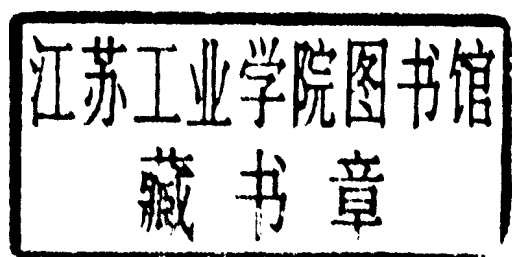


☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

134

Contemporary
Literary Criticism



Volume 134

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-46132
ISBN 0-7876-4623-7
ISSN 0091-3421
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

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Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Managing Editor:

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Hortense Calisher

1911-

(Also has written under pseudonym Jack Fenno) American short story writer, novelist, and memoirist.

The following entry presents an overview of Calisher's career through 1997. For further information on her life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 2, 4, 8, and 38.

INTRODUCTION

Calisher is a highly regarded and accomplished prose stylist whose subtle, textured use of language elucidates the complexities of human experience. Her writing, much of which is semi-autobiographical, is often compared to that of Henry James, Marcel Proust, and Edith Wharton. Calisher sees diversity as the defining element of the twentieth century, and her fiction reflects this belief. Although Calisher writes well-received novels, memoirs, and critical essays, her short fiction is generally regarded as her finest work, notably "In Greenwich There Are Many Graveled Walks" (1951) and the novellas in *The Railway Police*, and *the Last Trolley Ride* (1966). The four O. Henry awards presented to Calisher over the span of her career attest to her skill as a short story writer.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in New York City, Calisher grew up in a comfortable, middle-class Jewish home. Her father, born during the Civil War, was from Richmond, Virginia, and her mother, more than twenty years younger than her husband, was a German immigrant. The confluence of sensibilities arising from her multigenerational family—the South, New York City, Europe, and Judaism—inform much of her work. Calisher earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Barnard College in 1932. Upon graduation, she became a social worker for the Department of Public Welfare in New York City. In 1935 Calisher married Heaton Bennet Heffelfinger, with whom she shares two children. The marriage ended in divorce in 1958 and a year later Calisher married novelist Curtis Arthur Harnack. From 1957 to 1986 Calisher was a visiting professor and lecturer at various universities throughout the United States. She was president of PEN in 1986-87 and of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters from 1987 to 1990.

Calisher began her professional writing career in 1948 by publishing stories in the *New Yorker*, and soon garnered critical acclaim with the publication of her first collection



of short stories, *In the Absence of Angels* (1951). She was twice named a Guggenheim fellow, in 1951-52 and 1953-54. Calisher earned her first National Book Award nomination for the novel *False Entry* (1961). *The Collected Stories of Hortense Calisher* (1975) and Calisher's memoir, *Herself* (1972) were also nominated for the National Book Award. She was awarded the Kafka Prize at the University of Rochester for the novel *The Bobby-Soxer* (1986), and in 1989 received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

MAJOR WORKS

Calisher is known for her keen observations and ability to share them vividly through image, character, and lush, distinctive language. Her early autobiographical work, sometimes called the "Hester" stories, appeared between 1948 and 1953. These stories, published primarily in the *New Yorker* and various collections during these years, depict her protagonist Hester's coming of age. Calisher's first published story collection, *In the Absence of Angels*, in-

cludes the critically acclaimed "In Greenwich There Are Many Graveled Walks." The story contains trademark Calisher motifs and techniques—recognizable characters responding to a dark predicament not of their own making, revealed through rich prose in an intricate and carefully paced narrative. The novel *False Entry* draws partly on Calisher's southern roots and explores the life of a man with such a remarkable memory that he has assumed other people's identities through his knowledge of their past. In three months of writing about these experiences in his journal, he finally determines his own identity, permitting him genuine entry into the life of his beloved. His journal is written for Ruth Mannix, whose own story is told in *The New Yorkers* (1969), a novel admired for its realistic portrayal of New York City. The work evidences Calisher's skill in blending her knowledge of Jewish heritage, intimate familiarity with New York City, and psychological perception in her fiction. Following a pattern that continues to inform her work, Calisher subsequently alternated between short and long fiction, and published several volumes of both together. *Tale for the Mirror* contains a novella and twelve short stories, including "The Scream on Fifty-seventh Street," an exploration of fear and loneliness. *Extreme Magic* (1964), another volume of one novella and short stories, demonstrates a growth in Calisher's range. Two stories in particular illustrate her feminine voice: "Songs My Mother Taught Me" reveals both humor and sensuality, while "The Rabbi's Daughter" explores the feminine duality of worldly achievement coupled with inner dissatisfaction.

Completely dissimilar from her previous work, *Journal from Ellipsia* (1965) has been called both a work of science fiction and a work of feminism. In line with the central themes of Calisher's fiction, however, the novel explores what it means to be human, this time from the point of view of an alien creature. Moreover, the story involves a journey from the star Ellipsia to Earth; transportation serves as a recurring interest in Calisher's work, particularly its relation to American myth and public consciousness. In *Mysteries of Motion* (1983), another novel with a celestial theme, Calisher examines six human lives aboard a space shuttle. *The Railway Police*, and *The Last Trolley Ride*, two novellas published in a single volume, share the theme of a journey undertaken to promote both self-knowledge and perception of the world. The protagonist of *The Railway Police* experiences an epiphany when she witnesses the removal of an indifferent vagrant from a train. She interprets this as a sign for her to dispose of all her possessions, including the wigs that have long hidden her baldness from the world. Determined to reinvent who she is, she decides to strike out and become a vagrant herself. *The Last Trolley Ride* concerns two octogenarian grandfathers who decide to share one last adventure—a trip around the world. Calisher's memoir, *Herself*, describes her own journey from the world of suburban housewife and mother to the world of letters. In a second memoir, *Kissing Cousins* (1988), Calisher explores her Southern roots following a death in her family. In the novel *The Bobby-Soxer*, Calisher examines the dark provincialism of

small-town America and the ambiguity of identity, embodied in the narrator's hermaphroditic relative. In *Age* (1987), Calisher again employs the fictional vehicle of the journal, this time to shed light on the lives of an elderly couple. The brief, alternating entries, designed to be a defense against loneliness for the surviving spouse, reveal their reflections on life, relationships, and the prospect of living on after the death of the other. The novel *In the Palace of the Movie King* (1993) involves an Albania dissident filmmaker who escapes communist Albania only to encounter alienation and disillusionment in America. Calisher's *In the Slammer with Carol Smith* (1997), reveals the effect that involvement in a radical student movement has on a protagonist decades later. Calisher has also served as editor of *Best American Short Stories, 1981* (1981) and published a novel, *The Small Bang* (1992), under the pseudonym Jack Fenno.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Calisher is known as a "writer's writer" and an important voice in American fiction of the twentieth century, and critical response to her short stories is almost uniformly positive. Critics note that she dazzles readers with her sympathetic portrayal of everyday people, caught in moments of crisis, who attempt to exercise some control over their circumstances. Where her novels are concerned, however, response to her work is mixed. Critics have faulted her overwrought style, thinness of characterization, and lack of substantial plot. Reviewers disagree about the merits of *The New Yorkers*, acknowledged generally as one of her most important novels. A common contentious point among critics is the way Calisher uses language. Her short story style tends toward the terse and economical, in keeping with the genre, while her novels are far more exuberant in their expression. "Elliptical" is the word most frequently applied to her prose, and depending on the reviewer, it may mean either artful or ambiguous. Some reviewers insist that this technique reflects the complex, convoluted meanings explored in Calisher's fiction, while others simply view it as overwriting and a distraction.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- In the Absence of Angels* (short stories) 1951
- False Entry* (novel) 1961
- Tale for the Mirror: A Novella and Other Stories* (novella and short stories) 1962
- Textures of Life* (novel) 1963
- Extreme Magic: A Novella and Other Stories* (novella and short stories) 1964
- Journal from Ellipsia* (novel) 1965
- The Railway Police, and The Last Trolley Ride* (novellas) 1966
- The New Yorkers* (novel) 1969
- What Novels Are* (lecture) 1969

Queenie (novel) 1971
Herself: An Autobiographical Work (memoir) 1972
Standard Dreaming (novel) 1972
Eagle Eye (novel) 1973
The Collected Stories of Hortense Calisher (short stories) 1975
On Keeping Women (novel) 1977
Best American Short Stories, 1981 [editor; with Shannon Ravenel] (short stories) 1981
Mysteries of Motion (novel) 1983
Saratoga, Hot (short stories) 1985
The Bobby-Soxer (novel) 1986
Age (novel) 1987
Kissing Cousins: A Memory (memoir) 1988
The Small Bang [as Jack Fenno] (novel) 1992
In the Palace of the Movie King (novel) 1993
In the Slammer with Carol Smith (novel) 1997
The Novellas of Hortense Calisher (novellas) 1997

CRITICISM

Lucy Johnson (review date January 1962)

SOURCE: "High Polish," in *The Progressive*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January, 1962, pp. 49-50.

[In the following excerpt, Johnson offers praise for *False Entry*.]

Hortense Calisher's *False Entry* is an immensely accomplished and fascinating first novel, one that, through both its ornate style and the obsession of its major character and narrator, engulfs the reader in its world.

Hortense Calisher's narrator is a vicarious man, one who from earliest childhood has been a watcher and listener outside the inner circle of whatever group he has lived among. He has combined his longing to belong with a self-protective reluctance to give anything of himself to anyone, so that all relationships with others have been completely artificial on his side. In his forties this weakness has caused a crisis from which he seeks to extricate himself by writing a journal of his life as honestly as possible. This novel is that journal, the confession of a man "who for once wants his hand on the pulse of another's life-beat, would for once see a human effect of which he is the cause—or perhaps merely an outsider who can bear no longer to stand beyond the gate."

The son of a London seamstress who knows her place, he first wants to be a part of the rich, charming, close-knit Jewish family for whom she does most of her work. When he is ten, his mother takes him to Alabama where he finds another kind of closed community in which even the courthouse loafer has something of exclusive value—"the rested psyche of a man who from birth has had somebody handy

to despise." He learns here how to make a purposeful false entry into other lives, gathering in his memory bits and pieces of information that build up to a total picture of which he has no firsthand experience, but of which he may know more than those who do. The use he makes of his special knowledge of the life of the town, and particularly of the activities of the Ku Klux Klan there, is vengeful and has tragic results, the only time when he deliberately harms anyone but himself with his addiction. But the horror of his false testimony before a grand jury comes less from the KKK activities he describes than from his subordination of moral judgment on what has been done to his private need to say—See me. I can effect you. You will not reject me again.

All through his life, by using other people's memories of the past he backs into the present because he fears it. In his relations with his mother and his step-father, with women, with men, at college, at war, at work in New York—always the rhythm is one step forward, one step back as he constructs from his collections of odd facts a glass wall between himself and the world. The crisis that brings him to a reexamination of his life is his fear-filled attempt to make a true entry into another life in the present.

Whether you see *False Entry* as just an intellectual's In-and-Out book, or as a particularly American and personal version of existentialism, or as an answer to all of the novels of alienation and individual isolation that have dominated the mainstream of serious American fiction in recent years (and to my mind there are elements of all these present), the novel has fascinations that are often independent of the material. The style is involuted in a manner reminiscent of medieval decorative art. Arabesques of thought intertwine like Scandinavian woodcarvings and from their complexities emerge recognizable and fantastic shapes, presented with clarity and wit. And, in spite of as well as because of this density and decoration, there are moments of pathos and tenderness and there is drama of action and of the intellect. Although Miss Calisher's fine talents as a short story writer are in evidence throughout, this is not a typical story writer's first novel. Every part is so integrated with all the others that the whole is an original, rich, and unified design.

Robert Kiely (review date 25 May 1963)

SOURCE: "On the Subject of Love," in *The Nation*, May 25, 1963, pp. 447-8.

[In the following excerpt, Kiely commends Calisher's prose in *Textures of Life*, though finds fault in her generalizations about women.]

To read the newly published novels of Hortense Calisher and Iris Murdoch one after the other is a salutary and educational experience for anyone who tends to place contemporary female novelists together in the same hazy cat-

egory. There are obvious attributes that women writers, these two included, are likely to have in common; they prefer to see a dramatic situation through the eyes of a heroine rather than a hero, and their feminine characters are deftly and unsentimentally—Lord, how unsentimentally—depicted; they have a fondness for precise detail, and their subject, no matter how you view it, is love.

Beyond that, these two authors defy comparison with each other. If Hortense Calisher's *Textures of Life* reminds us now and then of Virginia Woolf or Elizabeth Bowen, Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn* conjures up the ghosts of Ann Radcliffe and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. They are, in other words, about as far apart as you can get—as practitioners of fiction in our language.

Textures of Life is Miss Calisher's second novel. Her first was *False Entry*, and she has also published two fine collections of short stories, *In the Absence of Angels* and, more recently, *Tale for the Mirror*. Miss Calisher's previous work has accustomed us to expect a delicacy of expression and a subtle treatment of the psychology involved in even commonplace events. In this respect, *Textures of Life* is no disappointment. In fact, it is a tribute to Miss Calisher's real skill as a craftsman that she can turn a willful and unpleasant heroine, her wraithlike husband, and the dreary lofts they insist on living in, into interesting and occasionally compelling fiction.

The novel opens with the wedding reception of Elizabeth Jacobson, would-be sculptress, to David Pagani, photographer, and a young man of almost superhuman patience. Both are from middle-class families, both are half-Jewish, and both have widowed parents. In fact, the warmest and most moving section of the book has to do with the relationship between Elizabeth's mother and David's ailing Italian father. But the center of the novel is really Elizabeth and her obsessive need to rebel against the *petit-bourgeois* ways of her mother who loves domestic comfort and "nice things." Everything and everyone, including her young husband, is ground under by Elizabeth's single-minded intention, even after the mother has gone off to California, to avoid doing things "her way." When a daughter is born to the young Paganis (the significance of the name should not be overlooked) Elizabeth is forced, after a series of domestic crises, to realize that she must suffer the same agonies over her child that her own mother suffered—and receive for her troubles a similar hostility.

Miss Calisher's conclusion is not despairing but resigned and, from at least one man's point of view, depressing. Women, she seems again and again to be telling us, are just that way. And so is life. A kind of biological determinism accounts for most of the things people spend years trying to understand. So Elizabeth and her mother are types, perhaps even archetypes, of mothers and daughters everywhere and always. But it is precisely against the universality of this suggestion that the mind rebels. Miss Calisher is good—sometimes superb—at New York and lofts and dialogues between pregnant women, but she falters

when she generalizes. Elizabeth Pagani is *not* a modern Everywoman. She's too pinched, too narrow even for this petty century. . . .

Emily Hahn (essay date Summer 1965)

SOURCE: "In Appreciation of Hortense Calisher," in *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Summer, 1965, pp. 243-9.

[In the following essay, Hahn discusses Calisher's prose style, early fiction, and formative experiences, and the critical response to *False Entry* and *Textures of Life*.]

"Words are our reflex. We spend our lives putting things into words," says the narrator in Hortense Calisher's "Little Did I Know." (From *Extreme Magic*, a collection.) She recalls how, as a girl at college, "I was drunk on language, the way you see kids get on jazz at Birdland. I ran all over the pasture, wondering how I could ever eat all the books there were. . . . And the words! I collected them in all shapes and sizes, and hung them like bangles in my mind."

Like all good fiction-writers, Miss Calisher puts something not only of herself but of all of us into her work. Few of us don't remember that phase of youth. And we continue to recognize emotions as we read on, though they are less easily definable and have never, perhaps, been described before. The narrator is telling of the spring when she was really in love, "the last spring in which she really lived," when she saw the lyricism of the season slowly ebb from the affair, until love at last came to an end because she couldn't bear her young man's literary point of view: "Why did he always have to remove himself from everything, from the most important things, by putting them into quotes!" Wryly, she rubs this in, knowing as she looks back that this is her sin, too: that it won't be long before she outdoes Ben in the same offense. A day of crisis brings her to decision. She can support her distaste no longer, and writes to him, breaking everything off, after which:

I went to the window and leaned on the sill. It was the holy time, a beautiful evening. A dusky wind was blowing, and the west was the color of a peach. . . . A few foghorns were sounding on the river, and I wondered idly whether I would ever be able to set down exactly the emotion that sound always called up in me—as I had tried and failed to do so many times before.

And after a while, as I leaned there, the words came, began to shimmer and hang in the air about me. . . . So I sat down at the desk again—what I wrote was published the next year. The world stretched all before me that evening, in profuse strains of unpremeditated—life. But I left the window, and began to write about it.

Writers all know this self-impatience, even self-disgust, this sense of estrangement from first-hand experience because we can't help removing ourselves from things by

putting them into quotes. Sometimes I wonder if other practitioners—painters or musicians—feel equivalent misgivings. Perhaps not: ours are intimately connected with words, and they don't use those particular tools. Other writers have expressed the thought, though in very different form: Elizabeth Browning with "Yet half a beast is the great God Pan / To laugh, as he sate by the river, / Making a poet out of a man," and Francis Thompson, "The poppy hangs in the wheat its head, / Heavy with dreams as that with bread." But Hortense Calisher has evoked the old fear in fresh form and brought it home to us.

Ultimately, by the way, Miss Calisher herself succeeded in finding words for the emotion called up by foghorns on the river, in a story called "**The Sound of Waiting**," (*In the Absence of Angels*, a collection.)

For such feats of evocation Hortense Calisher has sometimes been called a writer's writer, an appellation that does not please her because it seems somehow limited, and that adjective certainly cannot be applied to her. It was her scope I noticed when I read her first published story, "**The Box of Ginger**" in the *New Yorker* in 1948. The style was unabashedly individual, the vocabulary was full; these were refreshing qualities at a time when most young writers, still in Hemingway's thrall, were reining themselves in and holding themselves down, deliberately employing the most poverty-stricken language possible. Miss Calisher knew where she was going, but would not be hurried. To make her point she took the way that seemed best to her, no matter if it wasn't a short cut. Impressed, I kept looking out for more of her work. A few years later I met her, when she came to England as the holder of a Guggenheim fellowship.

I may seem rather nervously eager to explain that I have met Miss Calisher. If so, it is because of an incident that occurred long ago in New York. I met Miss Amy Loveman of the *Saturday Review*, and asked her if she would permit me to review a certain book that was due to be published within the next few weeks. In England, I assure you, we often request the privilege of reviewing such books as we think might interest us because they treat of subjects within our fields of knowledge. Nobody in England, as far as I know, has ever suspected that such a request might mask depths of corruption, would-be logrolling and the like, but in America things are evidently different. This book, as I remember, was about Chinese villages: I was studying Chinese villages at the time. I swear to God I didn't know the author. I swear I meant no harm. But Miss Loveman jumped as if stung, and glared at me.

"Oh dear no," she said sharply. "We never let anyone review books they ask for." And she hurried off as if to escape contagion.

Well, I resented it then and I still do, but the incident has left me rather jumpy, and I want to make it crystal clear that I admired Hortense Calisher's work long before we met and became friends. Long before, Miss Loveman.

Miss Calisher, a tall, graceful woman with an individual type of beauty, much humor, and tremendous vitality, had told the committee—or whatever they are—who decide on the Guggenheim fellows that she wanted her grant so that she might go abroad for a year and think. This seemed a good reason to them, and they gave it to her. Away from household worries, she went back on her first resolve and began to write *False Entry* before she went home: there is a good deal about England in the novel. It is a long, tight book, remarkable for many reasons, not least that the narrator is a man. As far as I know no critic has complained that *False Entry* fails to convince on this particular point, but on other scores there were adverse comments by critics who—I think—didn't like having to work at their reading. For *False Entry* is packed, and moves along so subtly that unless you pay close attention you lose the thread. It's not the usual easy reading: and some people were puzzled by it. Others, however, were enthusiastically in favor.

The narrator, Pierre, is a man who has always been lonely. In a foreword he muses on his peculiar gift, an extremely retentive memory, and this passage gives the novel its title. "My own strange history of third-hand listening and remembering . . . has at least given me one bit of truth to hold for myself. . . . I know that there are certain people in the world . . . who either have never met me or do not even know that I exist, about whose lives I yet know enough, or so much, that I could claim entrance into their pasts with the most beautiful legalities of detail. . . . I am certain that every person, even the most commonplace, if he could but search and construe his memory, holds within his orbit of power at least one other person to whom he could do the same." There are many people within the boy Pierre's own orbit, including the Ku Klux Klansmen he trips up, months after they have committed an atrocity they had thought hidden, and the book gives a remarkable picture of the Southern town where these things are supposed to have happened.

J. N. Hartt in the *Yale Review* called *False Entry* a beautifully written novel. "Both in style and disclosure it is vivid and luminous, and its powerful moral argument is given an expression as dramatic as it is poetic." The brilliant Brigid Brophy said, in London, "Hortense Calisher is an American of European sympathies, taut artistry and stupendous talent." As for *False Entry*, "You can nibble round for twenty or thirty pages before you are suddenly in, hurtling through its exciting plot, dazzled by its delicacy and stunned by its sheer Dickensian creativeness."

The author was seven years writing *False Entry*, which was published in 1962, and its slow development was due not only to its length but to the complications of life. She had to bring up two children; they are now adult. Even so, work is often interrupted by the necessity of earning: nowadays, she teaches, and at one point went to the Far East on one of those cultural errands sponsored by the State Department, lecturing as she moved about. Much of her consecutive work has been done at Yaddo. Moreover, her method is slow: she thinks everything out before put-

ting it down, and does this so thoroughly that she scarcely ever finds it necessary to change what she has at last written. I find this hard to credit—I, who do my thinking as I write, and try out at least three versions of everything before I can be satisfied—but it is true. She could never have developed this technique if she hadn't as retentive a memory as her creation Pierre.

"Oh yes, I remember everything," she said when I asked about it. "I inherited that faculty from my father. My brother did, too. Total recall."

As many of the stories indicate, she grew up in New York, spending her childhood in a large West Side apartment. Her father, a prosperous, kindly businessman, supported large numbers of relatives. The place was seldom free of his elderly sisters, cousins, and aunts, drinking coffee and eating cake while they shook their heads forebodingly over Mr. Calisher's open-handedness.

"I went to the local public school," said Miss Calisher. "PS 46, at 150th and Amsterdam. Parents object nowadays to their kids going more than five blocks to school, but we lived at 161st and Amsterdam, and I walked twelve blocks to school every day, and nobody thought anything of it. Moreover, it was what we would call today a desegregated district: a lot of Negroes lived in the neighborhood, but it wasn't a talking point at all. Yet I was a very protected child. My mother wouldn't let me play in the streets unless somebody was there to keep an eye on me."

"You mean you didn't grow up in the South?" I asked. She shook her head. "Then where did you get the material, the atmosphere, for that part of *False Entry*? I would have sworn—"

"Oh well, my father was a Southerner, and I was brought up on his stories. Like everyone on his side of the family he was a born storyteller, and I must have taken on a good deal of the color of it, the feeling, from the time I could understand words. We did visit his home town once. Then after I married, my husband had to go to Alabama and I went along, and stayed there a few weeks, right in the neighborhood I've described in the book. I remember that it didn't seem strange even at the beginning: I felt as if I knew it." She paused and reflected, smiling. "You know, it was perfectly natural that I should write. Most writers must come from anecdotal families like mine. There must be some little bug like me in all those groups, sitting there listening to everything at family dinners, tucking it away. That was me. My father and his relatives all had a great zest for storytelling, and of course I did, too. I wrote my first story when I was seven, in a notebook. One of the aunts sneered at it. . . . I've been angry with the critics ever since. They don't know it, but they're all my Aunt Mamie." She gets angry, too, she confessed, at the blithe assumption made by many of those who edit book-review columns, that a female writer must automatically be reviewed by a female. "I've no objection, you understand, to woman reviewers themselves: it's the attitude behind this

custom that I resent. For a woman not to get a woman reviewer is a step up in the literary hierarchy." After all, Aunt Mamie was a woman.

The gloomy prognostication of the aunts was justified when Mr. Calisher's affairs fell on evil times. So did most other business affairs, of course—it was during one of the small depressions that preceded the large one of the 'thirties—but to them, the family troubles were due solely to the crazy generosity of Hortense's father. To earn enough money for college, Miss Calisher joined one of Macy's training squads and held all kinds of jobs at that emporium, including the lofty position of section manager. Even after she started attending classes she worked at Macy's as a Saturday salesman, but she hated it, and when a year was up she resigned.

"I told them nobody should work for a company unless he wanted to be president of it, and upon mature consideration I'd decided I didn't want to be president of Macy's. Then I rushed shrieking back to academe." She had studied Latin for four years at Hunter College High School—hard work, but she feels now that it gave her a good grounding in English grammar. At Columbia Graduate School she took a master's degree. Soon afterwards she married.

The big Depression hung over those early years. She and her husband and two children lived in a big, old-fashioned house in Nyack, near the river: on weekdays she commuted to Manhattan, at weekends tried to make up domestic arrears. She held various jobs, the longest lasting being that of feature-writer for a fashion magazine. It was a demanding schedule, but somehow she found the time and energy to write; her stories began appearing in the *New Yorker* in 1948, as I have said. The idea of *False Entry* was in her mind and she applied for the Guggenheim.

Miss Calisher's second novel, *Textures of Life*, was greeted with general applause, a fact she considers with mixed feelings, since she knows she didn't work half as hard on it as she had on the first book. However, the reason for the public's preference is clear enough to other people: *Textures* treats of something immediately familiar to everyone, friction between generations. A boy and girl marry. The girl is in violent rebellion against her widowed mother in her snug little uptown flat. She herself, she is determined, will never be caught like the older woman in a mesh of things: she has tremendous scorn of property and security. Her young husband is of like mind, and resolves never to follow the usual ways of the world, getting and spending and so on, though his relations with his widowed father are not bad. Greenwich Village is too far uptown for these children. They find a loft in a nearly derelict building near the Battery, and move in there. But life brings responsibilities and involvements. Imperceptibly, they change. There is a child; the little girl develops a terrifying ailment. The young couple compromise, compromise further, until there comes a time when resentment against their elders has been burnt away. They are grown