

Gifts is Farah's first African-published book and it is clearly aimed, stylistically, at a broader and more African-based readership: thus the learned epigraphic allusions to Western literature which open the chapters in the earlier books have been replaced by captions briefly summarizing the events that follow. This is a new, different Farah, interspersing his narrative with the familiar poetic dream-literature and oral folklore of Somali tradition but in a much more accessible form than hitherto. The new novel is the most radiant and sunny of his books, its humor gentle and teasing, its two central characters delightfully created. The quirky, enigmatic dovetailing of private and public themes is informed by a boldly original metaphoric conception and carries some subtle analyses of the complex psychology of donorship, its binding ties and dependencies. *Gifts* is both a poetically evocative and a politically provocative work, full of unexpected echoes and startling insights. It was six years in the making and will not disappoint Farah's patient readers inside and outside Africa. The best gifts are worth waiting for.

Cheryl K. Bove

Understanding Iris Murdoch

Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993. Pp. xii + 216. \$29.95

Reviewed by John Fletcher

This latest volume in the series *Understanding Contemporary British Literature* shares the aim of the other student guides or companions that are its stablemates, namely to "provide instruction in how to read certain contemporary writers, identifying and explicating their material, themes, use of language, point of view, structures, symbolism, and responses to experience" (ix).

This Cheryl K. Bove, a leading authority on the work of Iris Murdoch, does admirably. She begins with an outline of Murdoch's career, then gives an overview ("The Modern Realist") in which she stresses that Murdoch has contributed not only to the development of the novel but has also advanced the human condition as well. There then follows a lucid, concise exposition of Murdoch's aesthetics and moral philosophy, for which students of literature not taking courses in philosophy will be especially grateful, and from which even those majoring in philosophy will derive benefit.

The next four chapters form the core of the book: they contain the description and analysis of the "major" works of fiction, divided into four periods: early (1954-1962), middle (1968-1973), later (1978-1980), and latest (1983-1989). Few would disagree with this periodization of Murdoch's output, although some might not share Professor Bove's view that the "major" novels are *Under the Net*; *The Bell*; *An Unofficial Rose*; *The Nice and the Good*; *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*; *The Black Prince*; *The Sea, The Sea*; *Nuns and Soldiers*; *The Philosopher's Pupil*; *The Good Apprentice*; *The Book and the Brotherhood*; and *The Message to the Planet*. I myself would have dropped *An Unofficial Rose*, which I have always found a slight if charming work, and included in the canon of major novels *A Word Child*, which seems to me one of Murdoch's greatest achievements, both from a technical

point of view (the division into "days" rather than conventional chapters and the handling of the disingenuous self-exculpation of the first-person male narrator), and from the moral angle (the extraordinary empathy shown in the exploration of the ravages of a loveless childhood by someone who herself enjoyed the rare privilege of an entirely happy upbringing).

Bove deals with Murdoch's other works (the plays and non-major novels) in the next two chapters, the second of which is entitled "The Gothic." As Bove rightly points out, the gothic is not Murdoch's forte, and yet in her early and middle period she kept coming to it; as a result gothic works, such as the vastly overrated *The Unicorn*, are, together with *The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Italian Girl*, and *The Time of the Angels*, amongst her weakest creations.

In a brief final chapter, Bove shows how Murdoch's pessimistic portrayal of most of her characters as selfish and self-deluding does not prevent her remaining generally optimistic about the human race. "The vision of truth is there," Bove concludes, "even if individuals can gain only intimations of it, and the artist who attends carefully in order to present a just and accurate vision will be an instrument of truth for the world" (194). This sane and balanced assessment is a good example of what students at whom this guide is chiefly aimed will find so helpful.

Other readers, too, even British fiction specialists, will find it a convenient and concise guide to Murdoch's huge output, since few people will have read it all (and fewer still will want to; as F.R. Leavis used rather cruelly to say, "life is too short to read Iris Murdoch," and that was when she had barely started on her enormous opus). One word of caution, however: readers should ignore the blurb on the dust jacket, which seems to describe a different book, perhaps a synopsis or an early draft. The discrepancy between the sales pitch and the actual product will not worry those who read the book in a library, since the dust jacket will have been discarded. If the publishers intend to issue the book in paperback, however, they would do well to compose a blurb which more accurately reflects the contents.

Marie Luise Kaschnitz

Long Shadows

Translated from the German by Donald MacRae

Moonstone Press: Goderich, Ontario, 1992. Pp. 211. \$12.95.

Reviewed by Sibylla Dickson

Marie Luise Kaschnitz (1901-1974) is a well-known poet and short story writer in her native Germany. She is relatively unknown in North America, although several of her works have already been translated into English. *Long Shadows* [*Lange Schatten*; 1960] consists of twenty-one short stories. A close examination of these stories shows that Kaschnitz is undoubtedly "writing from a deep feeling of personal experience" (212). Three of them deal with her favorite theme, namely, childhood and the many crises of adolescence ("Long Shadows,"