

Chinese Studies at Leeds University, has also written a perceptive introduction on the current state of Chinese literature, and his biographical sketch of the writer that precedes each story is most useful to the general reader.

Swan P. Chong

**ROBERT and ROCHELLE
BONAZZI, ED.**

New Departures in Fiction:

Making a Break

Austin: Latitudes Press, 1975.

Pp. 243. \$4.50.

New Departures in Fiction is a collection of short stories, literary sketches, genre pictures, and fragmentary narratives by eleven contemporary American writers. Most of these works are of an experimental nature, but a few are neither modernistic, nor original in any way.

Among the pieces written by Brian Swann one finds purely lyrical sketches ("Stumbling," "Epiphanies") as well as abstract and extremely subjective ones ("Senario for a Farce," "Garden of Adonis"). In spite of the elegiac tone of his writings, Brian Swann is at times witty, ironic, and even grotesque. His "Home" is a poetic description of a hate-love relationship which ties a young man to his parents' home and brings him back to visit them in spite of a depressing paralysis of communication. This short story testifies to the author's superb narrative talents.

Charles Baxter's "Verdi in America" is an original story marked by a pleasant style and a great sense of humor. Verdi's imaginary trip to America, his stay with Dvorak at Spillville, Iowa, and his working on an American opera entitled "Wilderness," are depicted with wit and ingenuity.

From a narrative point of view, Henry H. Roth is undoubtedly a very talented storyteller. His "Cruz" stories ("Jose," "Rapping with Felicia," and "Victor's Damn Luck") depict the hopes, dreams, and adventures of three Puerto Rican brothers, and reflect—in a neorealistic manner—the tragicomic aspects of life in the slums. If it were not for the excessive use of obscene language, especially in the second story, these three episodes would have been remarkable.

In his four stories, especially in "The New Era" and "Making a break," Stephen Dixon clearly demonstrates his craftsmanship as a narrative writer; he is original, witty, and entertaining.

Among the not-very-impressive authors one finds Gomer Rees. His short pieces are unpoetic poems in prose; they add nothing new, inspiring, or controversial. Nina Khiney's "Two Tales" are mere *Fingerübungen* (the kind of music you play on the piano till someone finds your missing music book). Marvin Cohen's experimental sketches are parabolic ("The Transforming . . ."), surrealistic ("Pursued Like a Criminal"), and at times extremely abstract ("Hiding . . ."). He is too intellectual (read: overly serious) to be entertaining or even amusing. Elizabeth Tingon's "An Island" is a harmless little thing; it has nothing to offer, neither in content nor form.

Aside from the fact that some aspects of these "new departures" do not appeal to us, one has to admit that this collection includes a considerable number of highly rewarding pieces. Readers and writers interested in modernistic and experimental fiction would appreciate this collection. No doubt that soliciting, reading (sometimes deciphering), and selecting these untraditional and antitraditional writings is a very toilsome and expensive venture which requires taste, patience, and intrepidity. Robert and Rochelle Bonazzi (as well as Latitude Press) should be commended on this valuable collection.

S. Elkhadem

BIBHUTIBHUSHAN BANERJI
Pather Panchali: Song of the Road
Translated from Bengali by T. W. Clark and Tarapada Mukherji,
Bloomington: Indiana University
Press, 1975. Pp. 316. \$3.95.

To evoke sympathy untainted with patronizing condescension, to project peasant life without any romantic aura, to portray the innocence and wonder of childhood without overlooking children's many venial sins—these are the qualities that have made Bibhutibhushan Banerji's *Pather Panchali* one of the great novels of this century, and brought world recognition to Satyajit Ray, who produced and directed a film version of it. The essentially

universal nature of childhood is shown against the backdrop of a particular time and place—a village in Bengal at the turn of the century.

Pather Panchali (*Song of the Road*) takes Opu and his older sister, Durga, through various childhood experiences along the road. The road ends for Durga in her teens and takes a decisive turn for Opu as he and his parents board the train for Banaras. Plot and characterization, important components in the western mode of fiction, are subservient in the Indian narrative mode, which is essentially episodic. But they come naturally to a story well told. What we see is not the consistency of conscious craftsmanship but the consistency that comes from a realistic delineation of life. Thus, Shorbojya who is shown so movingly as a grass widow waiting for her wandering husband is also an unkind woman lashing abuses on a poor relative; Durga, like her divine namesake, is Mother; vivacious, and compassionate, but she is also a rooking girl who would steal not only fruit but also jewellery; the neighbors are malicious gossips but also willing helpers in times of need. The richly episodic structure gives an insight into numerous aspects of life, for example, Opu running away from the clutches of the village "witch," Opu listening open-mouthed to stories from the Mahabharata, as well as Opu's impractical Brahmin father going to the city in search of a job, his mother, half starved and destitute, sustained by the hope so typical of mothers, that her son would one day become the provider for a flourishing family.

The translators have done admirably, considering the intricacies of translating Bengali idioms, and bridging the cultural gap in comprehension with interpolations that have to be welded into the narrative. As with all translations, opinions will differ on these issues of interpolations and interpretations, but this version adds another question in that all translators to date have ended the novel at a point earlier than the author's because, in the words of the translator's Introduction, "what follows, if the reader goes on with it, is something of an anticlimax."

This translation first appeared in 1968. It now appears in an edition obviously designed for classroom use for it comes with a critical introduction and an extensive index that includes a glossary of terms.

Uma Parameswaran

NATSUME SÔSEKI
Grass on the Wayside (Michikusa)
Translated from the Japanese
by Edwin McClellan

2nd ed. London: University of Chicago Press, 1974. Pp. XII, 169.

Sôseki was born in Tokyo to a father who was 53, and to a mother who was 40 years old. His parents had had other children before. They did not feel like looking after yet another baby: Natsume was given away to a childless couple. His foster parents' marriage broke down when Natsume was eight or nine years old, and the boy was returned to his original parents—who were by no means enthusiastic about the homecoming of their prodigal son. Later, Sôseki took a degree in English literature at the University of Tokyo (1893) and married the daughter of a high official (1896). He taught at the college level from 1896 to 1900 and from 1903 to 1907. The years in between he spent in England—on a fellowship. After 1907 he devoted his full time to writing; he died in 1916.

Grass on the Wayside is Sôseki's only autobiographical novel and the last one he completed (1915). The action takes place in about 1904. Sôseki (called Kenzô in the novel) has returned from London, teaches English, and is disgusted with his life, his family, his relatives, and himself. His former foster father, now impoverished, appears and wants money. His former foster mother appeals to him—and gets money. His father-in-law has lost his position and his fortune and borrows money from Kenzô. Kenzô has to pay a monthly allowance to his sister. He is overworked, in bad health, but leeches appear from all sides, and his character and the habits and customs of society force him to accept financial responsibility for these people. The reader's sympathies are on the side of poor Kenzô, although the author tries, from time to time, to point out that he is a strange bird indeed—heartless, tactless, self-centered, a pure egotist (when there is an earthquake, he runs out of the house, and his wife has to evacuate the children all by herself. Kenzô is the product of an education without love—he ignores the feelings of his wife or his children as his parents had ignored the feelings of their youngest son.