

Does Drabble's three-volume saga impel us to consider the trilogy as a new artistic unit, rather than as three autonomous texts? Just as Drabble's postmodern playfulness in employing Trollopean authorial intrusions in recent novels appears a retrospective technique, so her trilogy may echo the three-volume novel of past centuries. Is Drabble's trilogy saga or soap opera, as some critics have claimed? Tune in next year when perhaps another sequel may render this trilogy a tetralogy.

Hans Robert Jauss

QUESTION AND ANSWER: FORMS OF DIALOGIC UNDERSTANDING

Edited, translated and with a foreword by Michael Hays

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. Pp. x + 283. \$16.95 & \$45.00

Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

The five essays of *Question and Answer* are drawn from a longer collection, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (1982), and much of the material appears here in English translation for the first time. *Question and Answer* is an amalgam of theoretical inquiry and practical criticism, with the opening and closing essays devoted to theory and the others to close critical readings.

The first essay contests the traditional separation of fiction and reality advanced, variously, by Plato, the Old Testament and its exegetes, and nineteenth-century historicism. In its stead, Jauss promotes the triadic model of Wolfgang Iser, his colleague at the University of Constance, that adds the category of the *imaginary* to the traditional reality-fiction binarism. The *imaginary* names the relationship between the real and the fictive that readers experience in textual appropriation. Over the last quarter-century, Jauss and other members of the "Constance School" have been developing theoretical refinements in the area of reception studies, and the notion of the imaginary marks a late stage in this process. (Iser's major work on theorizing the imaginary is in press in Germany and scheduled for English-language release by Johns Hopkins University Press in the near future.) Jauss goes on to demonstrate both the rhetorical biases of Ranke's purportedly "objective" historicism and the real-world referentiality of Hebbel's "unscientific," seemingly casual comments on historical events, and in so doing confirms the legitimacy of his interpretive model.

The practical implications of Jauss's conflation of the real and the fictive become apparent in the next three essays, where he considers the heuristic function of question-and-answer in textual interpretation. In analyses supported by both Bakhtin's variegated work on dialogicality and the privileging of open dialogue operating in *Truth and Method*, the magnum opus of his mentor Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jauss investigates the function of questions in a variety of Western canonical works, from Genesis to Rousseau and Goethe.

If there is a weakness in Jauss's approach, it lies not with the method itself but with the limits Jauss places on the scope of its application. Taken as a heuristic tool, the logic of question-making has two possible utilities. It can help one understand the horizon of expectations at play in a text that is normative for its contemporary readers. But it can also help us understand the horizon of expectations operating in the minds of subsequent reading communities, including our own. While Jauss has much to say about the reception of canonical works, he has little to say about *why* a given work remains today canonical (or, quite as importantly, uncanonical) for him or for anyone else.

Paradoxically, Jauss's hermeneutic sophistication and unusual erudition enable him to reconstruct convincingly the horizons of expectations of very diverse readerships, but they do not inspire him to deal critically with his own horizons. This inevitably leads one to wonder—perhaps unfairly—if Jauss does not in fact regard his own reception politics as somehow timeless and objective in the way Leopold von Ranke assumed his own historiography to be. Jauss's notion of "dialogic understanding"—a key topic of the summational final essay—can only enjoy internal consistency when it also involves dialogic *self-*understanding, when it engages fully the issue of historicity.

Question and Answer will serve English-language readers as a useful complement to two earlier Jauss essay collections brought out by the University of Minnesota Press, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) and *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982). These three texts demonstrate well the fecundity of Hans Robert Jauss's critical thought. A measure of this richness is clearly the broad and ongoing relevance his work has for late twentieth-century philosophical hermeneutics and particularly for the study of canon-formation, perhaps the preeminent issue in the postmodern period.

Olga Anastasia Pelensky

ISAK DINESEN: THE LIFE AND IMAGINATION OF A SEDUCER

Athens: Ohio University Press, 1991. Pp. 218

Reviewed by Thomas Whissen

At first glance, Olga Pelensky's *Isak Dinesen: The Life and Imagination of a Seducer* has all the earmarks of a very good book, one likely not only to attract new readers but to please old ones as well. In under two hundred pages it promises a capsule biography of Dinesen's extraordinary life, a survey of her artistic output, and a brief overview of the best of Dinesen scholarship. Unfortunately, it is a promise whose fulfillment is undermined by poor writing, injudicious research, and a gross distortion of the very figure it attempts to honor.

To begin with, the book reads like a bad translation: "The personality of Isak Dinesen's father [is] currently available in English" [xxiii]. "He was, in the