

Jones. Only in an historian's summarizing of literary plots could they come to seem alike.

In fact, Brooke's achievements are more interesting in outline than in McMullen's telling of them. McMullen's prose is not heavy-footed, but neither is it provocative. Understandably caught up in the sheer amount of pioneering research that her subject has required, McMullen tends to allow banal detail to overwhelm her narrative. The subject is a good one but could have been bettered by leaving some of its hard won details out. Yet at times—most jarringly in the way the deaths of Brooke and her husband casually turn up amid reviews of one of Brooke's plays—details seem to desert McMullen's prose. Between these two extremes Brooke never quite comes to life. Her career is felt to be of interest but not interesting.

It may simply be that McMullen is more of a literary historian than a biographer: "In reconstructing Frances Brooke's life and work, we reconstruct the literary world of her time." (219) McMullen's preface and conclusion thus show a clearly thought-out notion of what is being attempted by retelling the life of Frances Brooke. Perhaps it was a life and world without much passion—so this history would seem to imply. But it is curious that the works themselves tell us otherwise.

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The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer. Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen. Mary Poovey. *Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Pp. xxii, 287, cloth (Series: Women in Culture and Society);*

Fantasy and Reconciliation. Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction. Kay Mus-sell. *Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984. Pp. xix, 217, cloth (Series: Contributions in Women's Studies, No. 46);*

Insatiable Appetites. Twentieth-Century American Women's Bestsellers. Madonne M. Miner. *Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984. Pp. 158, cloth (Series: Contributions in Women's Studies, No. 48);*

Women Writers in Translation. An Annotated Bibliography. Margery Resnick and Isabelle de Courtivron. *New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. Pp. ix, 272, cloth (Series: Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 228).*

Traditional criticism's systematic derogation of women's writing, and in the particular context of the works reviewed here, of women's fiction especially, is of paramount importance in any discussion of feminist criticism, and it is therefore gratifying to find three studies which, in their own ways, take on the problem. In this respect, however, despite its claim to be a work of feminist criticism, Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* is critically the most conventional in its approach. Poovey's detailed examination of the works of Wollstonecraft, Shelley, and Austen in the light of their social and personal contexts, while interesting in itself, adds little that is new to the understanding of each writer. The strength of this study lies more in its general ideological thesis, of which the three writers are on the whole convincing examples. Poovey's identification of "the discrepancy between the promises of bourgeois ideology and the satisfactions that life in bourgeois society actually yields" is not at all surprising, but her further conclusion that "in the early nineteenth century this most general of all contradictions was experienced in an intense form by women and, particularly, by women writers" is amply justified not merely by her general discussion but also by the large number of specific

examples she finds in the works of the three writers. For this reason, the study deserves attention as a work of literary-sociological criticism, demonstrating as it does the profound, and often detrimental, effect of a bourgeois social ideology on the lives and achievements of individuals.

The weakest part of *The Proper Lady* is probably its examination of Jane Austen, and the weakness is most apparent in the decision not to subject *Emma* (along with the relatively minor *Northanger Abbey*, *The Watsons*, and *Sanditon*) to the detailed analysis accorded the other major novels on the grounds that "the aesthetic solutions [Austen] achieved in her other novels adequately represent her artistic accomplishment." One suspects rather, in view of *Emma's* personality and the way in which she resolves her particular problems, that an examination of this novel might tend to limit, if not undermine, the feminist thesis, at least as far as Jane Austen is concerned. But this is a small weakness in a study which is otherwise creditable.

Proceeding from much the same ideological assumptions as Poovey, but at a more superficial level, Kay Mussell in *Fantasy and Reconciliation* attempts an analysis of the formulas of women's romance fiction. The subject itself is of great interest and the factual information provided, along with much of the analysis, is invaluable. However, while identifying the male point of view clearly enough, Mussell nevertheless shows a tendency to accept its validity without question. The problem of literary merit, or the lack of it, is almost completely avoided. In addition, the references to history are particularly revealing. For while acknowledging that the "concerns of the professional historian" represent "a view of the past dominated by male values," she still asserts that history as it is presented in romance fiction "provides a partisan and limited vision of the past" and, even more generally, that historical romances give "simplified versions of historical events as seen through the prism of women's lives," thus not merely ignoring the proper func-

tion of historical fiction but also conceding to the male point of view the very superiority it claims for itself. The effect of this bias is to throw doubt upon some of Mussell's conclusions, a doubt which unfortunately leads to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the work as a whole.

The third work, *Insatiable Appetites*, Madonne M. Miner's study of twentieth-century American women's bestsellers, is more rigorous and positive, yet again not altogether satisfactory. Like Mussell, Miner does not claim any particular literary merit for the novels included in her study: *Gone with the Wind*, *Forever Amber*, *Peyton Place*, *Valley of the Dolls*, and *Scruples*, but devotes herself rather to an analysis of their phenomenal commercial success, in order to identify common features which might account for it. Miner's detection of themes and metaphors which reflect the frustrations of women in American society but which are not usually associated with either romance or mainstream fiction is clearly important, especially in the light of Poovey's analysis of early nineteenth-century British writing. Yet Miner's attitude, although somewhat different from Mussell's, remains superficial, obstructing the analysis. Her central image, found throughout the work, not merely in the title, is at best flippant. At worst, it suggests that the writers and readers of these novels have no concerns more important than an obsession with food, a particularly damaging analogy given the usual connotations of such an obsession in a female context. Valuable as this study is, it might have been even more valuable had its author been prepared to treat the subject more seriously.

As the editors of *Women Writers in Translation* point out, the bibliography of women's writing is most inadequate, generally hindering the study of writers and their works, but in the case of non-English writers, this inadequacy is so great that it virtually prevents study altogether for all but the most assiduous and linguistically able students. The volume under review is

the beginning of an attempt to supply the deficiency, covering (notwithstanding the comprehensive title) writers in a relatively small number of languages: Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Resulting from a 1978 MLA project, this biography is altogether laudable in its aims, but in actuality is even more limited than the list of languages suggests. For it is selective, omitting not merely whole countries, but also, and it seems arbitrarily, certain writers from the countries which are included. Granted the monumental nature of the task as first planned, the reason for these omissions given by the editors—the need “to rely on the interest and availability of scholars in the fields represented in the original MLA project”—still seems anomalous in a scholarly work. In addition, since the bibliography also omits all anthologies, several well-known writers whose work appears in English only in such collections have been left out.

The annotations are useful, especially those which provide information on the quality and nature of the translations themselves, but they do not make up for the other lacks. As an introduction to women writers in the languages and countries represented, this bibliography has an obvious value, but it should not in any way be regarded as definitive.

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What Is To Be Done? Mavis Gallant. *Dunvegan, Ontario: Quadrant Editions, 1983. Pp.110.*

Mavis Gallant's first play depicts a milieu familiar to readers of her short stories—the world of a young woman maturing in war-time Montreal. Gallant's memories of Montreal in the 1940's honed to sharp clarity by 40 years separation from her native land, enable her to recreate compelling historical pictures of the era that fascinate the reader, pictures made more

vivid by her assurity in producing the exact word or turn of phrase to set the situation, by her acuity of observation, and by her sophisticated wit. Her fine ear for Canadian dialogue, her observations on Canadian society and her attunement to the Canadian sense of humour place Gallant firmly among the finest English Canadian writers. *What Is To Be Done* is a continual delight to its reader.

In ten scenes *What Is To Be Done* delineates the experiences of two Canadian women between August 1942 and 8 May 1945: Jenny, at eighteen, still romantic and idealistic, and Molly disillusioned at twenty, with an unwanted child and a husband overseas. The girls are receiving Stalinist instruction as the play begins from an ex-Glaswegian Marxist against the staccato counterpoint of radio bursts. Jenny's only weapon against boredom and frustration is a series of evening courses—"I took Russian last winter... thirty-seven hours. We learned poetry. Well, one poem." Now she takes Strategic Journalism on three nights and Botany, Ethnology, Popular Superstitions, Moths and Butterflies of the British Isles, Book Binding and Illumination to fill the rest of the week. She signs up for the courses because "There's nothing else to do at night." On the advice of her Strategic Journalism course instructor, Jenny phones possible items to her paper's editor throughout the play because she wants to get out of the Department of Appraisements and Averages and to be a real journalist. Naively she has fixed her eyes to the top and believes that after the war she will reach her pinnacle. "After victory we'll have whatever we require in the most simple and natural way. "Street-smart and cynical, Molly knows that victory will bring boredom and frustration home to her. In his letters her husband reminds her she is only holding his job until his return. "My money." She complains, "He wants to know how I'm spending my money. Money I make."

At the end both girls know "Tomorrow we will have to change everything. The words we say.