

Sandra Pouchet Paquet. *The Novels of George Lamming*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1983)130 pp., \$10.00.

There has been a steady stream of literary output from the Caribbean, much of which has been published first in England, and only later in the U.S. Although such fine writers as V.S. Naipaul, Edgar Mittelholzer, and George Lamming have produced noteworthy novels, relatively little criticism has been written. Therefore, these authors have all too frequently been overlooked in university offerings. That is not to say they have been totally disregarded, but that they have not been given the attention they deserve. For this reason, Sandra Pouchet Paquet's book of criticism *The Novels of George Lamming* as the first of its kind is not only appropriate but long overdue.

Offering an introduction and conclusion in which she makes general comments about Lamming and some comparisons with other Caribbean writers, Paquet concentrates on exegeses of George Lamming's six novels: *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953); *The Emigrants* (1954); *Of Age and Innocence* (1958); *Season of Adventure* (1960); *Water with Berries* (1971); and *Natives of My Person* (1972). The extent of her scholarship is noted by the quantity and quality of notes she offers with each chapter and the excellent bibliography. Reading her criticism, one cannot help but feel the commitment of the author. Her writing on Lamming exemplifies Mario Casello's comments on Cervantes' *Don Quixote*:

True criticism is that alone which rests on interpretation. And in fact, only then, through aesthetic feeling, does the critic succeed in identifying himself with the object he knows and in reliving its poetic reason in order then to come back to *otherness* and distinction, without which it is not possible to give a value judgment.¹

Having entered fully into the poetic reason, Paquet interprets and explicates Lamming's novels. Although she occasionally offers a value judgment, her primary concern lies in revealing meaning and the art through which meaning is achieved.

Not only does she understand Lamming's intent but she refers often to his own comments about a particular work. In her introduction, she explains that the colonial experience provides the material for all his writings, that "there is no separation of the business of politics and private life." Paquet maintains:

He writes out of an acute social consciousness that is vitally concerned with politics and society, that is, with the function of power in a given society, and its effects on the moral, social, cultural, and even aesthetic values of the people in that society (1).

Lamming's sense of mission and his acceptance of the writer's responsibility to explore the influence of history on the lives of humans provide focus for Paquet's work as she demonstrates how he fulfills his "destiny."

Undertaking Lamming's novels as political acts, she sees, as Lamming had suggested, that each novel explores a "stage in or aspect of the colonial experience." Treating each novel in a separate chapter, she provides her own subtitles which explain significantly the particular aspect of the "colonial experience" being considered: *In the Castle of My Skin*: In Preparation for a New Beginning; *The Emigrants*: A Certain Kind of Death; *Of Age and Innocence*: Colonial Revolt; *Season of Adventure*: The Revolt of the Dreams; *Water with Berries*: Caliban in Albion; and *Natives of My Person*: The European Middle Passage. In every case, the subtitle succinctly captures the essence of the novel. In addition she finds, with reason I believe, that the first four novels are so coordinated as to form a work of epic proportion. Her treatment of the last two novels as allegory is less convincing. She contends that these are political allegory analogous to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; however, allegory demands constancy in the fixing of symbolic value. Paquet identifies the theme of each novel in accordance with Lamming's concerns: "the drama of redemption, of returning, of cleansing for a commitment towards the future."

While Paquet devotes some time to plot and character development along with elements of style in each novel, her real contribution to Lammingian criticism is the symbolic interpretation she assigns to characters, to events, to language. Finding that style reinforces her symbolic readings, she defends Lamming's use of dialect as appropriate and necessary to content. For the most part her argument holds, although occasionally she stretches too far. In her reviews she does construct the continuum of the epic she believes the first four novels form by revealing the undergirdings which link the works. In her explication of symbolic meanings she gives to the laity a most valuable accompaniment to the novels.

Finally, in this, the first book-length critical review of Lamming's novels, Paquet has published a seminal work. Beyond doubt Lamming is one of the most important of the contemporary Caribbean writers. Perhaps he insists too much on colonialism and the political act as a focus, yet his artistic accomplishment cannot be denied. The further research she suggests and the fine bibliography she provides should encourage further Lammingian research.

—LaVerne González
San Jose State University

Note

¹Mario Casella. "Critical Realism." *Cervantes Across the Centuries*. Angel Flores and M.J. Benardete, eds. (New York: The Dryden Press, 1947) 214.

The People of the 'Ksan. *Gathering What the Great Nature Provided: Food Traditions of the Gitskan.* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980) 127 pp., \$19.95.

Gathering What the Great Nature Provided is a book about the Gitskan Indian tribe in North Central British Columbia living on the banks of the Skenna River. The book resulted from a project by ninety members of the tribe whose purpose was to document their past for themselves and future generations. This collective authorship shows the commitment and dedication of the people to the goal. Elders were questioned and memories strained to remember the distant past. Their culture is conveyed in a rich oral tradition. The writing was difficult and tedious, accomplished by long hours of interviewing and transcription of taped conversations. Material was first written into the native language and then translated into English, with the final writing done by consensus.

The book is divided into sections on cooking methods and tools, preserving and food preparation, cooking hints, and specific foods consumed. Included among the text are photographs of women performing various skills and beautiful sketches showing cooking techniques and food items. The senior cooks cook by visual memory of what they have seen their elders do and by their own cooking sense gained through long experience. Difficulty thus arose in attempting to write down recipes but, despite this difficulty, a few recipes are provided in the closing chapter.

Throughout the description of food gathering and preserving, the cultural importance of food is emphasized. Food etiquette and the role of food in religion, celebration and play are all briefly discussed. Food has a curative role in the healing of certain illnesses and is symbolic in many ways. Berries are associated with blood in the preparation for war. The arrival of the first salmon each spring triggers a special ceremony, a ceremony of gratitude. There is a feast for almost every occasion and there is humor in the retelling of stories about the mythical food thief Weget. Refusing a neighbor's kind offer of food is not acceptable. Uneaten food is simply packed in a container and taken home without noisy thank yous.