

(Cross-Cultural Communications, 1993), and Latin American literature and criticism dealing with Luso-Brazilian epics as well as their translators.

Paloma Pedrero. *Parting Gestures with A Night in the Subway*. Tr. Phyllis Zatlin. Estreno. 1999. 60 pp. Paper: \$8.00; ISBN 1-88 8463-06-6. The plays of Paloma Pedrero, Spain's most widely-staged contemporary woman playwright, have been performed internationally in Latin America, the U. S., England, France, and Portugal. The original edition of *Parting Gestures* included three plays: *The Color of August [El color de agosto]*, in which an artist and her estranged model get naked and madly paint each other; *A Night Divided [La Noche dividida]*, where a Bible salesman is asked by the lady of the house to stab her; and *The Voucher [Resguardo personal]*, which features a couple willing to sacrifice their beloved dog in order to torture one another. This expanded revised edition includes a fourth play, *A Night in the Subway [Solos esta noche]*, about a woman trapped on a dark subway platform who spontaneously offers her valuables to a stranger. A specialist in contemporary theatre, Phyllis Zatlin has published numerous translations from Spanish and French, including Eduardo Manet's *Lady Strass*, which was produced at Ubu Repertory Theatre in New York in 1996, *The Elephant Graveyard* by Jean-Paul Dumas, and Jaime Salom's *Bonfire at Dawn*.

Arturo Pérez-Reverte. *The Fencing Master [El maestro de esgrima]*. Tr. Margaret Jull Costa. Harcourt Brace. 1999 [1988]. 245 pp. Cloth: \$25.00; ISBN 0-15-100181-2. Everyone in Madrid in the torrid fall of 1868 is discussing political plots and revolution except for Don Jaime. He is a fencing master and man of honor, an anachronism. For years he has been working on a *Treatise on the Art of Fencing*, the heart of which is his perfection of the unstoppable thrust. He is approached one day by a beautiful and mysterious woman who asks him to be her teacher, but he declines. Soon he finds himself involved in a plot that includes seduction, politics, secret documents, and murder. Rich with the historical detail of a decaying world that agonizes over ideals of honor and chivalry, *The Fencing Master* is primarily a character study that hints at the elaborate plotting and intrigue of the writer's later thrillers such as *The Flanders Panel*, *The Club Dumas*, and *The Seville Communion*. Pérez-Reverte's books have been translated into nineteen languages in thirty countries.

Roberto Quesada. *The Big Banana*. Tr. Walter Krochmal. Arte Público Press. 1999. 248 pp. Paper: \$12.95; ISBN 1-55885-255-7. Eduardo Lin loves New York. Where else could an aspiring (if under-employed) Honduran actor possibly want to be? In *The Big Banana*, we follow the struggles of Eduardo, his gringo boss Charlie, his true love Mirian, and his many Central and South American friends—especially his Chilean friend Casagrande ("musician, singer, mystic, teacher . . . above all, he knew how to live without working")—as they learn to survive in New York City. Beneath their hardscrabble everyday lives, we also perceive their hopes, their nightmares, and their outlandish, Hollywood-inspired fantasies. Some days, it seems those fantasies are all that

keep Eduardo going. But even if in winter the cold "reaches deep beyond his bones," and the icy, snow-covered city is "like a bride awaiting her fiancé," he is still determined to woo and win her. Also by Roberto Quesada: *El desertor*, *El humano y la diosa*, and *The Ships (Los Barcos)*.

Juan José Saer. *The Investigation [La Pesquisa]*. Tr. Helen Lane. Serpent's Tail. 1999 [Compania Editora Espasa Calpe, Argentina, 1994]. 182 pp. Paperback original: \$14.99; ISBN 1-85242-297-1. *The Investigation* seeks to unravel two cases—one criminal, one literary. The protagonist is "the monster of the Bastille," so-called for having brutally murdered 27 elderly women in one area of Paris. Meanwhile, an untitled manuscript by an unnamed author is discovered in Argentina among the papers of a missing poet, known for his hatred of the novel. Part police investigation, part historical account, and part novel, *The Investigation* shows Juan José Saer to be a virtuosic writer, orchestrating different layers into a Hitchcockian blend of suspense and descriptions of everyday life. Saer is considered by many to be the leading Argentinian writer of the post-Borges generation. His work has been translated into all major languages, including *The Witness* (1991) and *Nothing Nobody Never*, both published by Serpent's Tail. Helen Lane has also translated works by Octavio Paz, Luisa Valenzuela, Claude Simon, Mario Vargas-Llosa, and Juan Goytisolo

Manuel Scorza. *The Ballad of Agapito Robles [Cantar de Agapito Robles]*. Tr. Anna-Marie Aldaz. Peter Lang. 1999 [Monte Avila Editores, Caracas, Venezuela, 1976]. 175 pp. Cloth: \$44.95; ISBN 0-8204-4174-0. *Wor(l)ds of Change* 41. In this, the fourth volume in his chronicle, "La guerra silenciosa," Manuel Scorza describes the increasingly militant stance taken by the dispossessed Indian peasants of Peru in their struggle to regain their ancestral lands. Agapito Robles carries out the mission entrusted to him at the end of the preceding novel, *The Sleepless Rider*, namely, to encourage his fellow Indians to intensify their fight to bring down their archenemy, Judge Francisco Montenegro. The judge's defeat awakens the Indians to reality and initiates a process of demythification that is the focus of the chronicle's fifth and final volume, *Requiem for a Lightning Bolt*. Anne-Marie Aldaz has written a book-length translation of Rosalía de Castro's poetry, and translations of two of Scorza's previous novels, *Garabombo*, *the Invisible* (1994) and *The Sleepless Rider* (1996), both published by Peter Lang.

Ana Teresa Torres. *Doña Inés vs. Oblivion [Doña Inés contra el olvido]*. Tr. Gregory Rabassa. Louisiana State University Press. 1999 [Monte Avila Editores, Caracas, 1992]. 243 pp. Cloth: \$27.50; ISBN 0-8071-2476-1. A sweeping chronicle of Venezuela's turbulent history, *Doña Inés vs. Oblivion* makes its first appearance in English, published simultaneously by LSU Press and by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in the U.K. This book is the 1998 winner of the

Mobil Pegasus Prize for Literature, established in 1977 to recognize distinguished authors from around the world whose literature is rarely translated into English. Ana Teresa Torres is the first woman to win the award since 1985, and she is the first Venezuelan novelist to be published globally in English since Romulo Gallegos's *Doña Barbara* in 1929. *Doña Inés vs. Oblivion* is based on an actual court case that began in the 1600s and was not resolved until the 1980s, concerning the quest of a fictitious Caracas aristocrat to reclaim title to a piece of jungle land given by her husband to his illegitimate son. Gregory Rabassa is best known for his translations of works by Nobel Prize-winning authors Gabriel García Márquez and Miguel Ángel Asturias.

Esther Tusquets. *Never to Return [Para no volver]*. Tr. and afterword by Barbara F. Ichiishi. University of Nebraska. 1999 [Editorial Lumen, Barcelona, 1985]. 194 pp. Cloth: ISBN 0-8032-4433-9. Paper: ISBN 0-8032-9438-7. European Women Writers Series. On the brink of turning fifty, Elena suddenly falls into a deep depression. Her husband has gone off to New York to celebrate the triumph of his cinematic career, accompanied not by his wife but by a lover half her age. Meanwhile her grown sons have left home to pursue their own lives and relationships. Elena begins seeing a psychoanalyst, which provides the occasion for intense self-scrutiny while raising basic questions about psychotherapy and its implications for female emotional development. *Never to Return* is the fourth in a series of critically acclaimed novels by Esther Tusquets to be translated into English, including *The Same Sea as Every Summer* (1990), *Love Is a Solitary Game* (1985), and *Stranded* (1991). Barbara F. Ichiishi is the co-translator of Édouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint*.

Lope de Vega. *The Best Boy in Spain/El mejor mozo de España*. Tr. David Giltz. Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe. 1999. 182 pp. Paper: \$24.00; ISBN 0-927534-85-1. Spanish Golden Age Theater series. Bilingual. Isabel of Castile's choice of a husband is so important that she becomes the center of nefarious schemes in which her advisors and her half brother, King Enrique IV, vie to control her destiny while various suitors compete for her hand. Isabel must overcome serious obstacles before she triumphs and marries Ferdinand, the best boy in Spain. This translation is based on the Spanish text found in the twentieth *Parte* of Lope's plays (Madrid, 1625), and was commissioned by the Theater Department at the University of Rhode Island for a 1992 production that, unfortunately, was never staged. David Giltz has added some additional verses to help modern audiences "reach a sense of historical completeness" that depend on prior knowledge of 15th century Spanish history. Giltz has selected a variety of English metrical forms to reproduce as closely as possible the wide variety of rigorously measured and rhymed verse forms in the original text.

Tino Villanueva. *Primera Causa/First Cause*. Tr. Tina Horowitz. Cross-Cultural Communications. 1999. 32 pp. Cloth: \$15.00; ISBN 0-89304-176-9. Paper: \$5.00; ISBN 0-89304-177-7. Cross-Cultural Review Chapbook 14. Latin American (Chicano) Poetry #2. Bilingual. This slim volume containing bilingual versions of ten poems by Tino Villanueva is the author's fifth book of poetry, but only the second written entirely in Spanish. The first, *Crónica de mis años peores/Chronicle of My Worst Years*, was translated by James Hoggard and published in a bilingual edition in 1994 by Northwestern University Press. Previous translations by Tina Horowitz include works by José Angel Valente and Gabriel Celaya, and *Me and the Moon*, poems by Eugenia León published in Spain.

SWEDISH

Marianne Fredriksson. *Simon's Family [Simon och ekarna]*. Tr. Joan Tate. Ballantine. 1999 [Bengt Nordin Agency, Vårdmö, Sweden, 1985]. 336 pp. Paper: \$24.00; ISBN 1-345-43459-5. Though at the center of a loving family, Simon Larsson has struggled with inexplicable feelings that something from his past was not quite right. The expansive sea bordering his Swedish homeland fills him with longing—for connection, for freedom. But freedom from what? As the shadow of World War II falls across Europe, Simon forms a friendship with his Jewish classmate, Isak Lentov. It is a relationship that will forever change both their lives, as the two families are irrevocably drawn together in their striving to endure shame, betrayal, war, and even madness. Marianne Fredriksson's previous novel, the international bestseller, *Hanna's Daughters*, was her first U. S. publication.

Harry Martinson. *Aniara: A Review of Man in Time and Space*. Tr. Stephen Klass & Leif Sjöberg. Story Line Press. 1999. 160 pp. Paper: \$14.95; ISBN 1-885266-63-4. Nobel Prize-winning writer Harry Martinson published his masterpiece, *Aniara*, in 1953, right after the Soviet Union announced that they had exploded the hydrogen bomb. It is the story of a luxurious space ship loaded with 8,000 evacuees, fleeing an Earth made uninhabitable by Man's technological arrogance. A malfunction knocks the craft off course, taking these would-be Mars colonists on an irreversible journey into deep space that offers readers a prophetic, panoramic view of humanity's possible fate. Although the book has been translated into seven languages and adapted into a popular avant-garde opera, this volume is the first complete English language version. The early poems of *Aniara* appeared in Martinson's 1953 volume entitled *Cikada [Cicada]*, forming a section which culminates in the nuclear destruction of the city of Dorisburg as recounted by the last voice from Earth to reach the space ship "Aniara." Seventy-four additional poems make up the complete work.

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DONA INES VS OBLIVION

Ana Teresa Torres
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £16.99)



Weaving in and out of three decades of Venezuelan history, Ana Teresa Torres's award-winning novel takes its narration from a dead, disgruntled, colonial woman who refuses to pass on until her tale reaches the ears of the living. Although her bones lay gleaming in the half-baked earth, her memory wanders over and over the loss of her plantation as a result of the abolition of slavery, in the late 18th century.

Dona Ines's near constant stream of consciousness opens up a fascinating window on the political and moral upheavals which occurred in Venezuela from 1715. From a colonial and matriarchal point of view, the wife of a wealthy planter in Caracas fights for control over land which her husband bequeathes to his illegitimate son, born of a black slave. Although she dies in 1780, her narrative continues unabated, questioning the tide of history from beyond the grave. In effect, this piece of fiction is more than an exercise in magical realism or revisionism. It's a fictional representation of the oppression, rivalry and revolution of the land and people of Venezuela.

offered to gay people in monogamous, loving relationships, and how much our society continues to equate homosexuality with promiscuity.

People share deeply personal testimonies about children, colleagues and friends who are gay. Donald Shriver Jr. remembers his friendship with a fellow seminary student who would have been an outstanding minister, but whose life was cut short by suicide. Years after his friend's death, Shriver learned from a retired professor what had been at the root of his friend's problem. As a gay man, Shriver's friend could discover no social space—in the seminary or anywhere else—in which he could be himself.

Lutheran Bishop Paul Egerton describes how he and his wife responded when the oldest of their six sons told them that he was gay. They moved gradually through what Egerton terms six periods of creative development and transformation, from denial to eventual celebration.

Wink's expressed purpose is to bring serious reflection and a more loving approach to the debate. His preface includes a poignant observation: "We stand, blessed, before this stupendous gift—the mystery of human sexuality—awed, confused, and rendered delicate toward ourselves and others as we seek to listen closely to the new things the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Doña Inés vs. Oblivion.

By Ana Teresa Torres. Translated by Gregory Rabassa. Louisiana State University Press, 243 pp., \$27.50.

WINNER OF the 1998 Pegasus Prize for Literature, this novel is both a family saga and a fictionalized account of the history of Venezuela, focusing on the relentless conflict between races and classes over land ownership. A long list of historical figures march through its pages, including Simón Bolívar and a series of military

Reviewed by Kathleen L. Housley, an affiliated scholar in American studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

dictators. These men spawn storms of violence that buffet the fictional characters, who are also beset by such natural disasters as earthquakes and plagues. By the book's end, class and race are of little significance: the descendants of former slaves have risen to and fallen from power, while the descendants of the ruling class have alternately lost and regained their money. Loyalty is based on expediency, and property rights outweigh human rights. Oblivion—the total loss of memory and of ties to the land—wins.

The story is told by a ghost, Doña Inés Villegas y Solórzano, whose interest in the lives of her descendants is sustained by her determination that they regain possession of land that she once owned. She does not care about justice except as it pertains to her own narrow concerns. Based on an actual court case, the precipitating event that drives the plot is the gift by Doña Inés's husband of a plantation to a son he had fathered with his slave mistress. The problem is that the land had been owned by Doña

Inés's father and was hers by inheritance. She is so adamant about her right to the land that, after her death in 1780, she refuses to lose interest in earthly things, following intently, indeed obsessively, the legal wrangling between her descendants and those of the former slave. The irony is that by the end of the book none of either of their descendants care about the land. In return for being made partners in a corrupt corporation, whose powerful owners intend to build a resort for foreign tourists on the site, the descendants give up their rights.

Though *Doña Inés vs. Oblivion* has been compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel García Márquez, the book does not incorporate magic realism (a combination of fantasy and reality) despite the fact that its narrator is a ghost. Torres is not interested in transforming reality via her writing. The ghost is merely a convenient narrative device that allows Torres to provide an overview of 300 years of history. As Doña Inés de-

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scribes herself, "In this unmemorial country, I'm pure recall."

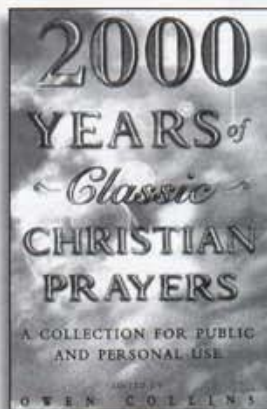
But though the device of the ghost may be convenient for Torres, it is also limiting. Doña Inés is both omniscient and omnipresent. She knows everything that is happening and what everyone, even her adversaries, are thinking. However, she has no power over the action; all she can do is comment on it, principally to her dead husband. Even as a ghost she is the most alive person in the book. Unfortunately, her passionate voice too often drowns out the other voices, creating a void between the reader and the characters. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Torres occasionally resorts to third-person narration before abruptly switching back to Doña Inés's shrill tones.

A native of Caracas, Torres has written three other novels, none of which has been translated into English. She credits her 20 years as a clinical psychologist for giving her insights into the stories people tell. Well

known in Venezuela, Torres will no doubt step onto a broader literary stage with the winning of the Pegasus Prize, which recognizes distinguished authors whose literature is rarely translated into English. Established in 1977, the prize has brought several exceptional books about other cultures and ideas to the attention of American readers. One component of the prize is translation, and in this respect Torres can be said to have won twice. Her novel was translated by Gregory Rabassa, highly regarded for his translations of García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa and Julio Cortázar.

Even though Torres is not yet in the same league as García Márquez or Isabel Allende, she is a writer to watch. She shares with them an anguished love-hate relationship with her own country and culture, a relationship which can be mined for rich fictional material. This is evident in the final pages of *Doña Inés vs. Oblivion*, when the legal case has come to an end, and the nothingness of forgetting is about

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to settle on the land. Metaphorically, when Torres has Doña Inés address her "beloved corpse," it is Venezuela itself that she means.

The Eyes of the Heart: A Memoir of the Lost and Found.

By Frederick Buechner. Harper-Collins, 183 pp., \$18.00.

FEW PEOPLE listen to their lives as closely as Frederick Buechner does, and fewer can articulate so well what they hear. This book, Buechner's fourth memoir, resembles his previous autobiographies—*The Sacred Journey* (1982), *Then and Now* (1983) and *Telling Secrets* (1991)—in that it deals with pivotal moments and persons in Buechner's life. It is unique, however, in that he here contemplates them in relationship to death. Now 73, Buechner writes, "I think about dying a lot these days. . . . I think about how much time I've got left. Sometimes they're sad thoughts, but not always. Sometimes the sadness is lost in wondering what will come next. If anything comes."

In these most personal of reflections, Buechner takes the reader on a tour of the place he calls his Magic Kingdom, his library/study. Buechner invites us into the sacred space where his books were conceived and created—a place itself filled with books. (It includes the first collected edition of Ben Johnson works [1692] and all the first editions of L. Frank Baum's Oz series.) The description of the books, pictures, family archives and artifacts on Buechner's walls and shelves centers his storytelling and his reflections. They gather Buechner "to his kinspeople." The writers of the Hebrew scriptures often use this phrase to refer to death. Buechner reverses the image. Someone who has experienced death, his grandmother, Naya, is gathered to him. She becomes his conversation partner and guide as he wrestles with the question Karl Barth asked in *The Doctrine of Creation*: "What we

shall then have and be on the far side of our life in time, is what death calls in question. We shall then only have been. What will then become of our being . . . when it is one which has only been?"

As in his previous memoirs, Buechner writes about his mother and father. His father's suicide when Buechner was only ten has had a lingering influence. He confesses that "one way to read my whole life—my religious faith, the books I have written, the friends I have made—is a search for him. Maybe at its heart my fear is that fear of finding him." A particularly insightful reflection on Buechner's relationship to his mother is the written response he sent to her question, "Do you really believe anything happens after you die?"

Not only do Buechner and his guide Naya speak about the death of his parents, but also the more recent deaths of a friend, poet James Merrill, and Buechner's younger brother, Jamie. Merrill died in 1995, and

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Torres, Ana Teresa

DOÑA INÉS VS.

OBLIVION

Trans. by Gregory Rabassa

Louisiana State Univ.

DOÑA INÉS VS. OBLIVION (\$27.50; Oct. 26; 243 pp.; 0-8071-2476-1): An accomplished 1992 novel, which won the 1998 Pegasus Prize, surveys Venezuela's modern history through the combative lament of "a crazy old aristocratic woman, . . . lost in her memoirs, . . . shouting for her slave women and her children, who'd already forgotten her." The eponymous Doña Inés's heated monologue excoriates such real watershed events as Simón Bolívar's revolution and Rómulo Betancourt's attempts to establish democracy, while she simultaneously

vilifies the freed former servant who sues for ownership of *her* land (the story features a Dickensian court case that drags on for generations) and her late husband Alejandro, whose death has left her alone to confront the tide of revolution and social change. What distinguishes Torres's energetic tragicomedy from dozens of other magical-realist Latin American novels is its focus on the embattled relationships among classes and between masters and servants. Doña Inés is both a retrograde tyrant and ferocious force of nature, and Torres has brought her to life (-in-death) with stunning success.

Dallas, TX
Morning News
11/27/99

WARMING WORDS

Continued from Page 1C.
on Monkey Chow. While his characters have no deeming values whatsoever, Mr. Poirier sculpts broad comic situations from their lives and, mostly, appeals to readers' self-righteousness. A feel-good book in the worst possible way. — Marc Lee

I Told You Once, by Judy Budnitz (Picador, \$24)

Judy Budnitz has picked an apt title for her first novel, its subject being four generations of Jewish women destined to repeat their mothers' mistakes. The story begins with Ilana, who lives in a "place where someone had forgotten to add the color," an Eastern European village made vivid only by its magical and superstitious powers. Repelled by her peasant mother, Ilana escapes to America, where the narrative shifts to her daughter, Sashie; granddaughter, Mara; and great-granddaughter, Nomie. The women share cunning and a blind devotion to their men. Yet none is independent. They clutch and cling, only to turn against each other "like a river bursting through the dikes and dams and flooding the fields." Nomie tries to end the cycle by contemplating abortion. But it is Ilana who finally recognizes her own voice in the mocking refrain, "I told you so."

— Shelley Hawes

Those Bones Are Not My Child, by Toni Cade Bambara (Pantheon, \$27.50)

In Georgia, 1980 was memorable for a nightmarish reason: Atlanta's children were disappearing. In this powerful novel, the Atlanta child murders are told through the life of one mother who, when called to identify the remains of her son, is unable to accept the body before her, insisting that "those bones are not my child." Children aren't supposed to die before their parents, but bureaucracies aren't supposed to drag their feet in searching for children, either;



race is not supposed to be a factor; and black men aren't supposed to be serial killers. But Wayne Williams was. The story of the murdered Atlanta children, as Toni Morrison says, puts the reader at the heart of the horror in the story of a mother and the neighborhoods gripped by terror but determined to survive it. — Ellen Sweets

My Russian, by Deirdre McNamer (Houghton Mifflin, \$24)

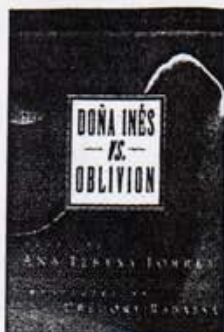
Lots of novelists these days are trying to bridge the gap between genre fiction and the literary novel. This Montana writer's third book could be classified as a mystery if

servitude. This entertaining read is easily small enough to tuck into a purse or briefcase

— Karen M. Thomas

Doña Inés vs. Oblivion, by Ana Teresa Torres (Louisiana State University Press, \$27)

Add another unforgettable character to the bank vault of excellent fiction produced by Latina writers this decade. Like Dede Mirabal in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* and Sofia in Ana Castil-



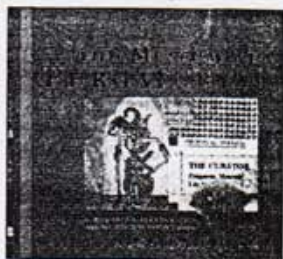
lo's *So Far From God*, author Ana Teresa Torres' *Doña Inés* transcends death and country in the classic surreal style made famous by Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Narrated by the 18th-century Doña Inés, the novel explores the last 200 years of Venezuelan history. Doña Inés is taken to court over land rights by her late husband's child, a former

slave, and even after she dies, her spirit continues a tale interwoven with historical events through the 20th century. Angry and redemptive, hers is a voice that won't go unrecognized.

— Jennifer Juárez Robles

The Museum at Purgatory, by Nick Bantock (Harper-Collins, \$25)

For anyone who found Mr. Bantock's best-known works — the *Griffin & Sabine* trilogy — a bit precious, this fictional book dressed up to look real may strike just the right note. A guide, Non, leads readers on a tour of collections — games, obscure objects, miniature mummies and the like — housed in Purgatory, carefully detailing how the former lives



of the collectors are intricately linked to the items they've amassed. The introduction even posits a theory on the meaning of life. Suffice to say, things are decidedly *not* what they seem. Where Mr. Bantock triumphs with this picture-

book jewel is with the decision to adopt an attitude similar to Non's curatorial detachment: He presents the stories, illustrations and photos of the items in the collections, and Non's insights, as a take-it-as-you-will proposition, leaving the reader to ponder the meaning of it all. — Tim O'Reilly

The Language of Threads, by Gail Tsukiyama (St. Martin's Press, \$23.95)

A central image infuses *The Language of Threads*: A Chinese girl, about 8, sits in a silk factory and carefully draws fine filaments from a cocoon.



Although the girl is poor and has been given over to this work by her par-