presentation of facts and problems takes precedence over the in-depth analysis one expects from research papers. Lorraine McMullen's "Double Colonization: Femininity and Ethnicity in the Writings of Edith Eaton," for example, is certainly meritorious in introducing the writings of this Eurasian author to a European audience that has most likely never heard of her, but too frequently the text reads like running commentary. Notable exceptions to this trend are Coral Ann Howells's analysis of the role history plays in three Prairie novels, Martin Kuester's discussion of Bowering's *Burning Water* as historiographic parody, and Jamie S. Scott's attempt to show that "Mary Daly's feminist theological vision also provides an interpretive framework within which we may talk meaningfully about the spirituality of Laurence's Manawaka women" (174).

In his introduction, Geoffrey V. Davis expresses his "hope that the contributors gathered here reflect in their quality and variety not only the insights and interests European scholars have to bring to Canadian literature but also something of the intellectual stimulation and sheer pleasure that Canadian writers and scholars continue to offer to us in Europe" (xii). The European perspective is certainly noticeable and distinguishes itself well from the "nationalist" anti-American rhetoric of Robin Mathews's "Possession and Dispossession in Canadian Literature," but the European perspective is no longer as rare as it was when Kroetsch and Nischik edited *Gaining Ground* in 1985. And unfortunately, some contributions to *Crisis and Creativity* have little more to offer than the European perspective.