

The new edition of *Long Drums and Cannons* is equipped with appendices that are particularly useful for the student reader. Bibliographical and biographical information on the Nigerian writers Laurence discusses provides a useful starting point for those who wish to research such writers further. A history of the civil war in Nigeria and a discussion of the ethnic groups discussed in the text offer a framework through which to better understand Laurence's text. Laurence's text itself, of course, is very well organized and clearly written. Laurence prefaces each section with a brief discussion of the author at hand and then gives a meticulous introduction to and analysis of that author's major texts. She writes from the perspective of a practicing writer rather than a literary critic, focusing on how various authors bring characters to life and are particularly in tune with the rhythms of idiom and speech. Laurence offers the most praise, perhaps, to Chinua Achebe, whom she admired greatly. Achebe, Laurence notes, is "one of the best novelists now writing in any country in the English language" (89). The new edition of *Long Drums and Cannons* is an excellent contribution to Laurence scholarship and an important introduction to Nigerian literature written in English. Scholars of Canadian and African literature alike will benefit from this valuable new text.

Alan D. Hodder and Robert Meagher, eds.

*The Epic Voice*

Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002. Pp. 157. US \$54.95. US \$15.00

Reviewed by Arnd Bohm

Readers of the *IFR* might raise several questions about *The Epic Voice*. Is it a book? Does it deal with fiction? And does it have anything new to offer? On the first question, there is the editors' suggestion that the anthology is "both a monograph and a veritable 'course-in-a-book'" (1). The main substance of the book are five essays that began as lectures and seminars presented at Hampshire College in the context of an interdisciplinary colloquium offered annually on different topics to students. One can only envy undergraduates fortunate enough to have heard five scholars present cutting-edge research in such an engaging way. Each of the scholars is a recognized authority on the texts they discuss clearly and provocatively: John Maier on *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Robert Alter on the biblical story of David, Stanley Lamborido on *The Odyssey*, Wendy Doniger on *The Ramayana*, and Tomás Ó Cathasaigh on *Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley)*. The selection of texts reflects the needs of the occasion, namely, to introduce undergraduates to key founding texts of the respective cultures, rather than submitting to a rigid genre classification. Not everyone will agree that David is an epic hero comparable to Odysseus or that the cluster of variants gathered around the figure of Gilgamesh constitute one coherent epic. Nevertheless, the notion of an "epic voice" proves convincing. All these texts

deal with the great themes of life and death and the quest for understanding and certainty in a world of so much darkness and chaos. All of them are also texts that simultaneously represent and shape essential values in Gilgamesh's love for Enkidu, David's guilt, the cunning of Odysseus, the adaptability of Vishnu, and Cú Chulainn's loyalty to kin.

Taking the book beyond the usual limits of scholarly monographs are the pedagogical features. Maps situate the texts geographically and spatially. Short time lines do the same historically and temporally. The selected bibliographies and suggestions for discussion and further individual or group investigation take up the momentum of curiosity and draw readers into personal engagement with the texts.

Are the texts under consideration fictions? Just how and where the boundaries are crossed in the declension of epics from myth to history and then to fiction are difficult issues. These are intricately organized narratives that had immense influence on the invention of fiction, even if their authors might have meant them to be read literally or as repositories of wisdom. What all five essays demonstrate is that the devices of fictional narration are as old as writing itself.

Since few people have the skills and training to be authorities on all five of these texts, there will be something new for everyone. But the contributors have not limited themselves to summarizing familiar interpretations. The application of sophisticated structural and narratological analyses opens up exciting new vistas in every case. Even the relatively familiar story of David is reinvigorated by Robert Alter's close reading of its rhetorical moves. Not least, each of the contributors succeeds in making even the most alien elements of these masterpieces familiar to us so that we might grasp them as part of a shared world literature.

Daragh Carville, ed.

*New Soundings: An Anthology of New Writing from the North of Ireland*

Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2003. Pp. 190. £8.99

Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 2004. Pp. 190. \$19.95

Reviewed by C. J. Ganter

As editor Daragh Carville points out in his introduction, this collection differs from the original *Soundings* anthologies edited in the 1970s in that it focuses on writing from the northern part of Ireland and features emerging writers from Northern Irish, English, and even Australian backgrounds, who are succinctly characterized as "offcomers" and "blowins" (xi). This nomenclature reflects the transient nature of what *New Writing from the North of Ireland* means