

CONCLUSION

After studying in depth each of Mrs. Sanguinetti's novels, it now seems that all her works should be considered in an effort to reach some conclusions about her art and accomplishment. Even though there is disagreement among various critics as to the importance of Mrs. Sanguinetti's work, it is significant that her novels are receiving the critics' attention. Reviewers from all sections of the United States as well as Great Britain, Canada, and the Scandanavian countries where the novels have been marketed have responded in large numbers to this new author's appearance.

By far, the general response has been a favorable one, although, of course, there is always disagreement on some points. Most of the critics comment upon various aspects of setting, plot, characterization, and style. Of course, in the case of Mrs. Sanguinetti, there is no problem to determining setting, for she invariably uses the small Southern town as a backdrop for her characters' adventures (or misadventures, as they may be called) although an occasional inclusion of such remote places as the Norwegian landscape finds use, for example, in The Dowager, and the major point of action in The New Girl is the Chesney Hall boarding school.

Primarily, though, one may safely say that the small southern town such as exemplified by Ashton, Georgia, is the norm for the Sanguinetti setting.

Plot becomes more difficult to assess than setting. Most reviewers, though, agree that, for this author, plot is always subservient to characterization. The characters influence the plot to such an extent that it becomes almost unimportant for itself and is merely a convenience for the characters' actions. However, as is expected, the plot varies according to the type novel Mrs. Sanguinetti is writing. For example, in The Last of the Whitfields she is attempting to portray the growing-up years of the two Whitfield children, Arthur and Felicia, as seen through the eyes of twelve-year-old Felicia; this trend continues in The New Girl as Felicia is completing her one unsuccessful year at Chesney Hall Boarding School. However, in The Dewarog, the plot changes somewhat and becomes that of a city trying to retain its old way of life and at the same time refusing to let its citizens escape its clutches. Primarily, one has the feeling that the plot is not vastly important but rather a result of the problems encountered by the various characters in their everyday living.

As might be expected, characterization is Elise Sanguinetti's forte. It is in this realm that her first fame

was based when Felicia was introduced to the public through the short story, "To You, Frère Twig," which was eventually expanded into her first sustained novel, The Last of the Whitfields. The characters which she presents are often young aristocratic Southerners who are facing the many problems of adolescence and thus are sometimes compared by critics with those young people in To Kill a Mockingbird and Catcher in the Rye. However, there are striking differences between the Whitfield children and the "typical" Southern youth. The Whitfield children, unlike the others, are presented in pure fun; there is no sordidness or perversion associated with them; they are genuine, everyday children and likeable. Too, the author introduces her characters in an atmosphere of fun and superb humor rather than one of being overwhelmed by the problems of adolescence. Her characters are delightful rather than degenerate.

When one begins to discuss the characters of a story, it is necessary to include an analysis of style, or the method in which the characters are presented. As mentioned before, humor is one of the most outstanding aspects of this author's style. Mrs. Sanguinetti has a delightful sense of humor which she has put to good use in her tremendously funny books. She is amusing and at times hilarious, without allowing her work to drop merely

to the level of a comic book or slapstick humor. Within her scope of humor she often presents her most serious observations, but since it is done with such fun, she can better make the point. This happens with her continuing discussion of race relations, the visit of the Northern newspaperman, and the relationships between various people. One must not think, however, that humor is the only quality at which the author is adept. There are passages which verge on the edge of pathos, as well as times of quiet beauty--times when loneliness is overwhelming and times when one is happy to a point of exuberance. Truly, Mrs. Sanguinetti is a master at presenting almost any mood.

Another strong point with this author is her ability to present authentic dialogue although, ironically, this is also a point which draws much adverse criticism. At times it seems as if she depends too heavily upon its use although she cleverly uses this method to present the opinions of people with differing points of view. Another way of presenting personal opinion as well as information is by having comments made by an outsider as, for example, Mr. Hopper, Dr. Gardner, and Miss Boggs. In this same vein is the author's technique of presenting Arthur's letters to convey information. All of these different

methods help to convey her point without their being monotonous. Thus, it is evident that although there are some conflicting opinions, most critics agree that Mrs. Sanguinetti is indeed a delightfully successful author who has gained approval of an enthusiastic reading public with her fresh new novels. Since her literary talent has not dimmed but rather improved with each new novel, much more can be expected from this Alabama author who now is taking her place alongside other modern authors of the Southern Literary Renaissance.

Just where Mrs. Sanguinetti will be placed in relation to the already recognized younger Southern authors has not yet been determined. She staunchly refuses to call herself a "Southern author," yet because she is a Southerner who writes about the South her works will be subject to classification as being typically Southern. Richard K. Meeker, in an article published in Southern Writers: Appraisals in Our Time, has included eight points which he considers typical for the young Southern writers. Perhaps by comparing Mrs. Sanguinetti's work with this list, one can better judge to what degree she measures up to or falls short of this pattern.¹

¹ For a summary and interpretation of this list, I have relied upon Dr. Ray M. Atchison's "Notes on Contemporary American Literature" [Mimeographed Lecture Notes], Samford University, 1965.

1. According to Meeker, historical novels generally are absent and the Civil War as a subject seems not to interest the authors. This is true according to Mrs. Sanguinetti's work. Although there is a remembrance of the war (and its effect), it is not really present in the various works. There is some historical background in all of her novels, and especially in The Dowager, but it remains atmosphere and the works cannot be considered truly historical in form or emphasis.

2. The stories, generally, are set in the twentieth century, not the antebellum days. Again, this statement is emphatically true regarding all of Mrs. Sanguinetti's novels, although there is an aura of what has gone before such as seen in the descriptions of antebellum houses, farm fields, and Negro servants, for example.

3. The younger writers are interested in the past but show that if a son tries to follow in his father's footsteps, he will be making a mistake. Again, this observation parallels Mrs. Sanguinetti's works. Arthur, the last of the Whitfields, is the only son who is dealt with extensively, but he does not plan to follow in the banking industry like his father who is essentially ineffectual; rather Arthur wants to become a writer and live up North.

4. Orthodox religious belief is strikingly absent.

Here Mrs. Sanguinetti deviates strongly from Mr. Meeker's list, for all of her novels are permeated with a religious quality whether it be in praying for something grand to happen to Arthur, attending a Negro funeral, or just being moved by the beauty of nature and the joy of being alive.

5. There are few aristocrats. Middle or lower class characters are dominant.

Here again, Mrs. Sanguinetti differs from Mr. Meeker's list since her main focus is upon the upper-class families in a small Southern town. Some lower class individuals are included, but this inclusion is merely to express another point of view rather than to dwell upon their way of life.

6. Increasingly the Negro appears in the fiction.

There are Negroes in each of the Sanguinetti novels. Velvet and Leuvenia, the servants in all of the books, hold semi-major positions in the households, and various other Negroes appear in minor roles and in subplots. However, even though there is a limited number of Negroes included, there is a continuous awareness of civil rights involvement throughout all of Mrs. Sanguinetti's novels.

7. There are few urban settings. Rural areas and small towns are dominant. This trait is especially apparent in this author's work. Ashton, Georgia, Charleston,

South Carolina, and similar small communities are the basis of existence for the Sanguinetti characters for whom it would be unthinkable of living in a large urban setting.

8. There is an absence of humor. Here, perhaps, is the most strongly opposed point when considering the works of Elise Sanguinetti, for humor is one of the major traits of her work. She includes wit, slight humor, puns, realism of the commonplace, and just plain funny incidents which combine to form very delightful reading. Thus, although Mrs. Sanguinetti does not follow the Meeker list completely, perhaps enough of its points can be applied to her work to merit her being a follower of this school of writing.

We see, then, that Elise Sanguinetti, the Alabama author who has gained nationwide attention as well as recognition in Canada, Great Britain, and the Scandinavian countries, is claimed by the South as a Southern writer although she wishes to be accepted on merit alone rather than as a regional writer. "I write about people," she says, "about things I know." Regardless of the school to which she does or does not belong, the reading public has found another worthwhile author to follow, and Mrs. Sanguinetti is doing her best not to disappoint her public. She now considers her writing a fulltime assignment and,

with the help of her agent, Candida Donadio, who handles the technical side of publication as well as publicity, keeps very busy. This author, who has enjoyed a more-than-moderate reception, is expected to continue to produce works, for, it seems, each of Mrs. Sanguinetti's works is an improvement in craftsmanship over the one preceding it. She has not yet showed any sign of slowing her pace. If this strength continues, surely Elise Sanguinetti will join the ranks as one of the foremost writers of our time.

Considering her contribution to the literary field, it seems necessary that one know more about this promisingly prolific writer, and this, then, has been the purpose of this thesis: an introduction and interpretation of Elise Sanguinetti.