women in lay society. That would have given Marta great pleasure.

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The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing: A Study in Narrative Technique. Katherine Fishburn. *Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985, Pp. 184.*.

Although Katherine Fishburn's study of the narrative technique developed by Doris Lessing in her novels of science fiction was first published in 1985, this work has received remarkably little attention in the standard academic publications of book reviews and notices. As far as I have been able to ascertain, only *Studies in the Novel* provided space for a full review by Betsy Draine (see fall 1986, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 322-326). In her own book length study, *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) Draine demonstrates both her knowledge and understanding of the importance of Doris Lessing's work, and her competence to judge Fishburn's study. She concludes in her review that "Katherine Fishburn's *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing: A Study in Narrative Technique* lives up to its title admirably.... [Fishburn] has produced a critical study as valuable for its insights into Lessing's individual works as it is useful for its contributions to literary theory" (p. 326).

On the negative side, two brief book notices appeared. R.J. Cirasa in *Choice* (see September 1986, p. 20) contends that not only is Fishburn's critical judgement at fault in attempting to show in Lessing's narrative techniques a significance where none exists, but also, by implication, Lessing's overall prose style in her science fiction is lacking in value. According to Cirasa, had Fishburn compared Lessing to "Conrad or any number of Lessing's contemporaries both in and out of science fiction," she might have seen the error in her literary theory. While gratuitously acknowledging the importance of Doris Lessing as a writer, Cirasa finds nothing in Fishburn's study which confirms that importance. Judging the book to be nothing more than a "standard thematic explication," Cirasa concludes that Fishburn's failures to follow a standard comparative critical methodology, and to write in an equally standard approved prose style renders the book "unrewarding" (p. 20). Cirasa's brief but damning book notice demonstrates a limited notion of what are the appropriate forms and functions of literary criticism. The tone is reminiscent of that patriarchal academic arrogance which, while priding itself on scholarly "objectivity," nevertheless condemns what it does not understand or what cannot be made to fit a neatly prescribed critical criterion. Cirasa's article reflects the outmoded attitudes of establishment critics who rarely, if ever, open themselves to an awareness of new and different critical perspectives. Like the "officials" in Lessing's science fiction, Cirasa gives us the final word—"Not recommended!"

The only other book notice appeared in the *Science Fiction Chronicle* (see August 1986, p. 47). While dismissing Lessing's science fiction as of little interest to those in the field, this notice does acknowledge some merit in Fishburn's attempt to analyze Lessing's "four volume series of science fiction." Suggesting that the study will be of no interest "to those who have not read the novels," this reviewer seems not to have read either Lessing's novel nor Fishburn's book; for reference is made to Lessing's four volume series of science fiction (p. 47). In fact, the Canopus in Argos series consists of five volumes: *Re: Colonised Plant 5, Shikasta* (1979), *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980), *The Sirian Experiments* (1981), *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982), *The Sentimental Agents* (1983); and further, Fishburn justifies as belonging to the genre of science fiction the two earlier novels, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974). Fishburn carefully analyzes in detail seven of Lessing's novels while indicating throughout her study those elements of science fiction appearing in *The Four-Gated City* and other earlier works.

Because Katherine Fishburn's comprehensive study has been so ill-served by the standard reviewing process, it seems important to try again—two [or three] years after its publication date—to give this book the attention it deserves. In order to get an accurate assessment of critical works dealing with any aspects of Doris Lessing's fiction, one must turn to those critics who are prepared to suspend final judgement and who are also aware of different critical perspectives and of the growing body of feminist criticism. Lessing's purpose, after all, is nothing short of a total transformation of the world. It is not surprising, then, that those academics and critics committed to protecting and supporting our traditional literary institutions have great difficulty in understanding and accepting the validity of Lessing's polemic novels. Betsy Draine is a critic who represents a new and different perspective. In her review in *Studies in the Novel*, she assesses many of the critical works cited by Katherine Fishburn, and she effectively shows that Fishburn, too, by virtue of her scholarly background, her experience in science fiction, and her

unique visionary perspective, is an ideal critic to give us new insights into the novels of Doris Lessing.

In *The Golden Notebook*, in *Small Personal Voice*, and in her many interviews and talks, Doris Lessing describes the process of criticism which was based largely on comparison as a "pernicious system." She warns readers, academics and critics not to compare or try to impose literary theory, systems, structures, themes, patterns or purposes on her works. Each novel must have a meaning of its own, and readers must test what has been written against the individual experience of their own lives. On the surface, then, it might appear that Katherine Fishburn and other critics have ignored all of Lessing's advice. Fishburn deals with the novels sequentially; she explicates the texts; she acknowledges and enhances our understanding of many of the labels renounced by Lessing such as Marxist, Sufist, feminist, or physicist; and finally, she traces a developing complex narrative technique in the science fiction novels.

While she engages in many linear-thinking practices, Fishburn does not really violate Lessing's injunctions. Like Betsy Draine and Jenny Taylor before her, from whose studies she quotes, Fishburn reminds us in her introduction and throughout subsequent chapters that Lessing's intent is to shatter our paradigms. Fishburn, then, as critic, is not attempting to replace those broken systems with "new certainties or new paradigms" (p. 12). Rather, her purpose is to challenge readers to reach new levels of understanding and to enable them to experience the extra-ordinary more fully. Her ultimate concern, then, is with process rather than end result which must be left as the interaction between reader and novel.

Process is a complex matter, but by concentrating on process, Fishburn is in conformity with Doris Lessing's concern about the sacred relationship between the reader and the novel. Fishburn's study of the different narrators in the series enriches the dialectic between the text and the reader and further enhances the reader's potential to respond subjectively to those new Lessing realities which can be ascertained and experienced only in the deepest recesses of the human mind. Since Lessing herself indicates in *Shikasta*, that this is the first volume of a series, it is understandable that readers and critics would fall into the trap of perceiving progression where none exists. Fishburn does not make that mistake. She recognizes that Lessing's universe does unfold unexpectedly, and her careful analysis of Lessing's narrative technique becomes the key to understanding that new universe.

Fishburn's theory is contained in her use of the term "guide-leader." In each novel different characters serve to guide the reader, and it is the task of the reader to determine the authenticity of these narrators. Fishburn, as a critic, becomes a kind of external guide-leader for the novels. Careful scrutiny of her narrative theory makes clear that Lessing in her fiction, and Fishburn in her criticism can be perceived as the penultimate. The task of being the ultimate guide-leader must be entrusted to the reader alone; for it is the reader who experiences the new reality, and who becomes the true "envoy" from the new universe.

Before readers can become ultimate guide-leaders leading to their new role as envoys, they must experience what Fishburn calls the "de-familiarization" process; *i.e.*, "recognition" must become "re-cognition." Only as readers engage in this process can they understand, again in Fishburn's term, the "eye/I" experience. That is, they must see with a new eye and feel as a new I. Only then can the extra-ordinary be experienced. The process of reader engagement with the text makes it possible to transcend all the rhetoric of current systems limiting and sustaining our present realities. Science fiction is the perfect vehicle for Lessing because her universe, while rooted in quantum physics, demands visionary powers. To understand it, readers of necessity must go beyond "one-dimensional" limitations.

Katherine Fishburn has given us an overview of Lessing's novels that, I think, Lessing herself would approve. Her book helps us comprehend the breadth and complexity of Lessing's thought and vision. This understanding comes from Fishburn's own willingness to master those aspects of Lessing's thought which many readers resist. The "Bibliographical Essay" at the end of this slim volume, and the excellent introduction, "Transforming the World" with its many references to authorities in science, history, sociology, etc., are in themselves major contributions to a growing awareness of the fact that Lessing's science fiction will eventually be ranked among the most important novels written in the twentieth century. Taken as a whole, this book on *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing* is to be recommended both to Lessing scholars and lay readers alike. As Lessing broke new ground with her science fiction, Fishburn breaks the mould in literary criticism.

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