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Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society by Gerald Graff. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979. Pp. ix + 260. $15.00.

There are several different strands to Gerald Graff's argument in this highly polemical book. But no matter what the strand may be—a discussion of Modern and Postmodern fictions and the differences between them, the New Critics, Herbert Marcuse, the "therapeutic society" of Philip Rieff, or the predominance of language theories in contemporary criticism—they all run irrevocably together: they limn an image of a postromantic culture whose literary excesses reflect a general suspicion of "reason" and "rational understanding" which has itself, in turn, led society to lose contact with "indispensable forms of social and historical understanding." Graff's hope is to "restore the connection" between the "leading forces" of our culture and reason itself: "we will have to revise our literary assumptions" (p. 239).

Because of the cohesive multiplicity of Graff's book, it is difficult to reject parts without rejecting the whole. For his argument that so many of the cultural aspects of the literature and criticism of this century have, in their assaults on the referential aims of writing and reading—to make life intelligible and coherent by rational analysis from the perspective of a unified philosophy of life—created the contemporary cultural crisis by subverting all authority, all tradition, and all coherence—this argument can only be accepted if his analysis of each of the important literary and critical movements is so demonstrative that his conclusions cannot be resisted. In other words, serious flaws in any of the individual analyses can subvert the entire text. If, on the contrary, one believes that Graff's wide-ranging conclusions on behalf of "reason," "intelligibility," and "referentiality" can survive errors in the argument, this is only so because one comes to the text already convinced—convinced of a series of statements which are unarguably value-judgments whose "inevitability" demands detailed and unquestionable demonstration. But, unfortunately, there are many specific objections to Graff's book which undermine its value by making it impossible to agree *rationally* with the line of his arguments and his conclusions.

Many partisans on one side or the other of this hydra-headed question of referentiality and "reason" will accept or reject Graff's book out-of-hand. Certain of his sympathizers have already wished that he had been more careful and graceful—here and there. And, of course, the "uncanny" critics, as Hillis Miller calls the "deconstructors," will be largely unaffected by *Literature Against Itself* because it is not a powerful enough text to dislodge them from their various "deconstructive" projects. When placed in the context of these groups especially, *Literature Against Itself* appears as only another battle (or is it rifle-shot?) in the tiresome war between "humanistic" and "avant-garde" critics. But, of course, this struggle—recently spotlighted by the debate between M. H. Abrams

and Hillis Miller and their friends—should not be considered only in this spotlit context or even in the slightly broader (and slightly yellow) spotlight of such popular reviews as *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, or *The American Scholar*. For whether we like it or not, the responsibility for literature is, as much as it has ever been, now in the hands of the universities where the assumptions and questions regarding literature and society are worked out in practice everyday in and out of the classroom. The success or failure of Graff's book, of his project and program, will be determined by how it is received and *used* in the academy. For this use will tell truly how the "war" between "referential humanists" and "avant-garde revisionists" is going, how the literary, cultural, and political sysmpathies of the society are moving: toward partisan acceptance or rejection or toward a more "objective" understanding of what specific literary and critical texts represent in a culture at any given time. To begin to understand what *Literature Against Itself* represents one must see initially that it is seriously flawed in its assumptions, methods, and conclusions and one must then ask what *interest* might account for these flaws in an intelligent, largely well-informed, and sometimes subtle text.

For example: it is a central thesis of Graff's book that the decentered, pluralistic, non-referential literary-critical theory and practice of Modernity and Postmodernity is itself a product of advanced capitalism; more specifically, it is an attempted revision of capitalism's repressive, scientific, representational culture which has *itself* been made captive by late capitalism and, hence, has become the new orthodoxy of consumer society. Modern revisionists have been only partially (at best) aware of their cooptation precisely because their cultural rebellion and capitalism's needs have destroyed any fixed order of norms against which the usurpation of Modernity's revisionist aesthetic can be seen as such. "One of my central arguments," writes Graff, "is that the real 'avant-garde' is advanced capitalism, with its built-in need to destroy all vestiges of tradition, all orthodox ideologies, all continuous and stable forms of reality in order to stimulate higher levels of consumption" (p. 8). Since space prevents a detailed critique of Graff's book, this issue must serve as an example of the type of problem which denies *Literature Against Itself* the authority it so desperately desires.

First of all, this argument requires great methodological rigor. Without a sustained analysis of "advanced capitalism" to tell us what it is, the argument is groundless. We find it nowhere in the text although there are passing references to Lukacs (in highly problematic contexts), H. M. Enzensberger, and, tellingly, Daniel Bell. In place of analytic descriptions of advanced capitalism, Graff provides mere assertions about its character. This is a crucial omission in the substantive and methodological underpinnings of the book. But beyond even this runs a strand of epistemological and methodological naiveté. For example, even though Graff has not described the economic base of our society, he asserts repeatedly that the cultural superstructure is a mirror of it. This "base-superstructure" metaphor has been so problematic for so long that one wonders why Graff feels he can use it so innocently. His way of thinking about the relation of culture and economy is, unfortunately, simplistic; it is heavily dependent on the straightforward metaphors of "mirroring" and "anal-

ogy" (pp. 96-97). He writes as if the theoretical advances in dealing with these problems made by Gramsci, Althusser, Macherey, Elias, and even Foucault did not exist. His procedure is always one of "common-sense."

But is it not equally "common-sensical" for Graff to ask how it is that he and some few other neo-conservatives (Christopher Lasch, Wayne Booth, and Daniel Bell) *escape* the captivity of history and "advanced captalism" to tell us about its horrors? Graff repeatedly argues that careful attention to the claims that literature is non-referential, a kind of play, absurdity, merely a semiotic system of codes, the endless substitution of signs reveals that they always rest on a *referential* assertion about the world: it is too chaotic to understand, language can no longer directly refer, or whatever. Thus, Graff argues, the revisionists contradict themselves at their own foundations. But such an argument is essentially only a powerful debater's trick which confuses levels of discourse and produces apparent contradiction. Yet it reveals Graff's tendency to turn the arguments of others back against themselves and, hence, it authorizes others to do the same to him–but on more serious grounds. And when one does, one is too often surprised to find not only that he can be "trapped" just as easily by this debater's trick, but also that the blind spots in his argument create substantial problems. For if advanced capitalism has so powerfully coopted (or produced) the non-referential exertions of a Beckett, Roland Barthes, John Barth, the New Critics, Northrop Frye, James Joyce and T. S. Eliot to some degree–how then has Graff escaped? Wherein lies his power and privilege? By what authority has he raised himself out of the superstructure of advanced capitalism so that he can see it clear and whole?

There are at least two problems here: one is that Graff does not seem aware that one conclusion of his own position is that his own work is a product and reflection of late capitalism, i. e., it is itself part of the pluralism of a consumer society despite its lamentations over the demise of a coherent bourgeois society–it is, after all, on one level, only another commodity being bought and sold in the spotlit academic arena; the other problem is that Graff does not explain by what authority he and a few others have been granted access to stable norms by virtue of which it is possible to see all of the rest of Postmodern culture as "distorted," not just different, as "degenerate," not just unauthorized. What are these norms? Where do they come from? Why has Graff been blessed with an awareness of them? What is the source of his so palpably present anxiety over the loss of central authority, of order, of clear "boundaries" (p. 15)? Modern economy has made the world unreal, and we can only be aware of this by comparison to something more real. Passing over the historical errors, one can still find the following statement illuminating: "People in the nineteenth century could see this fact more easily than we can today, for they could perceive the incursion of this capitalist reality as a profound change–in contrast to what still remained of the feudal order" (pp. 8-9). Taken in the context of other similar remarks, one can see from this statement where Graff's (ideological) sympathies lie–sympathies which control his literary-critical discussions: with a patriarchal, hierarchical "reality" whose presence, or whose lingering memory, functions as a contrasting ideal against which to measure the unreality of our revisionist world. Clearly, what is important in all of this is not

Graff's nostalgia, which is pronounced and barely obscured by his anger, but his arrogance. This arrogance appears not only in the privileged tone and position he adopts, but in the belittling, leveling attitude he assumes toward all those who deny the priority of "reason," "reality," and "order." "To repudiate art's representational function," he writes, "is not necessarily to leave no link between art and reality, but it is to reduce reality to a trivial role in the relationship" (p. 17). This implies that all of Graff's antagonists have wrongheadedly *denied* the common-sense priority of "reality" as a matter of (perverse) will. Graff is not only not very careful about his definitions—what "reality" means is evident to "common-sense"—but he shows how violent "common-sense" can be. For he is not generous enough to admit that there may be a non-common-sensical *lived-reality* for some who have the misfortune not to be attuned to "norms." Graff's common-sense judgments of reality and of its antagonists willfully exclude the lived-experience of those for whom, e. g., the world and man *are* semiotic structures. Graff's humanistic common-sense violently denies these different "realities" their legitimacy. The irony, of course, is that many of these anti-referential theories are clearly as "real" as Graff's own *inherited* ideas—ideas Kierkegaard would identify with the crowd and Heidegger with the public world of *das Man*. In the name of the wisdom of his fathers, Graff condemns a world without wisdom, without the conditions for it, a world without the necessary remnants of the past to build a future. The arrogance of common-sense is self-parody and low comedy.

The most important and dangerous aspect of *Literature Against Itself* is its concern with authority—a danger that its self-parody will not drive away. Repeating the neo-conservative critiques of Bell and Lasch, Graff claims that the "relativizing of belief" which defines Modernity does not actually free man from systems of repression and oppression, as is claimed, but, in fact, actually "dissolves the authority of anything that tries to resist these systems..." (p. 189). Advances in criticism, for example, which give priority to the act of reading in the constitution of "meaning" reduce the "author-ity" of a text and of a writer's intention; it reduces "meaning" to a multiplicity of "readings" (pp. 156 ff.). Criticism, in this way, extends the decentralization of authoritative coherence which Graff hopes to re-establish. In fact, he claims that the theories of impotence common to Modernity—it is impossible to produce one or a few authorized meanings; any reading is as good as any other; they are all "misreadings"—unknowingly extend the hegemony of late capitalism and, in fact, in this way, gain power. Graff is correct on one level in saying that the "adversary culture" is now "indistinguishable" from the "adversary," but the statement is too crude and incomplete. Where, for example, would one place Foucault (whom Graff pointedly neglects)? Is he the same as Marcuse and the New Critics? Where does one put Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva, perhaps the two most important and innovative semioticians? Graff must consider them in detail before he can reject semiotics out-of-hand (or is it second-hand?). The rejection of semiotics without a consideration of its central figures and theories reveals how Graff is indeed doing little more than crudely repeating the received wisdom of those whose own interests are threatened by revision and innovation (cf. pp. 177 ff.). This accepted wisdom might have been made a

bit more self-reflexive and a bit less blatant in its self-interest if Graff had been more aware of the complexities of the contemporary intellectual scene—a scene filled with figures more aware, more informed, and sophisticated than he is. (Compare, for example, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* with Graff on the problems of power and knowledge.)

Yet we must recognize that Graff is also bidding for authority by claiming that his position is powerlessness—but doing it all the time from the advantage of the still powerful rhetoric of "reality" and "common-sense." Whatever appeal *Literature Against Itself* has to the academy will be the result of the power of its conversative rhetoric in a time of increasingly uncomfortable cultural circumstance for the right—but a time, nonetheless, marked by the increasing vigor and voracity of the right. Errors in the interpretation of Kant (p. 38), lack of definition of key terms, failures to confront Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and others, the questionable priority assigned to Marcuse, Poirier, and Sontag as representatives of Postmodernism—all of these flaws will count for little if the authority of the conservative rhetoric is not exposed for what it is—an ideological attempt to regain social "harmony" by appealing to the past and its notions of social (bourgeois) order. It must be said that the negativism of this book—a book which essentially exists only as a parasite on major positive work done by others—is a sign of the dangerous movement of American academic intellectuals to the right, to the past, and away from the potentialities for the future contained in an admittedly somewhat uncertain present.

Since Graff is fond of affiliating Lukacs to his position, it is worth ending with a quotation from his 1920 essay, "The Old Culture and the New Culture": "In bemoaning the collapse of the capitalist order, the bourgeoisie most often claims that its real concern is with the perishing of culture; it formulates its defense of its class interests as if the basis of these interests were the eternal values of culture."

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Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film by Seymour Chatman. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978. Pp. 277. $14.50.

Chatman's *Story and Discourse* is a structuralist poetics of narrative, bringing together in a comprehensive, methodical way various elements of structuralist theory of narrative as it has developed over the last fifty years, and especially in the syntagmatic studies of the sixties by theorists of the French group: Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, and Tzvetan Todorov. The "story" and "discourse" of the title are the structures of substance and expression, respectively, of narrative in whatever medium; "story" consists of the signifiers and signifieds—the latter the "events" and "existents" of narrative—while "discourse" consists of the precise means and modes of their transmission, the techniques by which the events and existents are organized and focused: principally, it emerges, what was called in New Critical parlance "point of view." After a general theoretical

introduction, the book is about equally divided between consideration of story and discourse.

In his chapters on story Chatman painstakingly defines and illustrates such concepts as "sequence," "contingency," "causality," "veresimilitude," and "motivation" in the context of implied audiences' cultural assumptions about "reality" as well as fictionality. His discussion of the relations of "story time" and "discourse time," derived from Genette's and finely illustrated with analysis of examples from familiar novels and films, is the most coherent and readable I have found, as is his thoughtful consideration of the unresolved problems raised by attempts to construct typologies of plots. Those of Aristotle, Frye, Crane, Propp, Todorov, and Bremond are specifically reviewed, concluding with Chatman's warning that more detailed analysis of the form/content relations of narratives in the separate genres (such as Barthes' *S/Z*) remains to be done before a convincing typology can be formulated.

Chatman's discussion of space—"story space" and "discourse space"—in which the existents (characters and settings) of both fiction and film have their being illuminates a basic aspect of narrative that, like time, has often been obscure in theorizing. Tracing the history of theory of character from Aristotle through the modern structuralists, Chatman advocates an "open theory of character" which treats "characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions," and provides a detailed definition and grid of "traits" to be used in describing characters and distinguishing between "events" and "traits" in the structure of a text (not as easy as one might suppose, as Chatman's examples show). Drawing again upon Barthes' *S/Z*, Chatman defends the legitimacy of A. C. Bradley's much-maligned psychological method as a "useful and natural way to analyze characters," so long as one remembers that the characters are not "real" people but only, in R. S. Crane's term, "concrete semblances" which we interpret in part by our knowledge of what "real" people are like: "Iago is 'cold,' not cold." The exposition of setting also introduces useful criteria, although in the end Chatman has to recommend further development of "heuristic principles of categorization."

Most of the second half of Chatman's book is devoted to what he calls the "discourse," or "expression plane" of narrative, its "set of narrative statements . . . a certain posture in ballet, a series of film shots, a whole paragraph in a novel, or only a single word." Having divided such statements into "process" and "stasis" statements in his introduction, Chatman moves here immediately into the questions of "mediation," and of the supposed dichotomy of showing and telling, which he prefers to see as combined in a "spectrum of possibilities" ranging from "non-narrated" to maximally narrated. He gives substantial attention to a "fascinating new personage on the aesthetic horizon," the "narratee" (discovered, Chatman says, by Gerald Prince), the personage to whom the story is intentionally told or written.

The whole discussion of narration is facilitated by an incisive demonstration of the relevance of speech-act theory to analysis of various types of narrative statements, and Chatman surveys the various permutations of narrators with clarifying expositions of a number of the vexed terms: "interior monologue," "stream of consciousness," "indirect free style." One of the most stimulating and

potentially useful sections is that on different kinds of narratorial commentary: interpretive, judgmental, generalizing, and self-reflexive.

It is possible to object to particular points: Chatman's treatment of the implied author seems to me a misconstruction of Booth's original definition in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, and his bald assertion that events, characters, and "details of setting" are the *only* signifieds of narrative statements is at best arguable. Many readers are likely to feel a certain discomfort with the basic division posited between the structure of substance and the structure of the telling (the place of narratorial commentary, for example, is not altogether clearly in one camp or the other). However, Chatman's scheme is remarkably workable for the description and comparison of individual texts. We do well to recall the linguists' maxim: "all grammars leak." This one proves buoyant and serviceable, nonetheless.

Although written texts are the primary loci of Chatman's examples, the references to film are illuminating, not so much as contributions to a complete theory of film narrative, but as contrasting to the literary examples and further clarifying what is essential to narrativity per se. Oddly enough given Chatman's previous work on style, he devotes little attention to it here, except in the analysis of direct and indirect representation of speech and mental experience, thus implying that style is not essential to the structural study of narrative. The second half of the book is marred by uncorrected errors, some of them jarring (why should Ford's Dowell appear as "Dowling," Joyce's "Two Gallants" as "The Gallants"?); and the placing of the footnotes at the bottom of the pages, while welcome in itself, causes problems when there is no bibliography and no indexing of many individual secondary works and editors.

I have summarized the contents of *Story and Discourse* at length in part simply to support Chatman's contention that he has dealt, in a reasoned, thorough way, with all the fundamental issues pertaining to the structures of any and all narrative texts, and in part to demonstrate how conservative and common-sensical a theorist he turns out to be. His book aims, successfully, at the advanced student and teacher of literature who have read *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Nature of Narrative*, and perhaps some work of the Russian and French formalist-structuralist schools. For the most part Chatman resists being drawn into the vocabulary, or the equations and models of post-structuralist semiotics and deconstruction, or even of the more extreme positions of his mentors. He puts into perspective much structuralist thought on narrative and provides a refurbished taxonomy and a method for comparison and interpretation of narratives in the same or related genres. Because the book is so clearly written, and its examples so elegantly analyzed to demonstrate the theory, because it relates itself so firmly to the tradition inherited from Aristotle, it bids to become required reading for students of narrative, taking its place on the reserve shelves beside *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, *The Nature of Narrative*, and Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*, perhaps giving them a nudge into still-respected but less central positions.

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Dionysos Slain by Marcel Detienne, translated by Mireille Muellner and Leonard Muellner. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 130. $10.95.

This book, a translation of *Dionysos mis à mort* (1977), is a collection of four essays on classical mythology, united more by their author's structuralist methodology than by any intrinsic relationship. The second chapter excepted, all first appeared as articles between 1973 and 1975. The introductory essay ("The Greeks Aren't Like the Others"), in the guise of a structuralist manifesto, is in fact a witty and incisive polemic against traditional philology's historicist treatment of classical mythology and its sentimental idealization of classical culture. This opening broadside reverberates throughout the book's later pages. Its combativeness bears unhappy witness to the uncompromising hostility between the vast majority of traditional classicists and the structuralist left-wing. Yet Detienne is an excellent philologist himself: his mastery of the ancient materials is profound, his traditional techniques faultless when he chooses to use them, and his scholarship impeccable. But too often he refuses to make use of traditional philological techniques that would in fact help to validate his structuralist analysis.

Such intransigence undermines his most stimulating essay, "The Orphic Dionysos and Roasted Boiled Meat" (ch. 4). Here, in a brilliant and complex argument, Detienne holds that the Orphic myth in which the Titans dismember, boil, roast, and sacrificially devour the infant Dionysus is articulated in a culinary code whose message is to attack and subvert "the whole politicoreligious system." That system was allegedly based on the blood sacrifice of animals and the community's feast on their flesh. Marshaling the most far-flung evidence from over a thousand year period, Detienne carefully maps the many significant variations and oppositions the myth expresses contrary to normal culinary and sacrificial practice in ancient Greece. Thus, he demonstrates that the myth's insistence on boiling followed by roasting contradicts the mandatory sequence of the state sacrifice. For the Orphics to create this myth was to deny a history of culture from bestiality to civilization which was symbolically condensed in that sacrifice and represented man's mediatory position between gods and beasts. While the "totalization" of ethnographic context is the cornerstone of Detienne's argument, his obdurate insistence on synchronic analysis and his adamant rejection of what he derides as historicism needlessly weaken this esay. He treats the "politicoreligious system" and Orphism as monoliths, seemingly the same in all places and at all times, and texts are consulted as evidence without regard for provenance or milieu. But Greek cities and their "politicoreligious systems" differed greatly from one another, changing historically in very important ways; nor are all the ancient sources equally trustworthy or of the same value; finally, "Orphism" and its doctrines are open to the widest scholarly debate and confusion, the ancient sources rife with contradictions, obscurities, and deliberate fabrications. To make his argument work, Detienne must unbend enough to submit such generalizations about Greek politics and religion to a tougher *Quellenkritik* and a more rigorous philological and historical analysis. It is possible to do so without vitiating in any way his important insights.

Unfortunately, too, the argumentation of the various essays relies more on

rhetoric than on logic. Important evidence and analysis are laid down side by side and too often the only bridge is a rhetorical, not a logical connection. This weakness is most obvious in the book's longest essay, "The Perfumed Panther" (ch. 2), in essence an examination of Ovid's versions of the Atalanta and Adonis myth: "As a liminal place where socially dominant sexual relations are as if suspended, the land of the hunt is open to subversion of amorous pursuits, whatever their process or modality" (p. 26). It is a provocative treatment, but frustrating in its amorphousness.

Yet despite such shortcomings, this book represents a major advance in the study of classical mythology. What remains to be done is more fully to integrate structuralist or semiotic methods and techniques into traditional classical scholarship. This approach is long overdue.

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Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia by Richard McCoy. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 230. $14.00.

The mythologizing of Sir Philip Sidney after his death as an Elizabethan culture-hero has its counterpart in his critical mystification as an intellectual-literary saint. The respect and attention this author now receives are well-deserved: considering most of the literature written in his own lifetime, his fiction, poetry, and criticism are an historically remarkable achievement. But the kind of revisionist analysis Richard McCoy sets out to do in his study is long overdue. He detects in this writer's political life of "noble failure" (p. 9) unresolvable conflicts between autonomy and submission that manifest themselves in the "inconclusive development, thematic contradictions, and problems of closure" (p. 26) of the major works. Because Sidney could not or would not reconcile, for example, his need to exercise political initiative with the demand for prudent submission to monarchical authority, McCoy argues, works like the *Old Arcadia* and the unfinished *New Arcadia* "culminate in a pattern of ambivalence and evasion" (p. 216), the latter work incomplete supposedly because Sidney refused to come to the "harrowing conclusions" (p. 163) towards which he was moving. McCoy perceptively discusses the complex conflicts of sympathy and judgment Sidney creates for his reader, noting that this author's demand for good will from his audience is one attempt at disguising (at the end of the *Old Arcadia*, for instance) the disturbing conflicts between romantic rewards and moral realities. Both formalist and historical critics have tried to explain away such problems in Sidney's work.

Tactfully employing psychoanalytic insights, McCoy delineates Sidney's personal style in all its self-destructive magnificence—a combination of passive aggression and romantic heroism that is largely the product of sociopolitical failure. He argues that this style and the the literature that reflects it should be understood in the context of "the evasive, contradictory tendencies of Elizabethan culture" (p. 214). But what this study sorely needs is a better articu-

lation of this historical matrix, definitions of the necessarily inconsistent Elizabethan sociocultural codes that would allow us to read Sidney's prose and poetry with a better sense of their culture-specific meanings. McCoy's discussions of the ending of the *Old Arcadia*, of the development of the episodes added in the second book of the *New Arcadia*, and of the third book of the revised romance are critically sensitive and informative, but he usually relates the persistent conflicts between autonomy and submission to Sidney's biography and to such intellectual traditions as the Huguenot theory of subaltern magistracy and Calvinist moral determinism, rather than to the specific sociopolitical rules and dynamics of late Elizabethan England. His treatment of *Astrophil and Stella* (the weakest section of the book) would have benefitted from an examination of the precise personal and social contexts of these coterie poems: we need to understand how, for Sidney and his original readers, the vocabulary of love was encoded by sociopolitical realities in such a way that it could express effectively his frustrated ambitions.

McCoy is right to direct our attention to the Elizabethan court in which the problematic relationship of courtier and Queen produced characteristic forms of aggression and passivity, heroic posturing and impotent frustration—all captured in the anachronistic feudal ceremonials of the courtly tournaments and tilts in which Sidney himself participated. But before we can finish the work of demystifying this author—i. e. disentangling his work from the culturally- and self-generated myths that saturate it—we must extend the analysis McCoy has begun in his book by taking a hard and systematic look at Elizabethan culture and society. The result may be, as McCoy's conclusions suggest, a less aesthetically neat and coherent Sidney, but it should be a more fascinatingly problematic one.

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The Living Temple: George Herbert and Catechizing by Stanley Fish. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978. Pp. ix + 201. $11.50.

In this modestly-proportioned book Stanley Fish seeks a way of talking about Herbert's poetry that will do justice to the "simultaneous presence . . . of order and surprise." Too many critics of Herbert's poetry, Fish says, emphasize one of these elements at the expense of the other, and he asks how it is "that the same body of poetry has been the basis for reaching contradictory, but equally persuasive, interpretive conclusions." The thesis of his book is "that the answer to this question will be found in the forms, concerns, and conventions of the Reformation cathechism."

Herbert himself was a catechist, of course, and in *A Priest to the Temple* he tells us something of his method. Unlike many of his Protestant contemporaries, Herbert regarded catechizing as (in Fish's words) a "strategy" rather

than an "examination." The goal of Herbert's catechizing is "not the orderly disposition of a body of knowledge, but the arrival at that knowledge of a respondent who has come to it himself." Let us substitute "poet" and "reader" for "catechist" and "pupil," suggests Fish, and we will see that "rather than being a sincere report of a mind in the act of changing, the poem is a sincere effort on the part of the poet-catechist to change his reader-pupil's mind." Hence the "order and surprise": the order is that of the poet-catechist, the surprise the reader-pupil's.

Not only individual poems, but the three-part structure of *The Temple* and the metaphor of the temple itself are best understood against the background of the catechistical tradition. What Fish calls the "rhetoric of templehood" informs many of the popular catechisms, as in this introductory prayer to John Mayer's abridged catechism in 1623:

> Thou which art the Master-builder of thine owne house, settle me as one of thy living stones upon the right foundation, Jesus Christ; in whom I may daily grow up, till that all the building coupled together, groweth to an holy Temple in the Lord.

And in the ambiguity of the word "building" (is it a verbal, signifying "work to be done" or a noun, signifying "work done"?) Fish finds the "same contradiction that we shall find at the heart of Herbert's poetry... that is, in its equivocation between a structure that is precarious, shifting, and unfinished (work to be done) and a structure that is firm, secure, and complete (work already done)."

Further evidence that *The Temple* was composed on a cathechistical model Fish finds in "The Church Porch" and "The Church Militant." "The Church Porch" corresponds to the instruction that catechumens in the early church received before being baptized and to the preparations that Christians of Herbert's day should make before receiving communion. And the content of "The Church Militant" "corresponds perfectly to a standard feature of the early catechisms, the *narratio* or 'history of salvation' as it is embodied in the career of the Church."

Despite Fish's claim that his interpretation explains more of *The Temple* than rival ones, the number of poems he actually analyzes is very small indeed, and ninety-seven of the hundred and sixty-nine are not even mentioned by him, among them "Aaron," "Affliction 2, 3, 4, and 5," "The Bag," "The Collar," "Employment 1 and 2," "Peace," "The Pulley," "Redemption," "The Temper 2," and "Vanitie 1." Fish could of course talk about these poems as brilliantly as anyone if he wanted to; it is not at all clear, however, that his discussion of them would be illuminated by reference to the catechistical tradition. Of the poems he does talk about, his method, as might be expected, is more successful with some than with others. Readers who want to test the method for themselves should read the discussion of "Love III" on pp. 131-136.

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William Hazlitt: Critic of Power by John Kinnaird. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Pp xv + 429. $22.50.

When Walter Jackson Bate assigned a prominent place to Hazlitt in his influential anthology, *Criticism: the Major Texts* (1952), he set in motion a reassessment of Hazlitt's work and of his place among the great critics from Dryden to Arnold. Since then, two biographies and two studies dealing with Hazlitt's critical ideas have considerably sharpened the picture, and now (timed to coincide with the second centenary of Hazlitt's birth in 1778) John Kinnaird offers us a comprehensive biography of the mind of this most versatile of writers. Criticism, in this instance, must be understood in the widest sense of the term, to include "philosophy, politics and society, painting and theater, manners and morality and religion," as well as literature. And it is Hazlitt's conception of power—political, psychological, and artistic-creative—that runs like a guideline throughout this widely ranging discussion. The book explores with admirable clarity the life of a passionate mind engaged in the intellectual and political turbulence of the time. It portrays an astute and influential critic.

But it also has another aim. It is intent on rehabilitating Hazlitt's reputation in relation to his famous contemporaries and, further, on proving his "centrality" in English Romanticism. Bate, who thought that Hazlitt's importance had indeed been underrated, presented him as "easily the most representative critic in English romanticism." But Kinnaird goes further; he insists on moving Hazlitt practically to the center of Romantic theory. As a result, a tone of defensiveness enters the discussion. Kinnaird becomes overly sensitive to the familiar charges: that Hazlitt practices a kind of critical impressionism in his description of paintings, that he is merely a character critic when he writes about Shakespeare, that the early disciple of Coleridge and Wordsworth, however rebellious, never became a great critic in his own right. He reprimands not only such "insulting" detractors as George Watson but also the merely restrained admirers of Hazlitt who do not quite appreciate, or else do not quite understand, his originality as a theorist and practical critic. In a spirited peroration, he claims, among other things, that Hazlitt "stands unrivalled as the English critic with the best (that is, most consistently confirmed) record of judgment." In short, Professor Kinnaird is generally more convincing as interpreter of Hazlitt's work than as guardian of his reputation.

ALFRED SCHWARZ

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George Eliot and the Visual Arts by Hugh Witemeyer. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 238. $19.50.

Of all the novelists whose greatness is an article of faith, George Eliot is most in danger of impalement on her own wise aphorisms. Many of her most serious readers even today would echo Henry James' reservations in the *Atlantic Monthly* that her novels emerge strenuously from her "moral consciousness": "They are

deeply studied and elaborately justified, but they are not *seen* in the irresponsible plastic way." Insofar as Hugh Witemeyer acknowledges that seeing is an irresponsible act, his study of George Eliot and the visual arts breaks important ground. He defines persuasively the essential pictoralism of George Eliot's imagination, painstakingly recovering the works of art that were important to her, the values she found in them, and the ways in which they might have influenced her novels.

It is good to recover the visual and tactile base of novels that are too readily paraphrased into abstractions. Witemeyer's pioneering beginning is disappointing only in the modesty with which it insists on its own boundaries. Like James's George Eliot, Witemeyer limits his discussion of art to the morally paraphrasable. He himself refuses to approach his material in "the irresponsible plastic way" indispensable to important criticism as well as to art, eschewing the "intuitive school" of theoretical exploration he associates with Mario Praz in favor of a meticulously limited listing of works Eliot is known to have admired. He leaves us still in need of a study, not of sources and influences, but of the essentially visual nature of George Eliot's perceptions, and the ways in which these tend to subvert her overt moral positions. Witemeyer does not venture beyond the knowable; all his material is worked into consistent moral schemes, a method of limited value in approaching a novelist as sensitive as George Eliot was to the indefinable power of the senses, the omnipresence of mystery and dread.

In the mainstream of Eliot criticism, with its proclivity for what in Eliot is amenable to modern thought, Witemeyer is a maverick: he adheres staunchly to the boundaries of the past, placing Eliot in a context of mid-Victorian aesthetic assumptions. He refuses to approach her work with the surgical audacity of a Leavis, willing to amputate the novels, if necessary, in order to provide us with material to which we can respond. Witemeyer's Eliot must be taken whole and Victorian, even if she is often undigestable. Despite the infusions of light that so often dissolve contour at crucial moments in her fiction, Witemeyer will not even allow Eliot to be seen as a proto-Impressionist: her taste in art was that of her age, representational and often full of cumbersome allegory. By our lights, he admits, she seems a naive art critic, but he insists upon the limitations of the Eliot he discovers. In his depiction of her taste as in his total concept, the integrity and the incompleteness of the book lie in its fidelity to its own limitations.

Much of Witemeyer's research is interesting and helpful. A solid discussion of Eliot and genre painting breaks down our easy stereotypes of her affinities with Dutch art, which actually influenced her very little; Witemeyer is precise in his delineation of the sorts of genre painting that were important to her. The strongest discussion is a long, complex anatomy of varieties and philosophies of portraiture as it influenced, ambivalently, Eliot's characterizations. Witemeyer is shrewd in his association of portraiture both with exemplary human types, echoing Eliot's own need to uncover the human ideal in the real, and with an aristocracy that seemed to her increasingly effete and decadent. Thus, in her own portraits, we see her religious humanism at war with her social disgust. The book could do more with the class connotations of various forms of art, both in Eliot's works and in her times. It lays the groundwork for such a study, as well as for a

bolder, more theoretical and cross-generic exploration of the sort Witemeyer repudiates as "intuitive." For Witemeyer limits himself to what George Eliot knew and said, ignoring the complex visual achievements of her novels. Finally, we learn yet again that she was a Christian humanist, her exemplary visual pictorialism leading the reader to a moral apprehension of the real. All this indefatigable spadework leads to little that is new.

The importance of Witemeyer's topic, the interest of his research, but their dissipation in innocuous conclusions may spring in part from his insistence upon George Eliot as a representative Victorian rather than a woman out of her time as well as within it. He tends to see her exclusively as a composite of others' influences. He defines her aesthetic as virtually identical with Ruskin's, which itself is pruned of many divisions and ambiguities, and unblushingly identifies her opinions on all conceivable topics with those of George Henry Lewes. It seems unwise as well as uninteresting to define as her lover's mouthpiece a novelist who wrote so scathingly about docile women; here as elsewhere, the Eliot Witemeyer elides seems a richer figure for study. Of her decision not to have children, he writes highhandedly that it "suggests that she considered illegitimacy too cruel a handicap to be imposed upon the innocent" (p. 124). Since little suggests that Eliot ever wanted children, this argument hangs on a tenuous thread. This sort of banal misconception of her character limits Witemeyer's study of both woman and artist. Since he shows so little interest in the actual visual effects of the novels, a potentially interesting chapter on Leighton's illustrations of *Romola* (Eliot's only novel to be illustrated) becomes extraneous, a study of Leighton alone rather than of his visual techniques in relation to the author's. Similarly, Witemeyer often substitutes Eliot's own pious rationalizations for the innovation and complexity of her actual accomplishments. One feels throughout that he is most at ease with George Eliot when she is placed at second hand.

For all that it does not do, Witemeyer's book is important in that it opens for further study the wonderful topic of Victorian "wordpainting." We have much to learn about the readerly response to Victorian painting, and our ingrained revulsion against "purple prose" has kept us from appreciating the intense pictorialism of all Victorian literature. Most of all, we need to understand the marriage between the verbal and the visual to which so much Victorian art aspires. Though Witemeyer's shunning of "intuitive criticism" gives him a myopia that weakens this early tentative cross-generic study, I hope that many readers and future writers will follow him through the door he has opened.

NINA AUERBACH

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The New Woman and the Victorian Novel by Gail Cunningham. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978. Pp. viii + 172. $21.50.

Olive Schreiner: Feminism on the Frontier by Joyce Avrech Berkman. St. Alban's, Vermont:Eden Press Women's Publications, Inc., 1979. Pp. 88. $11.00.

At the beginning of *Woman and Labour* (1911), Olive Schreiner states that "wherever there is a general attempt on the part of women of any society to readjust their position in it, a close analysis will always show that the changed or changing conditions of that society have made woman's acquiescence no longer necessary or desirable." Her declaration would make an excellent epigraph for both of the books under review. The "New Woman" phenomenon in late nineteenth-century literature could never have occurred if social conditions had not already changed so much that new women of some kind were necessary for the survival of society. So too, Olive Schreiner's contemporary fame and present-day obscurity rest in part on her embodiment of her generation's attempt to change the conditions of that society. Both of these books are to be welcomed as part of a larger revaluation of literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Although the authors leave many questions unanswered, they have laid a solid foundation for others to follow.

The New Woman and the Victorian Novel begins with a description of the themes of "Marriage, Morality and the Model Woman" to be found in Victorian fiction. Since Cunningham is outlining dominant sterotypes she concentrates on such minor fiction as *East Lynne* (1861), *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) and *Ruth* (1853). The passive, pure or priggish women described will be familiar to all readers of Victorian fiction, though many might feel that Cunningham has oversimplified the issues in an effort to demonstrate convincingly what the New Woman fiction was revolting against. Far more useful is her succinct and effective analysis of the works of Grant Allen (author of the notorious *The Woman Who Did* [1895]), Sarah Grand, "Iota," and Emma Brooke, the most famous proponents of the new fiction. All of these writers, and many others, achieved fame and large sales during the mid-nineties for advocating a new model of sexual purity. A New Woman was to be educated in regard to sexual matters (the effects of syphilis was a frequent theme) so as to understand and wisely control her own—and her lover's—sexual impulses. This call for sexual education was accompanied by a vigorous attack on the current forms of marriage. This, far more than the question of redefining purity, aroused more traditional critics against the New Woman fiction. Grant Allen's "woman who did" refuses to marry on principle, though she remains intensely faithful to her chosen lover; she bears a lifetime of social ostracism for her fidelity. One of the central paradoxes of this fiction, particularly well analyzed by Cunningham, is the emphasis on the necessity of greater freedom for women and the concurrent price that must be paid by its pioneers. Death, nervous disorders and unhappiness dogged these idealistic women.

Many readers will be most interested in the chapters on Hardy, Meredith and Gissing, discussing the ways in which these men—all "major" writers in contrast to the almost exclusively female "minor" writers—used the New Woman theme for their own purposes. They shared with their contemporaries the prevailing

discontent with sexual mores and marriage, but in all three Cunningham traces a preference for traditional female virtues, untouched by modern corrupting ideas. Everard Barfoot, in *The Odd Women* (1893), has endless examples of men destroyed by the ignorant behavior of their wives. Even Widdowson, clinging to Ruskinian notions of wifely duty, is actually correct in assuming that Monica is untrue to him in thought, if not in deed. But we never see the effects of drunken or feckless husbands on upright women, as we do in the stories of George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne). Hardy's women no matter how high spirited and intelligent, are also temptresses entrapping men so that they never fulfill their ambitions. Indeed, capriciousness and childishness characterize virtually all of Hardy's heroines. No wonder contemporary feminists saw Hardy's heroines as "men's women," and disliked the "irresistable fascination" so many male critics praised.

Cunningham's work has many strengths, which make its weaknesses more disappointing. Although the literary links between the popular and the prominent writers are well sketched, Cunningham has narrowed her terms of reference too exclusively to the literary and therefore has failed to place her theme in the necessary wider context. The relationship of this "new" literature to the social and political movements of the times is barely considered. Emma Brooke, author of *The Superfluous Woman* (1894), was an early student at Newnham and an active Fabian. Sarah Grand was a leader in the suffragist cause. Why sexuality and marriage came under attack during these years is never explored. Nor is the abrupt decline in interest in these issues in the late nineties (Oscar Wilde's trial and the consequent suppressing of sexual freedom are not mentioned). *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* suffers from the modesty of its aims; a more ambitious theoretical base which included social and literary relationships would have made this a major work.

The absence of Olive Schreiner from Cunningham's book is symptomatic of its weaknesses. Schreiner (1855-1920) is mysteriously forgotten, perhaps, as Joyce Berkman says, because she doesn't fit into any category. She initiated the New Woman theme in *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), and wrote widely on sexuality, feminism, eugenics, imperialism and socialism. In her life and works she embodied many of the goals the fictional heroines of Cunningham's book struggled so ardently to achieve. Close friends with such pioneers in social and sexual thought as Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Karl Pearson, Schreiner was in touch with the leading ideas of her time—and made a significant contribution to them herself. She insisted upon the importance of sexuality in a woman's psychic makeup, was a cultural relativist who defended African and Boer culture, and was a staunch pacifist. Throughout her life she suffered for her beliefs, from such petty annoyances as being repeatedly thrown out of her lodgings by irate landladies (she admitted men to her rooms whenever they happened to call) to suffering house arrest and the burning of all her books and papers during the Boer War. Her debilitating asthma attacks, like the neurasthenia of the fictional New Women, were clearly rooted in unresolved anxiety about how to combine and fulfill her personal needs and political beliefs.

The little criticism that exists of Schreiner has concentrated on defending her place in English or African literary history. *Olive Schreiner: Feminism on*

the Frontier, in contrast, looks at the totality of Schreiner's output, placing it in its appropriate historical context. At times Berkman suffers from the opposite defect of Cunningham; she provides so much background that Schreiner's works get lost. I would have liked more about Schreiner's literary innovations; for instance, her use of dreams and allegories as a means of expressing states of mind was very attractive to her contemporaries, though they did not imitate her. Berkman does not always capture the excitement and energy of Schreiner's life and ideas—her prose is occasionally turgid and she tends to cover too much ground too quickly—but she has done a valuable job in placing before the reader Schreiner's major strengths and weaknesses. As she explains, Schreiner's vision of woman's future and her analysis of woman's nature and social role were particularly penetrating. The passionate, thwarted feminism of Lyndall, heroine of *African Farm*, went far beyond New Woman polemics. Clearly a full-scale study of Schreiner's literary achievement is needed, specifically treating her work in the context of the period. In the meantime, Berkman's monograph will help to redress the undue neglect of Schreiner by Cunningham and other literary critics.

MARTHA VICINUS

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Failure and Success in America: A Literary Debate by Martha Banta. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. Pp. 568. $30.00 cloth; $12.50 paper.

This book claims the best of American writing is found in those literary achievements which demand "more than survival" but "less than perfection" (3). Banta presents an exclusively national reading of American literature dependent upon the transformation of literature into solely the expression of ideas in words. In effect, the book understands American literature to be one long and argumentative answer to the Franklin of the *Autobiography*— i.e., to the man whose care about achieving success and the appearance of success was not marred by worry over that separation. Thus her essentially American writers, among whom Emerson, Thoreau, William and Henry James, Twain, Henry Adams, Gertrude Stein, and Norman Mailer are the most important, succeed insofar as they recognize, accept, and then overcome failure.

They first reaffirm the "force of the idea" (179) of American as sacred experience by reconstituting success as "aesthetic and moral" rather than "tangible and material" (133). They then provide to us and themselves what is for Banta the enduring moral lesson of our national literature: a constant battering by the reality principle which elicits a resistance to the siren call of the ideal. They and we must learn, in the words of Henry James at age 13 to his sister, Alice, to find our "pleasures under difficulties" (257). At the cost of treating philosophy and literature as identical systems of signification, William James occupies a particularly prominent place in the argument as the exemplar of those "really tough imaginations" because he teaches us to locate "the *topos* (good place) in the *eutopos* (no place)" (450).

This thematic, ideational, and elitist approach to American literature is perfectly congruent with our major critical traditions, especially as it measures the writings by standards necesarily prior and extrinsic to them. For Banta, American literature is a category as ideal as it was for Margaret Fuller in 1846; both are able to discuss "what does not yet exist" (47) and do, although at the cost of ignoring Emerson's warning that we pay as much attention to "what they were" as "what they designed." The preference for design has the consequence of widening the scope of literature; letters, journals, diaries, biographies, lectures, and memoirs are now available for the argument. However, correct and desirable as it is to include these as literature, two drawbacks vitiate the approach. Rather than applying the skills of literary criticism to these materials, Banta presents them as if their non-fictional status privileges their gloss on the fiction. Even worse, she finds herself relying too much on weaker fictional texts, as if the worse the book, the more typically American. Nowhere is this more so than in the use of Norman Mailer; the argument depends upon his *Of a Fire on the Moon* in which self-consciousness becomes self-parody for Mailer, Banta, and America.

Despite the embarrassing presence of Franklin, treated here much as he was by D. H. Lawrence almost sixty years ago, Banta's American literature is a timeless construct from the Puritans to the prurient. Put more bluntly, history is an empty category here, capable only of marking the gross swings from optimism to pessimism and half-way back. Although she denies that the ideal may serve to indicate radical social and political alternatives, Banta sneaks it in the back door as the standard of literature and culture through a disdain for and dismissal of mere "data." An unfortunate consequence, although one not explicit in the text, is the development of a category of Unamerican writers and writings. Cooper, certainly as obsessed as any American with failure and success, is one; so too are Hawthorne, treated primarily as if he were the author of unfinished romances, and Melville, at best a springboard back into the more comforting world of Emerson and Thoreau. My guess is that the skepticism of these writers, especially about the nature of language, and in the case of the latter two, their refusal to provide a key in non-fiction to the American qualities of the fiction, makes them particularly resistant to her approach.

An ontological certitude shapes the consideration and criticism of American literature and culture. Royce and James are permitted to argue absolute versus subjective knowledge; but the nature of being and the nature of the subject, defined variously as the individual, literature, and the nation, are unchanging and immediately accessible. The worlds of facts and of words become transparent media through which the truth always shines. Norman Mailer supposedly responds directly to Henry Adams; more dangerously, we learn that Samuel Sewall is "a member of the generation contemporaneous with Goodman Brown" (299), a contention which not only blurs the distinction between history and fiction but which denies that Hawthorne's historical fiction is predicated upon the existence of Sewall and his fellows. Thus not only history, but intention, surprisingly enough, matters little; once again we confront the news that American literature is marked by the meaning and stress placed upon the adjective while the noun drowns in its wake.

Metaphor and idea dominate the form and content of *Failure and Success in America* to the exclusion of all else. Indeed, Banta refuses to distinguish metaphor as one specific means of gaining and organizing knowledge. She remarks that the "destructive movement away from 'mothers' is crucial to many of Melville's narrative structures" (72), a reading which somewhat perversely ignores the greater impact of "fathers" in these texts by citing only *Pierre*. Further, by setting "mothers" in quotes, Professor Banta indicates her awareness of its use as metaphor; yet the form of her argument forbids the exploration of mothers except as metaphors. Ishmael's near-destruction thus follows abandonment of the land, his "mother," for the sea. Why he should be so foolish is not explained; nor is it apparently meaningful that this mother is metaphoric rather than actual.

Clearly this is no standard academic treatise (except in the world of American Studies and its preference for the "unscientific method") although it makes one wish it were. In place of readings of particular texts, with the exception of *The American* and *Huckleberry Finn*, we get brief allusions which slide into other texts on the basis of a word and a pun—sometimes those of the authors, sometimes not. A discussion of Thoreau's gratitude that he was born in the "nick of time" leads to William James' talk of "my nick" and then to "Old Nick" himself (204-05). Somewhere, too, Nick Carraway obtrudes his name and presence. Rather than devise and defend her own methodology, seemingly an unnecessary and always an unwelcome task for American cultural critics, Banta adopts that of her authors. Their interest in and fascination with the transformations of language and their assumptions about the role of consciousness become hers; Thoreau's hope and Adams' despair seem equally true and mark the limits of the debate rather than its beginning.

The metaphor for the argument as a whole is that of a "house," surely the most prevalent and prominent of American tropes. Whereas the critic often tries to provide the blueprint, Banta gives us a tour through a labyrinthine mansion filled with members of the family: Waldo and William James sit on the porch, bid us welcome, and assure us we have nothing to fear; Henry James stands in a corner of the drawing room observing us observing him; Mark Twain swaps lies with the servants in the kitchen and claims their life is real because it is so determined; Henry Adams waits in the study for his call to service; Henry Thoreau takes the hot, uncomfortable room under the roof in the belief he has the best view; Norman Mailer shakes the ashes down in the furnace and tells Bigger Thomas the secret is to get the fire even hotter; and Gertrude Stein's postcard, perhaps a bit hard to read, lies on the hall table. If I have caricatured these writers, I have not violated the text of *Failure and Success in America*. They are frozen in a world of metaphors, a paradoxical fate given the nature of metaphor, but an inevitable one when the tension which characterizes metaphor and literature is collapsed.

We do not really learn somehing new about these writers and America from this book. Instead, we are forcibly reminded just how concerned and obsessed they were with success, a point worth reiteration. But we should question a conclusion that claims Thoreau or Adams or Mailer, individually or together, wish to teach us to be content with "just enough." History, psychology, audience,

and intention are missing from a book which seeks not so much to explicate and evaluate the literary debate about failure and success as it desires to become the latest addition to a continuing discourse. It is not enough.

ROSS J. PUDALOFF

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Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian by David E. E. Sloane. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979. Pp. xi + 280. $12.95.

This book performs several valuable services. Its major one, its very *raison d'être*, is to challenge a view which, after Kenneth Lynn's *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*, has been virtually official. As Lynn's title implies, this view assumes that Twain's humor was born and raised in the Southwest, among the likes of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, George W. Harris, and Joseph G. Baldwin. Sloane traces Twain's humor to a different source, the literary comedy of the Northeast, to such figures as Orpheus C. Kerr, Petroleum V. Nasby, and especially Artemus Ward, who is significant enough to get a chapter from Sloane all to himself.

Sloane is not merely concerned with Mark Twain's genealogy, however. At issue is the meaning and significance of Twain's humor, hence of Twain's career as a whole. Sloane's demonstration of his genealogy is accordingly thorough: more than fifty pages, over a quarter of the text. The Southwestern humorists, he notes, all of whom depicted a rural world, were undemocratic, unsympathetic to the common man. They made their fun at the expense of the vernacular figures they depicted. In their frame narrators they established an unvernacular elitist norm. The literary comedians, on the contrary, did not deal with disparities by dividing their narratives between an elite and a vernacular style. In their work, Sloane points out, the vernacular has the field to itself, in the figure of a single (and singular) narrator who handles disparities with deadpan irony. The literary comedians were, then, largely motivated by social ethics, and their persuasion was liberal, their norm democratic, their biggest grudge the power of the urban corporate elite. We need only cite these items to see how well they fit Twain, as characteristically as his white suits.

Sloane's book performs another service by examining Twain's career in terms of his development of literary comedy, demonstrating thereby a real unity in all of Twain's bewildering variety. He shows us how Twain kept realizing, in a single figure or voice, the many different posssibilities inherent in literary comedy. He managed as no one before him had to evolve a voice rich and flexible enough to handle sustained narrative and finally the novel form itself. Thus Sloane helps us appreciate continuity in Twain's career as a whole and between individual discrete works.

Sloane's thesis is incisive enough to enable him not only to perceive important connections between works, but also to examine anew the energy and form of individual works. In the tradition of the novel, for instance, Huck Finn was

something new, but in the tradition of literary comedy, Sloane demonstrates, he was a familiar figure, the deadpan ironist on stage, at work. But in the figure of Huck the literary comedian becomes "a visionary hero," and that, Sloane argues, constitutes his genuine originality. Thus Sloane raises the issue—unresolvable, finally, but crucial—of the extent of Huck's self-consciousness, the actual nature of his innocence. He helps us realize how ambiguous a character Huck is. With his thesis Sloane is also able to show us—to cite only one other instance—how Hank Morgan is not an ass who stumbled into a novel, but rather is a consummation of Twain's evolution as a literary comedian. His self-contradictions are hereby present and accounted for: they amount to the different offices which literary comedy traditionally served—"political argument, economic reasoning, professional ethics, comic humanism, and literary burlesque"—but in Twain's hands put to more serious work, a critique of modern democratic civilization itself, and ending up, significantly enough, with an admission of that civilization's futility. Sloane argues in effect that the novel's failure, as most critics construe it, is actually its success: the novel is about the failure of the ethos implied in literary comedy and embodied in the person of Hank Morgan. It is an interesting argument.

Sloane examines in detail a number of other works: *The Gilded Age*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *The American Claimant*, and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. His approach is chronological, starting with Twain's journalism, and his omissions are easily defensible, with one exception. He does not go beyond *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, which means he neglects *The Mysterious Stranger*. To be sure, *The Mysterious Stranger* was never finished, but it is an important document nonetheless, and Satan, though he is not the narrator, is nevertheless a character we could reasonably call a literary comedian. But his type of humor is different from that defined by Sloane, and that difference may account for his omission. For Satan is strictly antithetical, anti-ethical, anti-egaliterian, anti-ideal, anti-empirical, and anti-historical. He reminds one, in many ways, of the vernacular figures of the Southwestern humorists, though he does not speak in dialect. But he did not arise *ex nihilo* in Twain's later career. For as James M. Cox has shown us (in *The Fate of Humor*), there was something anti-ethical in Twain's humor all along, indeed, there is something anti-ethical, anti-serious, in the nature of humor as such. Sloane acknowledges Cox, but he does not give Cox's thesis sufficient attention. He insists too strictly, too narrowly on his own, and at times it misleads him. Twain enjoyed blowing ethics to bits at least as much as he liked to preach. In his deep heart's core there was anarchy as well as a democratic ideal. His later nihilism and despair did not emerge in spite of the values implicit in his humor, as Sloane thinks, but as a direct result of realizing those values.

At other times Sloane's thesis, or more precisely his focus, keeps him from seeing certain important issues implicit in his discussion, issues that deserve explicit consideration. Are literary comedy and sustained narrative, for instance, truly compatible? To understand that Hank Morgan is a literary comedian is genuinely helpful, but I for one cannot help but think that therein, precisely lies his weakness as a narrator/protagonist of and in the novel. A literary comedian, in other words, may by nature be fit only for one-night stands, not

for the extended engagements required by the novel. Perhaps, however, the two modes can live successfully together in the same structure. The issue needs thinking about. So does the issue of humor. Perhaps there are different kinds of humor—essentially different—and perhaps Twain practiced both (or all three, or four, as the case may be). Hence, it may be, the richness of his humor—the play of Southwest and Northeast off against one another—and hence too the self-divisions that would not, finally, let him stand on any faith or hope.

These are a couple of important issues concerning which Sloane makes assumptions rather than examinations. But he does raise the issues, and thus he not only defines a valid perspective for regarding Twain, he provokes thought that goes beyond his own discussion.

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Dos Passos: Artist as American by Linda W. Wagner. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979. Pp. xiv + 220. $14.95.

Professor Wagner's study of Dos Passos is balanced, sane, modest, learned, appreciative, and brief. Therein is an acomplishment which is more remarkable than at first might be recognized, for the abiding quality of Dos Passos' own accomplishment peculiarly evades assessment, despite all of the plain-speaking that is in it and despite all of the sprawl.

It is to be recalled that Dos Passos was once a contemporary master and that he was not only acclaimed but was also informative. In a period which was committed to the idea that "both politics and the arts must derive their power from a common center of energy"—the phrase, astonishingly, is Allen Tate's—Dos Passos seemed, better than anyone else, to have created the shapes appropriate to the central energy. It helped also, of course, that in the 1930's his political attitudes were generally perceived to be correct, although perhaps a little bit ornery on the side of artistic freedom. All of that was long ago, however. Dos Passos continued to write, voluminously, to the end in 1970, and he did not change, but the times did, and the enterprise which had combined a political and a literary radicalism into a single expression, by the 1950's and 1960's came to seem to be the utterest conservatism. What had been an effort towards discovering a new and liberating version of the American tradition was an antiquarian crotchetiness. Where once the villains in Dos Passos' America had been the Military, or Andrew Carnegie, or Frederick Taylor (of the Taylor Plan), the tyrants who suppressed individual liberties were, latterly, bureaucrats of the mode of Roosevelt's New Deal, and Roosevelt himself, in the *District of Columbia* trilogy, and the union movement as it had become Big Labor, in *Midcentury*. The message was what it had been—"The theme is freedom," as Professor Wagner says, quoting Dos Passos—and the message was not necessarily unwelcome, but it lacked the context of a broad, sympathetic, and somewhat organized movement. Lacking such, there was no longer much of a definable urgency in the presence of Dos Passos.

And now to look upon the enormous amount of the work would seem to constitute either an invitation to scholarship in the most dreary meaning of the word, or an invitation to polemical celebration by subtraction—at one point or another, according to individual bias, he was one of us—or the task would seem to prescribe puffery. But Dos Passos' politics at every major point is lacking in sectarian purity, and puffery is likely to be just that because in truth not all of the approximately fifty books are wonderful, and Dos Passos did not write a Balzacian or Faulknerian kind of opus in which the pieces might be seen to be fitted intricately each to each to create a grand and singular design, nor was Dos Passos even in the major moments a powerful originator of forms and language. There is nothing in the sometimes celebrated technical devices of *Manhattan Transfer* and *U.S.A.* which Dos Passos could not have picked up from others among his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, notably—of course—Joyce. He was, rather, an ambitious, fluent, and skillful adapter of forms and language.

In her introduction Professor Wagner says that "The question today, critically, should be why Dos Passos' very important role in the development of modern American fiction need be considered with any tinge of apology," and that question, wistful-bold as it is and giving up so much ground as it does, does have a pertinence. It is by no means a matter of certainty that Dos Passos has indeed had any continuous "very important" role as an American literary influence. Professor Wagner names three putative recipients of the influence: Günter Grass, E. L. Doctorow, and Norman Mailer. But Grass (disregarding the fact that Danzig is not an American town) obviously is beholden to many teachers and to Dos Passos, if at all, much less than, say, to Dante; Doctorow's technique of working real names from the recent past into narrative fiction—presumably that is what Professor Wagner is referring to—has many modern sources (Joyce, again, preeminently); and, as for Mailer, it was only in the first novel that he showed a clear indebtedness to Dos Passos, and the great thing about Mailer is that formally every one of his novels has been a fresh beginning. But the "tinge of apology" which any serious discussions of Dos Passos would in fact seem to entail, in its turn, leads to a large problem, the only answer to which probably is grace and flexibility.

There are other American writers approximately of Dos Passos' generation who are much like Dos Passos. Archibald MacLeish is one. Carl Sandburg is perhaps another. These are men who had virtues in such abundance that attention would seem to be compulsory. As writers they were, persistently, very shrewd and very adept and always at least moderately inventive, and they were ambitious in the very best sense: they were writers first of all. When other blooming geniuses faded, they went on. At the same time they were, at least in what they revealed in their writing, wonderfully decent men for whom literature was a way of doing good. Given some access in each instance to some special materials of passion—in Dos Passos' case there was the matter of his peculiar family situation, his position as a kind of royal bastard—they mostly chose breadth and citizenship. Their careers are acknowledgedly monumental while the sum of what they actually wrote is curiously obscure.

In fact Professor Wagner reads her way through Dos Passos in shiftingly various ways. She sometimes refers to biography. She traces connections be-

tween earlier and later characters in the novels, although she does not press a case for a single opus. She does stylistic analysis and technical analysis. Sometimes she faults Dos Passos, especially for his failures to provide his characters with greater psychological depth. Sometimes she does contextual analysis. But that kind of inflection of critical attitudes would seem to be mandated if the books are at all to be made freshly apprehensible. Professor Wagner ends by agreeing with someone else that Dos Passos was fundamentally "a good man." Amen to that, and a good man is hard to find.

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