

## **literary perspectives on the family**

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND LIFESTYLES THROUGH LITERATURE. Edited by Rose Somerville. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. 1975. \$12.95. Paper: \$7.95.  
THE FAMILY THROUGH LITERATURE. Edited by Nicholas Tuvachis and William J. Goode. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1975. Paper: \$6.95.

These two anthologies on the family through literature seem based on the same premise—that sociology and literature have unique contributions to make to our understanding of the family, sociology striving for generality and cumulation, while literature deals with the particular and irreproducible—and both provide selections notable for combining representativeness, emotional impact and literary value. But they exhibit contrasting strengths and weaknesses, whether judged by the standards of American Studies, literature or sociology. Less than half of the Tuvachis and Goode book—by far the more carefully edited—consists of American selections, though these, well chosen, cover a broad spectrum from Franklin, Twain and Wharton to a variety of significant contemporary authors. The American selections are especially strong where ethnic and regional sub-cultures are concerned, and the British, Chinese, Greek, Norwegian and Spanish selections often provide vivid though brief comparisons with American materials. Though the organizational framework is sociological, it is perfectly adaptable to the American Studies classroom; the formation of unions, for instance, can be examined from the perspective of the contemporary urban middle-class and of the lower-class immigrant ethnic groups which lie just a few generations behind it. And very helpful commentaries introduce each section and selection.

The Tuvachis and Goode anthology is not without limitations, however; these include relative disregard of alternative family forms, and bias in the treatment of women. Both shortcomings may result more from the available material than from the editors' attitudes, though there is surely more good literature, by authors of either sex, revealing women's behavior and their views of themselves than there is genuinely outstanding writing on family alternatives. Nevertheless, where sex roles are concerned, the emphasis of the anthology seems to be on an exploration of men's roles in and attitudes toward the family.

Somerville's anthology exhibits neither of these limitations, and she includes more material from racial, as opposed to ethnic, minorities than Tuvachis and Goode do. Moreover, though her anthology is the shorter of the two it contains primarily American material, with a good selection of worthwhile work by lesser-known authors. Alas for the American Studies student, these relative strengths are more than offset by some

puzzling weaknesses. Somerville neglects to inform readers of the chronological and national genesis of her selections, except sporadically in the copyright acknowledgements; the quality of her excerpting is extremely erratic; and some of her selections are of very dubious quality, or are unnecessarily repetitive (three excerpts from *Main Street*, for instance). However, the greatest flaw of the anthology is that it is based on no useful framework, no matter what disciplinary perspective it is judged by. The only editorial apparatus, the brief general introduction, is too brief, too general, and too often based on embarrassing metaphors of coming to the feast, or of admiring the glitter of little jewels; there are discrepancies between introduction and text (e.g., sexuality is a separate concept in the former, but not in the latter); and there are major problems of scope (despite its title, the anthology offers few selections focusing on the interactions between wives and husbands). Consequently, the book seems both too broad and not broad enough. Since almost all the selections are 19th or 20th century, and since the foreign literature excerpts are few, the anthology might be better as a purely American assemblage, with a much sharper organizational perspective. As it stands, however, Somerville's anthology is stronger than Tuvachis and Goode's as a gathering of Americana, but far weaker as a coherent collection.

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