

BOOK REVIEWS

Richard E. Mezo

A Study of B. Traven's Fiction: The Journey to Solipaz

San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993. Pp. 199. \$69.00

Reviewed by Kenneth Payne

Until quite recently, the trouble with most B. Traven scholarship was that it had to be produced in a kind of information "black hole," given the very little that was known for sure about the life of the mysterious author of *The Death Ship* (1926) and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1927). The result was an almost exclusively text-centered variety of literary criticism which usually left the works in question floating curiously detached from any but the vaguest social, historical, or biographical context. The situation was corrected with the publication of two volumes about Traven—Karl Guthke's *B. Traven: The Life Behind the Legends* (1991) and Heidi Zogbaum's *B. Traven: A Vision of Mexico* (1992), which together provided enough biographical and historical background for us to make better sense of the Traven oeuvre.

Although published in 1993, Richard Mezo's study of Traven's fiction was obviously completed before the appearance of the Guthke and Zogbaum volumes and without the benefit of their insights—how else to account for Mezo's total silence on their important contributions? As a consequence, Mezo's book has a decidedly dated ring to it. Indeed, at least one section (his discussion of the novel *The White Rose* [83-96]) originally appeared more or less verbatim in *The Texas Quarterly* in 1977, when modern Traven studies were in their infancy. It would be absurd, therefore, to suggest that Mezo's volume is in any sense a "seminal book," as the writer of the Foreword misguidedly claims.

In his Introduction, Mezo puts us on notice that his purpose is not to pursue the question of the author's actual identity but "to focus attention upon his works" (xiii). Fair enough. As a quite narrowly focused and dissertation-like appreciation of Traven's major work, Mezo's study just about holds its own. At times, his somewhat pedestrian technique of plot summary and *explication de texte* becomes a little tiresome, as do his frequent and often unhelpful allusions to literary parallels (Shakespeare, Dickens, Conrad, Melville, et al.); but he does have some interesting opinions to express about some of the lesser-known texts, such as *The Bridge in the Jungle* (ch. V), the six Jungle Novels (ch. VII), and the short stories (ch. VIII), and he does succeed in suggesting something of their richness and complexity.

A major disappointment is the cursory treatment that Mezo gives to Traven's 1928 travelogue, *Land des Frühlings*, which commentators have come increasingly to see as perhaps the key to a proper understanding of Traven's Mexican period. Mezo confirms it as "an important work in the Traven canon" which reveals much about "Traven's divided personality," but allows it only one page.

The most that can be said for *A Study of B. Traven's Fiction* is that it is a workmanlike survey of the plots and themes of Traven's fiction which does nothing to significantly advance our insights into the author or his work, or to make us see them in a different light. The Traven aficionado will probably be left with a strong sense of *déjà vu*. He will also wonder how Traven's final novel, *Aslan Norval* (1960), could have been misspelled throughout Mezo's book as "Alsan Norval."

Ruth H. Bauerle, ed.

Picking Up Airs: Hearing the Music in Joyce's Text
Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. 220

Reviewed by Murray McArthur

Ruth H. Bauerle observes at several points in *Picking Up Airs* that the five essays gathered there are intended to be "in some sense an extension of Cheryl Herr's influential work in *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture*" (11). Herr's 1986 text was one of the first of the cultural studies of Joyce's work, and it is still the best. Focusing on three areas of the popular or general culture of Dublin—the press, the stage, and the pulpit—Herr wove a richly textured reading of Joyce's works that illuminated the construction of character and citizen through the shared and infinitely repeated codes and discourses of a particular cultural space and time. *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture* was especially sensitive to the play of power within this particular colonized space and time, addressing the complicated question of cultural power with a maturity, modesty, and fairness rare in cultural or postcolonial studies. In other words, Herr's text is a very tough act to follow. In this sense, *Picking Up Airs* is only a very limited extension of *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture*. Several of the essays, in fact, cover some of the same ground that Herr covered so brilliantly; several others cover ground mapped previously by the authors themselves; only the last essay, by Bauerle herself, seems to open up some new territory in an interesting though limited way.

In the first essay, "Music as Comedy in *Ulysses*," Zack Bowen extends the thesis of his *"Ulysses" as a Comic Novel* (1989) to argue that *Ulysses* as a whole is a musical comedy. Although his readings of "Sirens" and "Circe" in terms of comedic and pantomimic form respectively are convincing, largely because these ways of reading those chapters have been commonplaces from the beginning of Joyce criticism, he does not demonstrate or attempt to demonstrate that all eighteen chapters of the novel have any sort of musical form. The next two essays, "Pantomime Songs and the Limits of Narrative in *Ulysses*" by Henriette Lazaridis Power and "'A Rollicking Rattling Song of the Halls': Joyce and the Music Hall" by Ulrich Schneider, add some interesting details to Herr's brilliant reading of the role of the Christmas pantomime and the music hall in Joyce's text. Power adds to Herr's presentation of the role of the pantomime *Turco the Terrible; or Harlequin Amabel* in *Ulysses*, and Schneider demonstrates the contribution of music hall lyrics to certain of Joyce's narratives at both the macrotextual level (see especially her elucidation of the use of the naughty girl and lodger song type in "The Boarding House" from *Dubliners* [74-80]), and the microtextual level (see "Voices of the City: Music