

Short reviews

M. R. D. Foot reviews John Chandos's study of the great English public schools, Robert Temple writes about the first publication in this country of H.D.'s *Bid Me to Live*. Also reviewed, Jane Ewart-Biggs's *Memoirs*, a new collection of Ronald Searle's work and the art of The Beatles.

Boys Together
by John Chandos
Hutchinson, £15.00
ISBN 0 09 139240 3

JOHN Chandos has written a book to defuse the passion, the gush, the "I'm sick of the Ott, she bores me," says Lawrence; Molly Croft is Viola Meynell. The book essentially chronicles H. D.'s relationships with her husband, and with the Lawrences. The passionate goings-on are exceptionally steamy stuff. The most bizarre character in the book is D. H. Lawrence, who from H. D.'s intimate account seems to have been both detestable (Ezra Pound's word for him) and deeply and seriously disturbed. H. D.'s husband Richard Aldington comes across as extraordinarily callous and egocentric. The most fascinating character is probably Brigit Patmore, with whom H. D. and Aldington took part in threesomes in bed. In her own autobiography, Patmore wrote; "I was under the spell of (H. D.'s) capacity for suffering and for years was tormented by a vain endeavour to keep unhappiness from her."

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The Observer

"*Bid Me to Live* is a masterpiece of intensity, as compelling as Proust, and as alarmingly intimate"

Robert Temple
Books and Bookmen

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one's sons to a public school; in middle-class households it was believed that their boys might thus be able to mingle with the sons of the aristocracy, and so improve both their own manners and the state of their friendships and a few

Vaughan obeyed; and he never thereafter disobeyed the dead man's injunction beyond accepting the deanery of Llandaff and the mastership of the Temple. He preached marvellous sermons on repentance and remorse; and left an injunction that there was to be no biography of him.

M. R. D. FOOT

Bid Me to Live

by H.D.

Virago Modern Classics,

£3.50

ISBN 860 68 4296

THE Imagist poetess H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) was one of the finest and most sensitive novelists in our language this century. But her best work, *Bid Me to Live*, has only just been published in this country for the first time. It is an emotional testament by H. D. published just before her death, though only in America, in 1960. The book describes minutely the events in her life in 1917 in England. But though confined within the bounds of the events themselves, somehow it transcends them and speaks in a region where language fails. H. D. rides the wings of



H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)

words to that limit of the atmosphere where air becomes too tenuous, and then bursts into gossamer, and floats still higher. The book has, as Norman Holmes Pearson has said, "the fascination of a dream. It is really a poem, a tremendous poem."

In this dream-poem, the characters are vividly portrayed real people, most of them famous. The personalities are barely disguised under obvious pseudonyms: Mary Dowell of Boston is Amy Lowell, Rafe Ashton is H. D.'s own husband, the novelist Richard Aldington, and Julia Ashton is of course H. D. herself. Frederick ("Rico") is D. H. Lawrence, who was in actuality called "Lorenzo" by his wife and friends; Elsa is Frieda Lawrence; Lett Barnes is Ezra Pound ("my first poet", with whom H. D. had once had an affair); Morgan le Fay is Brigit Patmore; Lady Ottobourne is Lady Ottoline Morrell ("I'm sick of the Ott, she bores me," says Lawrence); Molly Croft is Viola Meynell. The book essentially chronicles H. D.'s relationships with her husband, and with the Lawrences. The passionate goings-on are exceptionally steamy stuff. The most bizarre character in the book is D. H. Lawrence, who from H. D.'s intimate account seems to have been both detestable (Ezra Pound's word for him) and deeply and seriously disturbed. H. D.'s husband Richard Aldington comes across as extraordinarily callous and egocentric. The most fascinating character is probably Brigit Patmore, with whom H. D. and Aldington took part in threesomes in bed. In her own autobiography, Patmore wrote; "I was under the spell of (H. D.'s) capacity for suffering and for years was tormented by a vain endeavour to keep unhappiness from her."

Greater insight into the characters of these well-known literary figures may be gained from H. D.'s novel than from any number of formal biographies. After reading *Bid Me to Live*, one feels that one has lived amongst them intimately. We learn facts in an accumulating way, like the deposit of sediment from the waves as they come in succession upon the sand, - the repetition, each timed slightly different with a new detail, lays down coatings of facts and impressions. We learn of events in the way the eye learns to see unfamiliar sculpture, by returning to its contours repeatedly until a full image is eventually built up. By doing this, H. D. involves us deeply in the unfolding of her tale as discoverers, as confederates. Because she does not tell or describe but rather intimates, her images always precise according to her canon of poetry, we cannot help but feel the immensely strong undercurrents. Her capacity for love, her vulnerability to betrayal, are tidal waves engulfing the mere story and the reader. This work is a masterpiece of intensity, as compelling as Proust, and as alarmingly intimate.

ROBERT TEMPLE