
Pro Rege

Volume 8 | Number 3

Article 6

March 1980

Gypsies (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Vanden Bosch, James (1980) "Gypsies (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 8:

No. 3, 36 - 37.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol8/iss3/6

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Gypsies, by Cynthia Nibbelink. University Center, Michigan: Green River Press, 1978. 141 pp. Reviewed by James Vanden Bosch, Assistant Professor of English.

This 141-page book is actually two books: *Gypsies*, the title collection of poems, and *Animals*, which was originally published in 1975. Although each collection has its own integrity, there are themes which they share, and it is that set of common themes which gives the poems what interest they have for me.

By this I do not mean to say that the individual poems are of little interest. On my first reading of the poems, it was their variety that struck me: love poems, in several voices and tones; chants or incantations; and jazz-like poems, both celebrative and meditative. However, not all of the poems are strong. Nibbelink writes in open form, freed from the traditional restrictions of regular line length, rhyme, and stanza forms. Many lines and stanzas exist within a logic of their own, which is to say that it is often difficult to discover just what that logic is. Furthermore, there is a tendency toward sentimentality and self-pity in many poems, two related features which can be fatal to the success of lines, poems, and themes. Nor has

Nibbelink always managed to get beyond the conventional images and techniques of juxtaposition that go with her sometimes phantasmagoric or visionary program. But constantly we do hear the sound of a person speaking, and it is this personal voice which unites the poems, especially because this one speaker, the poet, so regularly finds herself approaching familiar territory.

This familiar territory is perhaps best described as that of the family. Nibbelink's poetry circles this area; it approaches it indirectly, never fully or directly addressing the subject. There is an ambivalence here, suggested by the tension between the title of the book, with all of its suggestions of mystery, adventure, rootlessness, and escape, and the book's dedication, which is to the poet's father. It is this tension which generates the set of themes that I mentioned earlier.

The reminiscences of childhood make up a part of the rhythm of these poems; these scenes are used to analyze the promises and difficulties

of childhood, particularly as these promises and difficulties are part of the family setting. We are shown the relative innocence of children, and the adventurousness of adolescence. We see parents who had to lead and guide, and who wounded and were wounded in the process. The poet-speaker is caught between these two stages of the freedom and promise of childhood and the obligations and restrictions of adult responsibility. Typically we hear a young woman speaking and thinking, sharing her experience of things. She can no longer be the observing child, nor is she completely ready to take on the full burden of social and familial commitments. She remains at that stage of development which is devoted to the pursuit of romantic love, which, with all of its own hopes and disappointments, seems to her to be a more comfortable place to live.

Consequently, in much of this poetry we hear the voice of a woman who is alone (not necessarily lonely) and taking stock of the resources available to her. These resources include love, imagination, memory, desire, dreams, the past, and her own resilience, but her greatest source of strength is her confidence in the rightness of her own history. She has a large faith that her actions,

her desires, her motives are *right*, that they need not be put under the pressure of critical scrutiny. She does not normally cross-examine herself; she is capable of occasional keen descriptions of the tone or feeling of an event, but she stops short of doubting the adequacy or propriety of her responses. What is doubted is the faithfulness of other people, or the reliability of history itself. Whenever felicity is described, it is the felicity of another time and place, not here and not now. The present seems to be largely a place of deception and disappointment.

The stage of personal development I am describing is a crucial one; there are great temptations to stay there, and not to move on. But Nibbelink's present reluctance to take on larger commitments is not a spirited refusal, if it is a refusal at all. She, or her poetic speaker, displays a kind of caginess, a cautiousness, which gives due regard to the seriousness of the choices she faces. Nibbelink seems to be ready to face seriously the challenges of this stage of personal development; there is a necessary next step, if she is to move forward in her poetic development. The style and substance of this book give us some reason to hope for such growth in future work.

The Dutch Revolt by Geoffrey Parker. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 1977. 327 pages, no price given. Reviewed by McKendree R. Langley, Associate Professor, Abraham Kuyper Chair, Lectureship Center.

The rise of the Dutch Republic in the sixteenth century is one of the main events in the development of the Western world especially for Northern Europe, Great Britain and North America. Some of the finest historians of various perspectives, including Groen van Prinsterer, John Lothrop Motley and Pieter Geyl, have attempted to evaluate the genesis of the modern Netherlandic state. Geoffrey Parker, Lecturer in Modern History at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, was aware of his illustrious predecessors, yet he felt compelled to make his own contribution to the subject. The result has been an important one-volume survey of the genesis of the Protestant nation of the Netherlands. Mr. Parker is a tireless worker, having conducted archival research in Madrid, Brussels, Lille, Valladolid, The Hague, the Vatican, London, Besancon, Utrecht, Louvain, Paris and Vienna. He

has also mastered a mountain of published historical materials, both primary and secondary sources, in a number of languages. Understanding both the Spanish and Dutch sides of the conflict has been one of his main concerns. From his British perspective Parker has tried to present both the concern of King Philip II of Spain to maintain the Catholic integrity of his Lowland possessions and the determination of Prince William of Orange to create an independent Protestant Netherlandic state. Emphasis is put upon the interplay of nationalistic, dynastic, economic, geographical, military, aristocratic and religious factors.

The main emphasis of the book is the thesis that the Dutch revolt was actually comprised of three separate revolutions which occurred in 1565-1568, 1569-1576 and 1576-1581. The first revolution