Criticism

Volume 22 | Issue 3 Article 5

1980

Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

Book Reviews

Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method by Gérard Genette, translated by Jane E. Lewin, Foreword by Jonathan Culler. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980. Pp. 285. $15.00.

Jonathan Culler characterizes Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* as "one of the central achievements of what was called 'structuralism.'" That spoiler of a past tense and Genette's rather humble introduction and afterword reduce *Narrative Discourse* to a document of critical history rather than a viable theory, a flower of decay rather than a bud of new beginnings. The resulting pall cast over the book awakens the critic in one, despite the fact that this study is one of the most admirable available on its subject. Measured, insightful, self-conscious, generalizable—it has all the virtues that modern scholarship esteems. What is it then that makes us stand back and reserve judgment until the inevitable flaws show through?

Genette sets out to analyze narrative discourse according to categories borrowed from the grammar of verbs: tense, mood, and voice. At the same time he chooses to illustrate his typology—or perhaps to rival it—with an analysis of Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu.* His typologies are powerful enough to show up other theorists, who chronically confuse their own categories, while his analysis reveals the uniqueness of Proust's achievement as a manipulation of the very narrative categories that Genette has isolated. Where other narratologists stop at the meta-level, Genette's theory pays off in his analysis, and the inexperienced reader is supplied with a guide to application that is both disciplined and inspired. Though I am no expert on Proust, I suspect that Proustian scholars will be much impressed with Genette's work, while narrative theorists will undoubtedly find it, as Culler does, "the most thorough attempt we have to identify, name, and illustrate the basic constituents and techniques of narrative."

Or will they? Beyond the author's rather cloying ardor for etymology, his conscientious coining of terminology which he almost immediately consigns to the garbage heap of history, and his occasional undecipherable "formulae" for narrative, the utility of this book is marred by two related problems. The first is Genette's inability to recognize mimesis when he sees it; the second is his failure to include literary and ideological norms within his scheme. I suppose that these are what Culler means by the label of "structuralism" when he declares—again in the past tense—that it "sought not to interpret literature but to investigate its structures and devices." But the attempt at investigating structures and devices without spelling out the conditions for interpretation is surely wrong-headed, and in Genette's case in particular, where at least half of his book is "practical criticism," the failure to engage these conditions is striking. Moreover, this failure is *not* a given of structuralist thinking. All we need witness are Jan Mukařovský's *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social*

Facts or Claude Lévi-Strauss's criticism of Propp's "formalism" to be reminded that the aim of structuralism is to account for *all* the systems that compose a text, among which are the literary and the referential worlds.

The issue of mimesis is of particular importance, I think, because Genette's position is meant as a corrective to much previous imprecision on the subject. He claims that

> in contrast to dramatic representation, no narrative can "show" or "imitate" the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, "alive," and in that way give more or less the *illusion of mimesis*—which is the only narrative mimesis, for this single and sufficient reason: that narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating.... [M]imesis in words can only be mimesis of words. (164)

Presumably the world needs to be reminded of this "fact" from time to time. Lessing and Thomas Twining performed this service for the eighteenth century, although the effects of their efforts were soon blunted. But Genette lives in another time. During the past century the concept of imitation has been examined with enough sophistication to make his disclaimer appear as simplistic as the confusion of description with imitation that he criticizes. Perhaps the exposure to such errors in researching *Mimologiques* has led Genette to this "hard line" on mimesis, but his own insights into narrative structures are enormously suggestive in the argument for narrative iconicity.

For example, Genette repeatedly emphasizes the fact that narrative time can never be treated as an absolute, in that its only "real" basis is the definitionally variable reading time. Nevertheless, he argues, temporal relations *can* be established in the relative amount of narrative space an author uses to depict an extent of story time, this resulting in four narrative "movements": ellipsis (zero narrative time for *n* story time), summary (NT<ST), scene (NT=ST), and pause (*n* NT=zero ST). In the rhythm (*anisochrony* for Genette) of narration that a writer establishes, these different relations would seem inevitably tied to mimesis. It is not that NT can actually equal ST, but that its extent can make it either more or less equivalent to ST in comparison to other narrative extents. In Peircean terms, this contrast is the difference between an image and a diagram: both are iconic signs, the one sharing substantive traits with its referent, the other sharing the relations among its components with its referent. Thus, if an author systematically mixed the four movements he would be foiling mimesis, since the relations among the extents of his various paragraphs of chapters would not correspond to the relations among the extents of his narrated episodes. On the other hand, if an author consistently used any of the four temporal structures he would be diagrammatically iconic, although the kind or narrative that would eventuate from certain choices might be deviant, or even unrealizable. But such an outcome in itself would be worth investigating. And indeed, the reasons why certain techniques create the "illusion of mimesis" while others do not is also worth looking into. If a scene creates this illusion, is this not because *relative* co-extension in time is the basis for narrative iconicity rather than some simple-minded notion of absolute equality?

But Genette's elimination of all questions of literary and extra-artistic norms

is equally disturbing. Given the analytic tools he supplies, one would expect to be able to describe general trends in the history of narrative that would carry value-laden names, such as "traditional," "classic," or "innovative." Not only are these trends not provided in *Narrative Discourse*, but no theory is offered as to how such norms, once determined, could be integrated into an overall structural analysis. This omission is all the more striking when Genette actually claims a virtuosity in Proust's handling of certain devices. Where is the careful establishment of the norms against which Proust's perfomance is to be measured as unique, and where the outline of the cultural values that will make that particular uniqueness admirable?

In addition to literary norms, Genette ignores what Boris Uspenskij and Michail Bachtin would term the "ideological plane" of narration. Uspenskij treats this as one of four components of point of view in his *Poetics of Composition*, and though neither his nor Bachtin's discussion has the precision of Genette's work, the positioning of a text vis-à-vis ideological values is not an aspect of its structure that can be omitted simply because it is hard to talk about. Surely the strength of structuralism *was* that it took on methodological problems so complicated that whole disciplines had to be constructed in order to solve them. It would seem that narratology has a long way to go before it lives up to the aspiration of being a structuralist discipline.

WENDY STEINER

University of Pennsylvania

Critical Assumptions by K. K. Ruthven. Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Pp. x + 263. $23.95.

The English used to look askance at American books of criticism: they were "Germanic," which meant that they probed too deeply, doggedly, and artlessly. The Americans used to speak about English criticism as "genteel," which meant that it didn't probe deeply enough. That division belongs pretty much to the past. There are only occasional outbreaks illustrating it, and then only when critics on one side or another relax their preoccupation with the French. K. K. Ruthven teaches in New Zealand, and his book is written for students, not for critical theorists. As such, it can be partially excused for not probing very deeply and for its plethora of quotation and reference. But not entirely.

Ruthven is interested in what he regards as "four recurrent problems in the history of criticism." They are genesis, form, meaning, and value. In twelve chapters how these problems have been approached is discussed, always with voluminous reference and quotation, the latter always brief. I open the book at random and discover on one page (122) the following referred to: Tennyson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Nabokov, Chaplin, Delalande (a writer invented by Nabokov), Borges, Kafka, Browning, Peckham, Joyce, Rabelais, LeClercq, Browne, Eliot, Homer, Pound, Li Po, *Discours sur les ombres* (by Delalande), *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, the metaphysical poets, *Ulysses*, *Odyssey*, and *Cathay*. And this is a slightly shortened, section-ending page!

One wonders what the influence might be here, and the mind turns to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, astonishing in its range of reference. (Frye also gets the last word in this book.) But one concludes that in this case something may have gone a little wrong: we may have here a not wholly self-conscious version of what Frye called the Menippean satire, which unfolds erudition in the way a peacock displays its tail. What is lacking to make the formula work is Menippean wit and speculation. This book does not work out a position but examines or, let us say, accumulates descriptions of critical trends. (Of course, it *does* have a position, which is tacitly held or slipped in in the form of brief concluding assertions at the close of chapter sections.)

The descriptions are broadly conceived. Ruthven is not concerned to look very deeply into the work of any one critical theorist or even one text. The manner is to pile up a series of brief quotations, allusions, and descriptions. Thus in the chapter "Imitation and Originality" the three-page section on "Originality as a mark of genius" begins with a five-word quotation from Johnson's Imlac, offers a generalization about the eighteenth-century attitude toward originality as against imitation, quotes Young (thirteen words), notes the connection of originality to the contemporary interest in "genius," alludes to two scholarly essays on this matter, quotes Pope on Shakespeare (thirteen words), names four eighteenth-century books on originality, offers seventeen lines of comment on Horace, moves on to discuss the fashion of natural genius, quoting Johnson, Young again, Croce, Anthony Storr on psychiatrists, and a gaggle of of others in a concluding paragraph. The whole chapter is sixteen pages long, is mainly about the imitation of nature or of human actions. Its introductory section ends with the following:

> ... there was once a time, not so very long ago, when it seemed the sensible thing to accept the impossibility of saying anything original and to devote one's energies instead to saying what has been said before, but in a manner much superior to that of one's predecessors. *This is what the theory of imitation is all about.* [my italics]

But it is *not* what the theory of imitation is *all* about, as anyone who has read *Republic*, *Poetics*, and McKeon on this subject knows very well. Imitation has always had two faces as Pope remarked of Virgil's copying nature when he copied Homer. Ruthven, of course, knows this (he has apparently read everything, as attested to by forty-seven pages of footnotes), but he doesn't examine the deeper aspects of imitation that invoke what he himself calls "transactions with reality." We are not encouraged when we read in the next line: "The earliest surviving literary theory of imitation is in the *Poetics* of Aristotle." This may be strictly true, but Plato had a theory of imitation with at least literary implications, and Aristotle was concerned enough about it to try to answer it. Ruthven does not discuss it and even *seems* to be saying that it does not exist. This is an example of a flaw in the way Ruthven's book carries on. Despite its barrage of erudition from nearly everywhere in the history of criticism, the book is fundamentally ahistorical. That Aristotle offered his theory in a situation that involved Plato, that he worked with Plato's terms, and that this is part of his meaning are not made clear.

The same problem comes up in Ruthven's treatment of the Kantian notion of beautiful uselessness without attention to any of the reasons why such a notion should arise or how uselessness in some authors becomes an ironic term and even a moralistic one. The notion of "purposiveness without purpose" or "internal purposiveness" receives similarly superficial treatment in connection with the problem of intention. This is a somewhat odd perspective and results in distortion. Ruthven does not halt long enough to examine any idea deeply and for the most part he ignores historical context. In a book on Nietzsche, Walter Kaufmann argues quite rightly that we won't understand Nietzsche unless we ask what he opposed, what he sought to overcome, what his problems were. Any thinker's expression must be treated in this way if one is to be accurate.

There are a number of statements in the book that if not entirely inaccurate are not responsible either. Six examples:

1. "The reason for this is that organicist critics from Coleridge onwards have generally agreed that the two kinds of form are in fact antithetical to one another." Why not from Schlegel onwards?

2. "For if everything in a poem is predetermined to this extent, involuntary experiences bring us about as close as we are ever likely to get to an awareness of those unconscious drives which shape everything we do." The logic of this is slippery. Perhaps a step is missing.

3. "... *A Vision* dictated to [Yeats] through the medium of his wife by a supernatural being called Michael Robartes." Robartes is a fictional, but not a supernatural being, and he did not dictate *A Vision* via Mrs. Yeats. He did not dictate it at all.

4. "So Forster concludes that since 'all literature tends towards a condition of anonymity,' any signature on it can only be a distraction. As if to test the truth of this claim, I. A. Richards was shortly to circulate unsigned poems for comment...." In spite of the disclaiming "as if," this plays fast and loose with Richards' intention, probably in order to effect a transition in the discourse.

5. "... a novel semingly without authorial presence. Such too was Joyce's ambition in writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." But it is Stephen, as Ruthven allows, who preaches this theory, and there is authorial presence in certain ways in the novel.

6. "Oh 'darkly, deeply, beautifully blue',
As someone somewhere sings about the sky.

The 'someone' Byron fails to recall is Southey...." But *has* Byron forgotten? Or is it a sly put-down? Now this is a minor matter, as are the others. But I am compelled to wonder how many more there are and whether or not they may not be products of a characteristically loose method of quoting and alluding.

Nevertheless, I find that this book could be helpful to students and to teachers. For students it identifies clusters of fundamental critical issues and provides a compendium of quotations and references that can be followed up. For the teacher, it can be a foil. The teacher can expand upon it, fill in its gaps, quarrel with the brevity of Ruthven's accounts, and point to the author's own assumptions. Ruthven never takes any question to the point where anything resembles a last word is said.

Yet he does make some utterances as if they were last words. In the end he is, I think, a more sophisticated version of the English type of critic thought by Americans to be "genteel." This newest version has metamorphosed into an antitheoretical skeptic. I have some sympathy with a form of antitheoretical theory, but I have very little with Ruthven's ahistorical version of it, which leaves critical theory in a shambles. He conveys the impression of looking down on a jumble of perspectives, ideas, quotations, and phrases, a scene of folly that adds up to little and has had no direction. The reason for this is principally his ignoring the historical moment of every critical utterance, the absence of which generates the absence of the dignity and seriousness of the critical discourses to which he alludes. This is not what we find when we go back to the texts themselves. I acknowledge that many of these complaints can be made to stand against any effort of Ruthven's sort. I ought to know, because I wrote a book of this same general kind about twelve years ago.

The final complaint that can be made against Ruthven's and other such books is that—in this critical climate—they are out of date by the time that they arrive. In Ruthven's case the omissions are rather glaring. There is no treatment of the so-called post-structuralist movement. That couldn't be accomplished unless Ruthven had paid more attention to recent critical theory in general. One finds only passing mention of the structuralist movement (Barthes is mentioned), no discussion of Heidegger and phenomenological criticism (except brief mention of Poulet and Miller), hardly anything on modern hermeneutics (no mention of Gadamer and Ricoeur, though Hirsch is alluded to and two chapters are devoted to meaning), only brief mention of speech-act theory (Austin and Searle), and no mention of Derridean deconstruction whatsoever. Nor does Ruthven allude to some of the critics who have tried to resolve the differences upon which Ruthven builds his chapters—Krieger on imitation and expression, for example.

Still, the book is erudite, readable, and, within its bounds, informative. No matter that the map it lays out is, in the end, unconsciously Menippean.

The price for this sort of book is astonishing, even in an age of astonishing prices for books.

HAZARD ADAMS

University of Washington

Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy by Giuseppe Mazzotta. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. xv + 343. $20.00.

Giuseppe Mazzotta's valuable contribution to Dante studies is a *tour de force* of harmonization which may well make him the *Concordiae comes* of the profession. At first glance this dense volume (weighted down at times by a ponderous latinate style) seems to offer what might be seen as "a typically Italian" (though for that reason not necessarily unsatisfactory) solution to a difficult problem. As in the story of the Italian judge who listens to plantiff and defendent and tells them they are both right, and then answers a third-party observer

who objects that they cannot both be right by saying "you are right!", Mazzotta seems to have discovered the way of compromise which bridges the gap of discord separating the "literalists," who see Dante's way of writing as one which imitates the allegorical mode of Scripture, and the "fabulists," who see the theological, figural and prophetic elements of the *Comedy* as nothing more than part of Dante's strategy as a producer of fiction.

At worst Mazzotta's study, or that portion, at least, which deals with the question of allegory, will be cast aside as the machinations of a "neutral angel" (of which danger he seems to be aware, just as he seems to be aware that his own text, like Dante's in Mazzotta's formulation, may be its own most subversive adversary). At best, by denying us the critical palliative that we seek as a source of relief from Dante's dolorous complexities, he may have succeeded in demonstrating that the *Divine Comedy* is not only a monument to medieval encyclopedism, but a genuine act of reconciliation of the ultimate immutable reality of the Logos with the contingent corruptible reality of the text.

The general purpose of this study is to "probe Dante's sense of history" by focussing on the "structure and language of history... the relationship between history and literary language" and the vexing question of allegory accompanied by the related ambiguities which Mazzotta calls the "historicity of interpretation" (p. 3). The author begins with an examination of the image of the Old Man of Crete (the *Gran Veglio* of Inferno XIV) and the related figure of Cato in Purgatory I and II. In so doing he shows quite convincingly (with considerable improvement over the original dissertation chapter) how Roman history figures as part of salvation history and the redemptive process. In Chapter IV (Vergil and Augustine) he shows how the "theological harmonization of the earthly and heavenly cities" is made possible by "a partial revision of St. Augustine's view of Roman history" (p. 6). Central to the argument are the divergent notions of Dante and Augustine on the historicity of Vergil's *Aeneid* and the role of Rome's history in the process of redemption, and in a movement through the inevitable corruptibility of the secular order to the ultimate goal of eternal glorification. The *Aeneid* is seen, from Dante's rectified perspective, as a poem of love and a book of history "which, though immersed in a condition of temporality and finitude, strains toward the enduring atemporality of Heaven and enacts a view of history as a sequence of events significant in God's providential plan" (p. 158). Mazzotta ultimately and most convincingly argues that Dante "implies that history enacts typologically the pattern of Exodus" (p. 182). This, in turn, implies, it seems to me, that the text is rightly to be regarded as a *figura* of history. It is history in the same way that history, like the meta-statements of historiography, is grammar and text. In a logocentric world fraught with semiotic complexities and hermeneutic perils, one which ranges from the emanation of the divine Word to the cloacal sememes trumpeted by the devils of the infernal realm, one must confront the problem of interpretation, as Mazzotta does in a strenuous and imaginative way in his concluding chapters.

The final chapters, dealing with literary history, allegory and the language of faith, are perhaps the most provocative but also the most problematic. If the *Aeneid* is to be understood as history, then "history," as Mazzotta has noted

earlier (p. 158), "cannot be taken literally." By the same token, he concludes, "The distinction between poetic allegory and theological allegory depends not on an intrinsic separation of truth and lies in the literal sense, but on an act of interpretation: 'the theologians take the literal sense otherwise that the poets do'; the truth of the literal sense, then, lies not in the actual enunciation, but in what the literal sense signifies" (p. 235). History and historiography (including the records of conversion) suffer the "ambiguity of the letter" provoked by what in Peircean terms might be called the inevitable flight of the interpretant. The dilemma of unlimited semiosis acts to subvert the text as authority and causes the interpreter to enjoy the pleasures of the promised end as long as he is immersed in the "historicity of interpretation." The text, then, becomes the desert where temptations are encountered. What is not especially clear in Mazzotta's argument of harmonization, where the truth depends on the interpretation of the enunciation, is the conviction that the text may be hermeneutically closed at the same time that it is semiotically open. It is an open desert, a "writerly" text in Barthes' sense, which threatens the reader with the temptation of a new interpretation, while at the same time it leads that reader to one certain *telos*. The reader will become either an Adam or a Christ by analogy. As in the threefold temptation of Christ in the desert, the Tempter may use the word (Scripture) itself to deceive, and only a process of "rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2.15)" will dispel the deception. Just as Satan's misuse of Scripture, though literally accurate, does not invalidate the literal accuracy of the text itself, just so does Mazzotta's attempt to resolve the question of truth at the interpretive level leave inviolate Singleton's notion of the *fundamental* veracity of the enunciation itself. This does not mean that we can confidently answer the question "Did Dante really go to Hell?," which, for most readers, I would guess, remains a valid one, but rather that the verbal incarnation which is presented as the literal text is indeed a non-deceptive *interpretation* of a spiritual and intellectual event.

Mazzotta has written a fine, well-documented book which is a significant addition to the shelves of Dante criticism. It sheds much light on the important questions of history and Vergil's contribution to the *Divine Comedy* as well as that of the poem's meaning. The questions it raises are significant ones which ought to continue to demand the attention of Dante scholars.

ANDREA DI TOMMASO

Wayne State University

The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies by Susan Snyder. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Pp. ix + 185. $12.50.

One interesting feature of this book is that its critical method works against the very assumptions it seeks to prove. Susan Snyder observes that since Shakespeare wrote ten "successful" comedies before he wrote his great tragedies, "...it seems probable that he would use the dramatic conventions in which he was most at home, the world of romantic comedy, as a point of reference and

departure in developing tragic form" (p. 4). Aside from the problem in her notion of what was "successful," she does not explain why Shakespeare's tragic form should have developed from his comedies rather than from his histories, his poetry, and his early tragedies nor why he was more at home in one genre than another. To address such questions would require some consideration of the economic, social, and literary historical factors that affected the production and reception of Shakespeare's texts. Instead she takes Northrop Frye's argument for comedy and tragedy as her critical model and supplements it with Suzanne Langer's discussion of comic rhythm. Hence from the outset the book posits an assumption about the historical development of Shakespeare's literary forms to be argued in terms of a critical theory which is radically paradigmatic and thus cannot account for historical development.

Professor Snyder's first chapter surveys comic conventions in eighteen "popular" comedies of the 1580's and 90's, "popular" apparently meaning public theater productions. Much of this chapter covers familiar ground, but the discussion does not consider Rosalie Colie's work, particularly her *Resources of Kind*, and so we find conventions and devices discussed as if they were largely indigenous to comedy. The second chapter concerns *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, two Italianate tragedies employing comic conventions "to reveal the vulnerability of love, threatened from without in *Romeo and Juliet*, from within in *Othello*" (p. 89). The third chapter argues that comic convention enabled Shakespeare to explore the issues of human power and benevolence in *Hamlet*, while the last chapter argues that grotesque comedy is Shakespeare's way of asking questions "about the purpose of all human experiences" (p. 165). For all their fine moments, the readings of the plays as a whole tend to treat Shakespeare as an author writing without a historical audience and yet sharing the eighteenth century's hierarchy of literary forms, the nineteenth century's belief in universal human truths and the twentieth century's modernist sensibilities. There is no historical change from *Romeo and Juliet* to *King Lear* in Professor Snyder's system. The problem centers on a notion of literary convention as somehow independent of the fluctuations of social history, and hence free of the exigencies of Shakespeare's needs to communicate with a specific audience. Thus despite the virtues of some insightful discussions—particularly in Chapters Two and Four—this book begs the very questions it seeks to address.

LEONARD TENNENHOUSE

Wayne State University

Interpreting Interpreting: Interpreting Dickens' Dombey by Susan R. Horton. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii + 162. $12.00.

This book is an ambitious project. Susan Horton wants "not so much to discuss what *Dombey and Son* means as to find out how all novels mean" (ix). Her title is, from this point of view, indicative of her emphasis. Three quarters of her book is concerned with the nature of interpretation, one quarter with Dickens.

Specifically, Horton wants to defend the critical operation which produces an explication of a text against recent suggestions by Stanley Fish and E. D. Hirsch that, since this method cannot establish a single fixed meaning, critics should concern themselves with asking historical and sociological questions. In answer, Horton would like to show that a plurality of readings and a certain indeterminacy of meaning are inevitable and are not, in practice, incompatible with the "fiction of a stable entity" without which the interpretative process "spins off into outer space" (128).

The center of Horton's attempt to reconcile the subjective and objective elements in interpretation lies in her discussion of what she calls the hermeneutical model. The model essentially articulates the assumption of New Criticism that the work was self-defining and that the individual details becomes meaningful or symbolic within the context of some conception of the whole. New Criticism was based on a certain idea of the second reading of a work which assumed that the critic brought to this reading a total, spatial vision of the text. Horton argues that the expectation of a single meaning is the result of this too-simple assumption. She shows that various critics of *Dombey* have defined both part and whole differently—the part as word, sentence, or paragraph; the whole as single text, the author's entire work, or all the works in a genre—and that each of these assumptions has resulted in a radically different reading. Finally, drawing an analogy to the "uncertainty principle" in modern physics, she argues the ultimate unpicturability of the whole and, consequently, the inevitable partiality of any reading.

This partiality, then, is not so much a failure of interpretation as its inevitable condition. A reading is always partially true, partially false. But this does not mean that all readings are equally valid. Once the variables of interpretation are known, the various definitions of part and whole sketched out, it is possible to define a certain area of meanings, although, because of the variations in the interpreter, this area can never be absolutely fixed. In addition the critic can aspire to the widest possible context and can avoid being trapped in a single interpretation by constantly invoking other alternatives.

Horton's discussion of *Dombey* itself is a clear example of the practical effects of her theoretical conclusions. Since she has rejected the possibility of a spatialized vision of the work, her approach involves itself with the temporality of the reading experience and, in this sense, it is close to what she refers to as Stanley Fish's reader-response criticism. Even when she is invoking the widest possible context, which, for her, is provided by the letters Dickens wrote during *Dombey's* composition, this context is used not so much to provide an overall statement of the theme of the novel as to relate certain passages to certain effects Dickens wanted to produce in the reader. And even the tentative definition of theme which her argument allows is constantly qualified by an immediate reference to other approaches which would ignore or subordinate this theme.

I think this is a fair statement of Horton's argument. What can be said about it?

Most obviously, it is clear that the relation she establishes between the critic and the work remains entirely traditional. Despite her references to the "fiction" of a stable center to the work there is no doubt that, for Horton,

the text does have meanings which are in some sense the expression of the author's intentions. Her argument is not at all about the possibility of such meaning. She simply answers a certain skepticism about its determination by developing a theory of perspectivism which saves partial interpretation. All this is apparent in Horton's central example of the nature of the text, Isamu Noguchi's sculpture entitled "Cubic Pyramid." The polished sides of this piece reflect both changing patterns of light and the perceiver himself. In order to see the work as a totality, the critic would have to stand before it for eternity. His view is inevitably limited. But, on the other hand, there is no doubt that the work is there, that it is the product of an intention. The solidity of its form and intention are, for her, one with the solidity of its physical presence.

Her sense of a totality which is the origin and sum of indeterminate perspectives is one posible explanation for certain conflicting tendencies in Horton's book. On the one hand, she obviously wants to free criticism from the tyranny of the idea of a single, total meaning so that it can admit subjective factors and celebrate what she refers to as the "nice fillips" (23) in a work. At the same time, however, Horton can never relax in her discussion of these limited moments. Each interpretation must be immediately balanced by another interpretation and that by another interpretation. Her discussion consequently proceeds with a kind of nervous impatience which, for me, robs it of much of its value. This impatience, her search for the widest context, and her references to her book as an attempt to "stand aside" (3) from individual interpretations in a way which would reveal, and presumably escape, the inevitability of limitation which is the center of her argument, all suggest that the idea of a unified vision of the work attracts her in a way which makes the fall into a restricted point of view claustrophobic.

How can we explain the persistent attraction which this vision has for Horton? Her own example of Noguchi's sculpture suggests one answer. Horton tells us that she chose *Dombey and Son* because she "loves" (11) it. The viewer before the "Cubic Pyramid" is like the critic before the text is like the lover before a beloved. This beloved is various, but this only increases her attractiveness. Others may love her for these various qualities: her hair, her eyes, her appearance in a certain light, her "nice fillips." The true critic, the true lover desires these. But he loves more. He loves what she really is, her inner self, the "protean" (55) form of Dickens within the novels, the solidity of the stone behind the reflecting surface.

It is interesting to think, in this context, about the relationship between the critic's desire for a total picture of the work and the structure of a certain kind of romantic love. Since, moreover, the protean form the viewer would glimpse in the mirrored surface of the "Cubic Pyramid" would obviously be his own, it would be even more interesting to submit this relationship to Lacan's discussion of narcissism in his article on the *stade du miroir*.

But Horton's book is most striking in its illustration of how a theory which, on a manifest level, denies the critic access to such a totalizing vision, can be used to invoke the presence of this vision. From this point of view, a certain kind of theorizing operates on the model of Freudian denial. It posits the existence of the very object it rejects. Loss is recuperated in the act of its acknowledgement.

Theory seems to function like this in *Interpreting Interpreting*. Certainly this would explain why, as I have said, no limited interpretation is ever allowed to develop without constantly being interrupted by repetitious theoretical statements which, despite their insistence on limitation, serve to keep the idea of the whole constantly before us. The image of the whole, the protean form of Dickens, is the real emotional center of this book, and Horton is never able to free herself from it enough to accept the necessity of restricted points of view or of the limitations of her own image as a critic.

ROY ROUSSEL

State University of New York at Buffalo

Virginia Woolf by Michael Rosenthal. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979. Pp. 270. $15.00.

Any book written about Virginia Woolf these days is likely to be outmoded even before it reaches print. This is partly the case with Michael Rosenthal's recent study, which takes current feminist and biographical approaches to Woolf as the occasion to proclaim "primacy of form" as the key to her achievement. In 1977—while Rosenthal must have been slogging away on his closing chapters—Hermione Lee was employing the same rationale in the opening lines of her newly published *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*: "This is not a book about Bloomsbury, lebianism, madness or suicide. It does not deal with Virginia Woolf as a feminist, as an owner of the Hogarth Press, as a critic and essayist, or as a biographer. It is a literary criticism of her nine novels, written in the hope of turning attention back from the life to the fictional work. . . ."

Worse yet, Ms. Lee was also usurping his major thesis, his similar concentration on Woolf's "continuing attempt, in every new work, to match her vision of reality with its appropriate form." Rosenthal would go her three better, of course, by dealing with Woolf as a critic, essayist, and biographer as well as a novelist, on the valid premise that these activities also have their appropriate forms. But he would agree with her that "criticism of Virginia Woolf which is emphatically feminist cannot get very far with any of the fiction, except perhaps *Orlando*." In 1978, alas, a year after Lee published these remarks, and while Rosenthal was no doubt polishing the accepted version of his manuscript, Phyllis Rose got very far indeed, in *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf*, with feminist readings of all the fiction. These readings were substantially more original, moreover, in opening up the feminist dimensions of each text, than those by Lee and Rosenthal—and decidedly more exciting.

Are formal readings of Woolf *passé*? Certainly with Woolf as with other major modern novelists we have had them *ad nauseum*. A list of critics who attempted them—and who invoke "primacy of form" in their behalf—would fill the rest of this review. What *is* new about Rosenthal's approach, let me accordingly add, is the doggedness and lucidity with which he pursues those diary entries about originating shapes, forms, designs (as opposed to characters or

themes) from which the experimental works proceed. No previous study—not even Lee's—has followed these entries so tenaciously, nor explained their implications so precisely, nor made such an impressive case for their centrality as keys to her various artifacts. As I have implied, the readings arrived at are inevitably familiar; there is no plethora here of dazzling insights, no resolution of old cruxes: but the elegance and care with which the formal dynamics of each text are defined is altogether exemplary. No one in that imagined list above has done such justice to Woolf's formal intentions and their literary unfoldings.

To clear the way for that enterprise Rosenthal writes related chapters on Woolf's life, her Bloomsbury circle, and the problem of defining her fictional commitment. In the first chapter he tries to separate her literary legacy as Leslie Stephen's daughter and Thoby Stephen's sister from whatever might detract from it. The conversations among leading intellectuals in her childhood home, the great resources of her father's library, the circle of Cambridge intellectuals her brother brought to her in later years, become salient; and the early bouts with madness after crucial family deaths, her sexual exploitation by an older half-brother, her resentment of male privilege and male dominance, are seen as serious obstacles and conditions which, by 1922, when her great experimental period began, were either surmounted or subordinated or kept in tremulous abeyance. From that point on until her suicide in 1941 she lived chiefly in and through her writing, where her chief commitment—as the third chapter holds—was to design.

This view of her life and art suffers again from supercession; it fails to include some of her own revelations, available since 1976 in *Moments of Being*, which help to explain why her mother and half-sister Stella were at least as crucial to her literary development as her father and her brother Thoby. Though Rosenthal knows how such late-Victorian domestic "angels" figure in her later animosities, he doesn't see how they figure also in her selfless artistry and—paradoxically enough—in her selfless devotion to feminist causes. He arrives, then, at a curiously encapsulated life which leads—as we shall see—to a curiously encapsulated formal study.

The Bloomsbury chapter, which might have widened the study's scope, tends largely to preserve its narrow focus. Though Rosenthal is plainly enamored of Bloomsbury and feels at home in its heady environs, he dismisses its present standing as the precursor of contemporary liberations and defines it rather as a conservative enclave—rational, civilized, affluent—whose ethical and aesthetic concerns were essentially privileged. As he later shows, moreover, these same concerns—as reflected in Woolf's privileged life and art—would eventually appeal to "common readers" belonging to a similar class. Thus Bloomsbury becomes for Rosenthal a metaphor for his own and Virginia Woolf's readers, an educated, prosperous, and largely academic group in which current liberationists—if not excluded—are put in their properly subordinated places. The rescuing of Woolf from her present admirers takes a strange form, indeed, in this oddly regressive study of her designing ways.

But there is no gainsaying its dogged achievements. After dealing with Woolf's conventional realism in her first two novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, Rosenthal moves confidently to the elucidation of her first experimental

novel, *Jacob's Room*. Through careful analysis, he isolates the different formal principles at work in the three experimental stories—"The Mark on the Wall," "Kew Gardens," and "An Unwritten Novel" which—Woolf had conceived as "taking hands and dancing in unity" to produce *Jacob's Room*; then he demonstrates how in fact these principles do work to unify that novel—which suffers nonetheless from heavyhanded explanations and uncertain narrative focus. Where Rosenthal moves nimbly and lucidly through these paces, producing what I take to be the best account of the novel's form extant, his predecessor Lee begins with the same three stories but quickly bogs down in the intricacies of verbal play. In general, she is more richly engaged with the novels than Rosenthal, but lacks his great gift for describing formal topographies.

Rosenthal's formal expertise works well on at least three more occasions: with the dubious "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*, which I treat quite otherwise in *Criticism*, Winter 1979, but for which he supplies the best formal justification I have seen; with the somber distillations of inner essences in that stillborn classic, *The Waves*, which he unstintingly admires; and with the livelier uncertainties of *Between the Acts*, where again his reading ranks with the best we have. He is alert always to the author's concern with creative effort in the face of chaos, and to those globed "moments of being" which so many critics have remarked; he is alert to isolation and unity as constants in her fictive world, and to the coalescences of times past and present; and he is attentive, finally, to the social dimensions of her texts, to her feminism, her pacifism, her diatribes against conversion, her concern with sexual identity. Unfortunately, he is something less than alert to Woolf's personal stake in her own creative efforts, which may explain why his approach to these and other novels seems relatively shallow. As he himself observes of the pageant in *Between the Acts*: "What matters are not the merits of the play but the ongoing nature of the creative process itself.... Miss La Trobe's ability to continue in spite of the difficulties she faces constitutes a triumph of the spirit in which Woolf, in this novel, ultimately rests." Of course, the merits of Woolf's "plays" still matter; but since she also had to face ongoing difficulties throughout her career, and since Rosenthal sets them aside in his opening chapter, there is no triumph of the spirit in this study, nor of the spirit's changing forms.

We are not even told, for instance, that it was her shift of allegiance from Mansfield's external impressionism to Joyce's internal stream which helped her to solve her most glaring difficulty in *Jacob's Room*—her avoidance of inner life—in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Her discovery of "her own voice" in the latter novel, her sudden access to "new maturity," comes *sui generis*, and Joyce is given no credit at all for showing her how the mind's quickness might be used in apprehending death, as in the cemetery scene in *Ulysses* she so admired. Nor is death itself seen as an ongoing problem with which she bravely wrestles in these novels; it is simply a local theme, handled flawlessly through appropriate forms. We do learn here that Mrs. Dalloway was originally intended to commit suicide; but Rosenthal never questions Woolf's motives in shifting that fate onto her hapless double, Septimus Warren Smith, nor in shifting the blame for it onto two complacent doctors, Holmes and Bradshaw, in whose excoriation Rosenthal sees "a splendid summary" of Bloomsbury's case against "a whole world

view... which abhors diversity" and subdues people "to its own restricted premises." Woolf's easy victory over these cardboard villains, her failure to provide a burden of ungrieved grief and guilt for Mrs. Dalloway like that her double has to bear, the vicarious triumphs over the exigencies of sex and death she then provides for Mrs. Dalloway, go unexamined. In other words, Rosenthal accepts unquestioningly the author's intentions and their flawless execution in this novel—indeed, in all the novels after *Jacob's Room.* As a result, he fails to penetrate with any depth into the human problems Woolf explores; he simply demonstrates the technical excellence of her design and the kind of "substances" which yield most readily to them: the disconnectedness of modern life; the heroine's life-savoring absorptions; her vital presence; and those globed moments which, like other artist-heroines, she achieves as stays against confusion.

These are worthy subjects, in most cases admirably realized, but they scarcely exhaust the range and depth of Woolf's concern with human problems; nor does Rosenthal's approach seem especially sensitive to that rich concern. At one point, for instance, he claims that Lily Briscoe exists in *To the Lighthouse* "without any particular sexual role at all"; she "seems essentially neuter, indifferent to sexual needs of any sort"; her resentment of Mrs. Ramsay's insistence on marriage defines "no alternative set of yearnings. Sex simply plays no part in Lily's life." As any observant reader might reply, Rosenthal overlooks her intense desire to join in the search for Minta Doyle's brooch, her fascination with and repulsion from the fires of passion in Paul Rayley, the intensity of her bodily yearning for union with Mrs. Ramsay, and her fumbling attempt to recall the "electric thrill" of the Ramsays' marriage vow. Lily is less neuter, then, than bound by sexual tensions which she cannot resolve; and these tensions are further entwined with her whole attempt to make sense of the Ramsays' marriage, and of her own relation to them, and beyond that, with her curiously impacted grief for Mrs. Ramsay—an impaction shared with Woolf herself—on the release of which the completion of her painting seems to rest. Rosenthal's blindness to this network of intertwining feelings of confused love, frustrated passion, and blocked grief is more than a minor critical lapse: it is a blindness to the deeper sources of the novel's emotional power and to their origins in Woolf's personal dilemmas; a blindness, then, endemic to his method. As Woolf herself acknowledged, the writing of this novel released her from daily hallucinations of her parents' presence; it seems to have freed her, further, for the androgynous romp of *Orlando* and for her energetic feminist writings of the late 1920's and early 1930's. An unquestioning view of design and execution cannot explain such deeply personal triumphs.

Nor can it explain why the force of her release divided and thwarted her energies when she came to write *The Years* in the mid-1930's. Though Rosenthal bows to Mitchell Leaska's essay on *The Pargiters,* the early novel-essay version of *The Years* which appeared in 1977, he has obviously failed to read or account for the text itself. The energy and freedom of its alternation between fictional passages and didactic commentaries speaks eloquently, I think, to the forcefulness of Woolf's feminist anger at this time. Though Rosenthal pulls *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* into his purview as substantial works of art, treats *Three Guineas* as an effective (if assailable) moral tract, and reads

Flush: *A Biography* as a playful feminist critique of Victorianism, he nowhere accepts Woolf's feminist convictions as sufficiently strong to split her intentions, challenge her belief in artistic autonomy, and move her, almost, to write a didactic novel. When she abandoned *The Pargiters* as too unwieldy, shelved its didactic chapters for later use in *Three Guineas*, and tried to aestheticize her convictions in *The Years*, she created the most tedious, labored, murky novel in her canon—as a great many critics have since attested. But for Rosenthal *The Years* is another flawless triumph. He does not see how her blunted feminist anger, together with the book's unmanageable scope and realistic densities, led to endless interchangeable instances of failed communications, dismal discontinuities, and lifeless verbal resonances. Indeed, he doesn't even acknowledge that Woolf herself dismissed this "odious rice pudding of a book" as "a dank failure" and denied its autonomy by lumping it with *Three Guineas* "as one book"—as if still trying to rescue her abandoned novel-essay plan.

By his concluding chapter, however, Rosenthal has moved onto safer ground. After defining Woolf's impressionistic criticism as essentially old-fashioned, and her modernist pleading as essentially self-serving, he establishes the privileged social position from which such writing proceeds; and here his argument, that in her criticism at least she was not a radical social thinker, strikes me as well taken. But her criticism is not her fiction, and when Rosenthal claims that we must accept the fact of her privileged social stance "if we are —to appreciate her work in its totality," he merely describes his own privileged approach. Yet plainly he does appreciate that totality, and is past master of its formal principles and enlivening designs. Readers will go to his book for these salient virtues for some time to come, and that too—for the critical spirit—is a worthy triumph.

MARK SPILKA

Brown University

The Language of Puritan Feeling: *An Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and Social History* by David Leverenz. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980. Pp. xi + 346. $22.00.

The New Englanders created the West, wrote Jorge Luis Borges, and so we study the Puritans to death in order to understand how we live. Though we already know more about the Puritans than any sane person would want to know, as Edmund Morgan once said, we continue to worry that 200-year bulge in history which they made, for we never seem to be quite sure we have got it right. And that has been one of the opportunities of studying the period: it is a field for intellectual experimentation.

One of the inadvertent pleasures of the literary and historical studies of early America has been the relative absence of Freud. One could *assume* the general insanity and go on to more important matters! Now David Leverenz, encouraged by Norman O. Brown, Erik Erikson, and other neo-Freudians, lays these beautifully demented souls out on an imaginary historical couch for

elaborate psychoanalysis. And while the methodology is disgraceful ("to use literature to apply psychoanalytic theory to social psychology"), the results are enlightening. One is almost seduced by the experiment, if mainly because of *their* talent at interesting and entertaining us.

Freud, Leverenz fantasizes, invented the Puritans. Theirs was A Family Romance—at home, in the new society, and in a dramatic cosmos—in which thousands of sons reacted ambivalently towards thousands of fathers whose traditional roles were threatened by new social discontents and so turned for tender mothering and grave fathering to The True Father, the Puritan God. These are the "anal dynamics" of early America.

In New England, male roles ("reserved or anxious fathering") and female roles ("good though demanding mothering") widened, and this left all the Puritan children full of "reaction formations" and "a conscious dedication to anxiety" and "obsessional neuroses [that] reflect infantile internalization of patriarchal repression." Thus "their hunger for comprehensive patterns" and "their hunger for more specifically regressive pleasures." Which anxieties, however, Leverenz struggles to assure us, they turned into virtues. Puritan frustrations turned (with Freud winking approvingly in the wings) into American productivity. "If all they could be sure of was anxiety, that was to them a profoundly comforting thought." Not a happy state, though often a creative one.

The Puritan sons' expectations of the fathers were impossibly high in America and got mixed results—ambivalence in an age of dislocation. The failure of the fathers led to insecurity in the sons, a set of ambivalences which led to opposites in the ethics and theology. Yet secure families led to stable communities and to universal securities. The subsuming of many conflicts in the expectation of order became—God knows how!—the transient genius of Puritanism.

However, Leverenz' drama of Puritanism ("a confluence of two contradictory modes of literary expression: nursing fantasies and obsessive styles") is simply on too small a stage: the domestic. And while that may have been a dominant metaphor in the sermons of the time (the family as "a little commonwealth"), that hardly represents all that was going on in mind and body in that period. Other analogies work as well and say as little. Leverenz does not see that Puritanism, like Freudianism, was built on analogies that broke down in their own minds and break down in ours. That saved it.

At one point in his arrangement of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ideologies and conflicts into a Freudian pattern, Leverenz commits an anachronism which gives him away: "Children were thought of as both more and less than little adults, some of our current theories to the contrary, and Puritans were especially sensitive to parental responsibilities." What are "current theories" doing in *that* period? Can syntax thus convincingly accomplish the proximity of centuries?

It is only by a rhetorical strategy of implicit polarity that Leverenz resolves the contradictions he finds in early America. But that takes skill at equivocation. And that is dishonest. Contradictory sexual imagery in the descriptions of God, for instance, does not mean the Puritans were ambivalent about their relation to God. The mixed metaphors are mixed metaphors, not mixed feelings. The equivocations are fun, as when Leverenz calls God and Christ "a fantasy

of mutual dependence between consenting adults" or speaks of grown Puritan men with "feminine and infantile fantasies," but they are hardly enlightening about an age that had no such concepts. The critic overreacheth—to say old things in hip ways.

Two major flaws make Leverenz' book fascinating. There is the flaw of the psychoanalyst: he actually takes these people *seriously*. And there is the flaw of the literary critic: *texts* are the truth.

Leverenz the therapist doesn't distinguish between what in Puritan rhetoric is a revealing slip and what is merely flip. John Cotton's reference to himself as the breast of God in one of his sermons, for example, doesn't necessarily mean he is ambivalent about his masculinity, his patriarchal authority. It probably means he has read his Bible and has simply found a metaphor he can use to show his joy in being a minister. Besides, if you put his analogy back into its context in his sermon, you find that it hardly matters what he has at that point as long as it makes his point. This metaphor, and hundreds of others like it, is used initially, Leverenz admits, "for purposes of analogy" but soon is taken seriously when the analogue justifies the Freudian-Puritan model.

Leverenz the literary critic, while admitting the annoying paucity of texts to tell us anything very conclusive about the Puritan mind, treats his few like holy scriptures, seeking "the emotional sources of Puritan rhetoric" in "great writers, our psychic barometers." In other words, lacking bodies, he analyzes words and deduces the whole thrust of a society therefrom, forgetting how many other factors, artful and otherwise, made it. For him, the rhetoric of the period is "a self-referential system," a "transformational mirror for social history, especially for shared feelings." Leverenz discusses no more than a dozen New England sons and no more than three or four works of each. But did that handful really represent all of *that* or make all of *this?* With Leverenz, it is a temptation to say yes, because of the slick correspondence with mythic Freudian patterns which he is able to make. But it is probably better to say an emphatic no, because we can't *know*, we can only guess. Leverenz too is only guessing!

Leverenz' mind is one that one must admire: immensely wide reading, a sweeping eye, a lively style, fresh examples, and acutely fine comments on the literary styles of "diverse fathers" like Thomas Hooker, John Cotton, Thomas Shepard, and "divergent sons" like Increase Mather and Samuel Willard. But Leverenz' book is one that one must simply forgive. It is a frivolous experiment.

KARL KELLER

San Diego State University

Home as Found: Authority and Geneology in Nineteenth-Century American Literature by Eric I. Sundquist. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xxi + 209. $15.00.

In this study of Cooper, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville, Eric Sundquist examines a preoccupation of nineteenth-century American literature that has already received a good deal of attention: the conflict between originality and imitation, between revolutionary rejections of the past and appeals or capitulations to its authority. But while the approach of such "classic" predecessors as F. O. Matthiessen and Marius Bewley was at heart social or political, Sundquist understands originality and imitation first of all in psychoanalytic terms. "The model for the conflicts under examination," he writes, "is the sacrificial totem meal Freud finds so strikingly fused with the Oedipal situation," in which "ritual remembrance of the [Oedipal] crime unnervingly augments the slain father's power at the same time it celebrates the seizure of that power" (xvii, xiii).

This is not to say that Sundquist is narrowly or exclusively concerned with psychology. The totem meal, and the ambivalence Freud found in it, are for him paradigmatic of a whole series of congruent tensions, ranging from matters of political authority to questions of authorial legitimacy. In Cooper's *Home as Found*, for instance, the attempt "to found an American home by incest and repetition" (36) is related both to Cooper's politics and to the function of imitation and parody in his writing. Thoreau's *Week* is read as a paradoxical and self-contradictory "retreat away from the speculative web of reference and inference" (54) spun by consciousness and language. In Hawthorne Sundquist finds a primal "*sacrifice of mimesis*," forcing such works as *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* to become "head-on confrontations with the problem of representation" (122, 126). And Melville's *Pierre* enacts "a point of crisis figuring authority at an impotent crossroads where the struggle [between rebellion and capitulation] is so internalized that it can generate only a wild, self-reflexive parody" (146). These brief summaries can hardly do justice to the dense (sometimes overly dense) complexity of Sundquist's argument. But they may at least suggest that his psychoanalytic focus does not prevent him from exploring such "literary" questions as the function of parody and, in Hawthorne's case, the elusive definition of "romance."

Sundquist insists that his use of Freud is not "clinical" but "cultural." He disclaims any desire to reduce creative power to neurotic symptom; he uses Freud, he says, not to *explain* but to *define* "the scenes of crisis that compel some of the best American literature of the nineteenth century" (xvii). While this approach may offend the strict Freudian it will probably please those who find psychoanalytic criticism reductive. But even the non-Freudian may find Sundquist's disclaimer an evasion, and find its results unsettling. This "cultural" Freudianism leaves important theoretical questions unanswered. The asserted relationship of Freud to the texts under discussion is mainly analogical: we are told, for instance, that a statement of Freud "corresponds closely" (100) to a belief of Hawthorne; that while "original sin" may not *be* the "primal scene," nevertheless "the two equally hypothetical moments have a similar force" (103); or simply that there is a "weird coincidence" (104) between an aspect of

Hawthorne and an idea of Freud. What is missing here is an asserted *explanation* of such "coincidences." As a result Sundquist's "cultural" Freudianism tends to come unmoored from any precisely defined sense of actual cultural interaction. The "coincidence" or "similarity" linking Freud to the works under discussion often seems little more than an elaborate pun. This charge might not bother an author who can describe *Pierre*, for instance, as "a 'Pierrody' and 'Pierricide' of itself" (184). But one expects more solid grounding from a book which appeals to Freud as "cultural historian" (xvii).

Nevertheless, whatever one's theoretical reservations about it might be, Sundquist's psychoanalytic approach has real practical value. His use of Freud's totem meal as analogical model yields an insight into the theme of rebellion and authority unavailable in more traditional, "political" approaches to the subject. In the work of critics like Matthiessen and Bewley the antagonism between rebellion and tradition is a contest, however internalized by specific characters, between separate forces or ideologies. What Freud contributes to Sundquist's understanding of this contest is not only the notion of ambivalence but the idea that "devotion and rebellion" may be welded "inextricably together" (xi) *in the same gesture*, including the gesture of the author's own literary performance. This insight permits us to see a crucial connection between the theme and form of the works under discussion. The literary analogue to the totem meal is parody; "*imitation*," as Sundquist puts it, "must always entertain the eventuality that it be taken as both obedience and mockery" (171-72) of the object it burlesques.

Thus in Cooper's *Home as Found* the Effinghams' effort to assert legitimacy by "echoing and plagiarizing" the past "at once constitutes an inviolable authority and threatens to collapse into itself" (39); and Cooper's analogous effort, as son and author, leads him "to the point of self-parody" (25). Thoreau's attempt in the *Week* to write "the myth of America" is simultaneously a "commemorative act" and a parodic repetition of what it seeks to strip away—an imitative "commerical intrusion in which the white man's 'load of thought' further buries that which it would recover" (81). Hawthorne's "Eden" of pure mimesis "constantly collapses under the pressure of [that] perception" (110) which, in seeking to revive it, only imitates its original loss. In such a view, the tradition of nineteenth-century American literature quite naturally culminates in the "wild, self-reflexive parody" (146) of *Pierre*, whose hero is "at home" only in the role and the words of his patriarchal past.

Some readers will object to Sundquist's psychoanalytic approach, either because they find it too strict or because they find it, theoretically, too loose. Some may be put off, and not without reason, by the arch density of his prose. Yet his book is still an original and useful contribution, particularly to our understanding of the stylistic and formal consequences of the obsession with authority in the literature of the American Renaissance.

MICHAEL DAVITT BELL

Williams Colllege

The Creation of Nikolai Gogol by Donald Fanger. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. xviii + 300. $16.50.

It is fitting that Donald Fanger's outstanding study on Gogol bear a punning title in the spirit of its whimsical object of study. "Creation" here can of course be understood as one possible translation of the standard Russian title for monographs on authors, i.e. "tvorcestvo" (works). Of more concern to Fanger is the second reading of "creation" in the sense of a verbal noun, the process of Gogol's creation of himself, or as Fanger terms it, "Gogol's stey-by-step self-improvisation as a writer" (ix). Again in Gogolian spirit, Fanger's thesis—and this is very much a work of thesis, *not* synthesis—might be couched in the following paradox: Gogol attempted through his creativity to fill a vacuum with a void and thereby fill the latter. The "vacuum" in this paradox is the absence of a Russian prose tradition when Gogol began writing in the late 1820's; the "void," the absence of the usual author's biography which Gogol, in person as elusive as in his texts, took great pains to obscure. In Gogol's case the separation of author from text is no modern critical posture; Fanger's well-taken point is that we really have no Gogol other than his texts. And the texts point nowhere but to themselves, an assortment of elusive narrators, voices, denials and characters that prove upon examination to be "bare verbal tissue" (259). As Fanger sums up the problem of text and referrent in Gogol: "This ultimate paradox of literary art is Gogol's fundamental message. The rest is implication—and of the most various sorts: Psychological, social, ethical, religious—all encoded, demonstrably and at the same time incompletely, in the texts" (259). These latter incidentally have provided the basis for traditional approaches to Gogol from Belinsky to the present day.

In focusing on the literary problems confronting Gogol, Fanger provides a much needed reminder of Gogol's acute awareness of the literary scene of his time and of the special role he felt it was destiny to play in Russian Literature. Briefly stated, Gogol saw his role to be for Russian prose what Pushkin was for Russian poetry. Fanger emphatically agrees that Gogol's was the first authentic national voice in prose; he "broke the language barrier" (235), as Sinyavsky puts it, and created Russian prose out of the spoken language(s) of his day. This parallelism between Pushkin and Gogol Fanger sees culminating in each author's greatest works, *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin's novel in verse, and *Dead Souls*, Gogol's prose *poema*. Both are sustained acts of poetic discourse, compendia of observation, commentary, confession, imagination with tones varying from burlesque through the lyrical to the solemn, with primacy of author as creator (151-2).

As mentioned, Fanger's study is one of thesis, and therein the reader must be cautioned. Although the book is intended for specialists and non-specialists alike, one will not find extensive retracking of familiar Gogolian landscape such as *poshlost, skaz*, "nosology," realized metaphor, hyperbole and like. Fanger assumes close familiarity with the texts, the major critics on Gogol and the general outlines of the development of Russian Literature. Gogol's works are analyzed only to the extent dictated by the thesis. Particularly refreshing is Fanger's acceptance of the miracle and mystery of Gogol's achievement. His

frank admission of the difficulties and dangers of interpreting Gogol is also bound to be heartening for students of Gogol. But for a study whose thesis is that content is *in* the form (235) or as stated in another place, "the bedrock allegory of Gogol's art... concerns the miracle and meaning of its own existence" (261), there is a curious absence of extensive discussion about Gogol's ultimate miracle, his language.

Fanger's study abounds in wonderful insights into many of Gogol's works, which will provide great stimulus to further study. But the one immediate, immense benefit of Fanger's approach is that it does what no "committed" approach can, simply make possible a reading of Gogol; that is, it not only makes permissible an eclectic approach to the works, it virtually insists upon it. The responsibility for the reader is to explore *all* the encoded implications (social, psychological or otherwise) of a Gogol text. As he concludes in his remarks on "The Overcoat," this sort of analysis entails "a respect for the idiosyncracy of the form that allows full appreciation of the capaciousness of Gogol's story, its legitimate transcendence of singleness of message..." (161).

FRANK J. CORLISS, JR.

Wayne State University

Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry During the 1960s by Charles Altieri. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1979. Pp. 258. $17.50.

Current studies of contemporary American poetry locate their subject somewhere within a historical continuum that extends—so elastic has the term "contemporary" become—from the end of World War II to the present moment. Given the variousness, the sheer breadth, of the work done in poetry during these three and a half decades, it is not surprising that we should find rather different versions of what constitutes it, depending on where the critic cuts into the period or simply on what writers he chooses to deal with. Understandably, there have been few attempts to account for everything. Most critics forego extensive coverage in order to focus on themes, issues, or coherent groupings of writers. Yet few confront the problem of literary change in terms other than the stylistic and the rhetorical, and few look beyond a merely temporal understanding of what is "contemporary" about poetry during this long (and lengthening) period.

What is immediately striking about Charles Altieri's important book, then, particularly at a time when the whole notion of periodization is being called into question, is the fact that it focuses on the poetry of a single decade, that of the 1960s, and views it as a coherent, historical whole. One obvious advantage of this approach is that it allows Altieri to avoid some of the risks inherent in any criticism of contemporary literature—primarily the risk of attempting to evaluate the careers of writers still actively productive. More important, it frees him to regard the poetry as a distinct and separate historical achievement,

without necessary connection to its continuities with work beyond the decade. In this sense, the poetry of the sixties is not contemporary for Altieri; it is comprised instead of a relatively fixed body of strategies, values, and styles that are seen as having arisen out of particular historical needs and that have now been absorbed into the general repertoire of literary models available to still newer writers. The great value of the book lies in its rigorously theoretical and philosophical definition of those historical needs and its precise placement of them in the larger context of literary and philosophical change extending back through modernism to the Romantics.

Altieri's term for the period is "postmodern," which in his usage is not simply a voguish replacement for contemporary or a gesture in the direction of Derridean "free play," but a sharply specific way of referring to the struggles of poets in the sixties to surpass the assumptions and values of some of the most powerful poetry of the twentieth century, that of the generation of Yeats and Eliot. What motivated this undertaking, moreover, was not just an anxiety of influence but a recognition of the need for new models of the poem at a time when poets were growing increasingly suspicious of the prophetic claims of the symbolist tradition and of the academic formalism, fostered by New Criticism, that represented a diluted, if elegant, continuation of that tradition. In Altieri's view, poets in the sixties, precisely because of their historical circumstances, as well as their sense of the inadequacy of forms and values inherited from modernism to newer versions of experience, were forced to reinterpret modernist positions on a variety of issues—including the relationship of concrete particulars to universals, the role of the self in the poetic process, language, myth, and the social functions of poetry. They had to invent, in short, a "coherent philosophical poetics" of their own to accommodate axiological and epistemological orientations beyond the scope of modernism. The chief result was what he calls an "aesthetic of presence," or immanence, involving the conviction, traced back to the early Wordsworth, that "experience has value without the artist intervening to rearrange and structure it." As the basic tenet of Altieri's version of postmodernism, this aesthetic of presence is opposed to Coleridgean symbolist theories that give primacy to the creative role of consciousness or mind as the source of value in art and that stand behind modernist poetics. Thus the task of the poet is no longer to impose himself on experience and wrest meaning from it, transforming it into myth with universal human implications, but to open himself to the values and energies already immanent in nature or experience and disclose them through the verbal energies of the poem.

Altieri's argument, even in this bare, oversimplified sketch of it, seems to rest on two essential and related claims. One is that the change from symbolist to immanentist modes of poetic thought constitutes a historical pattern or context in which a fairly diverse group of poets can be accurately located, and the other is that the poets themselves have indeed worked out, no matter how consciously or systematically, a coherent poetics of their own as an alternative to modernism. This second claim is apparently complicated by the fact that some of the poets he deals with—Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov, for example—have addressed themselves to poetic theory in substantial ways, while some of the others—Robert Lowell, W. S. Merwin, Frank

O'Hara—have been comparatively silent about theory or even hostile to it. But this complication is quickly disposed of by Altieri's basic assumption as a critic—that literary style itself necessarily has philosophical implications—while his close readings of texts in the light of this assumption demonstrate the extent to which poems themselves are often the best manifestation of their underlying poetics. In fact, one of the best sections in the book, on the poetry of O'Hara, suggests (especially if it is compared with the rather more densely abstract discussions of Olson and Duncan) that the absence of explicit theory from a poet's work is not necessarily a deprivation for the critic seeking the most direct apprehension of his poetry.

In dealing with his first claim, Altieri offers, in an ambitious and suggestive first chapter, "a logical geography mapping the internal relationships among various postmodern positions on the nature of the poetic imagination, the relationship between the mind and nature or objects, and the ways poetry can deal with mythic, historical, and social themes in order to dramatize the importance of values radically different from the essential conservatism of the modernists." Starting with Coleridge and Wordsworth, who provide the fundamental models of thought informing modernism and postmodernism respectively, Altieri's intention here is to develop the range of differences that distinguish poets who stress the creativity of mind from those who emphasize natural law as a creative source, as in Robert Duncan's well-known distinction between "the order man may contrive or impose upon the things about him" and "the divine order or natural order he may discover in them." The rest of the book, five extended chapters, is devoted to showing the variety of forms assumed by the basic attitudes of postmodernism in the careers of individual poets, including the specifically poetic forms and styles to which these attitudes lead. The following poets or groups of poets are dealt with: Robert Lowell; Robert Bly, Charles Olson, and Frank O'Hara; Gary Snyder and Robert Duncan; Robert Creeley and W. S. Merwin; and Denise Levertov. As a version of the poetry of the sixties, this selection will not satisfy everyone, biased as it is toward poets associated with Black Mountain or Donald Allen's anthology, *The New American Poetry*. In its defense, one might say that Altieri, who is largely indifferent to schools and labels, is not merely writing about poets he admires; in each case, his choice is more or less dictated by the demands of his "logical geography," his theoretical map of the period. One might also say that any theoretical construct that provides terms in which both Robert Lowell and Charles Olson can be discussed as inhabitants of the same literary time and place has much to recommend it. In certain ways, in fact, Lowell and Olson, despite the incompatibility of the "schools" to which they are usually assigned—confessional and projectivist—emerge for Altieri as the two major figures of the age—Lowell as the greatest poet and Olson as the most important theorist.

Lowell is considered first because he best exemplifies both the need to escape modernism and the difficulty of doing so. His break, in *Life Studies*, from the New Critical formalism of his own earlier work helps to explain the limits of that style and dramatizes the need for a new mode that will be more in touch with the direct experience of a naturalistic "prose world," a world in which experience is conceived as process and in which value is immanent, not transcen-

dent. Thus Lowell's poetry shifts radically from the tightly structured, epiphanic, densely symbolic forms of *Lord Weary's Castle* to the looser, more open forms of his later books which "appear," Altieri shrewdly observes, "to remain faithful to the casual flux of experience." What Lowell's career demonstrates is not only an increasing commitment to an aesthetic of presence but a pattern of conversion that is exemplary for the sixties, involving a movement away from the universalizing, myth-making, form-giving imagination to a position more immediately and directly in the world, so that familiar realities can be recovered as valuable in themselves, not as elements in a symbolic order whose value depends on their incarnational force. Yet Lowell is ultimately a tragic figure for Altieri because his commitment to immanence or flux is incomplete and always attended by a sense of loss. Although his later work is based on the conviction that we are "only in touch with what we touch," Lowell cannot give up what he nonetheless no longer trusts without nostalgia, a kind of Arnoldian longing for discredited historical and cultural ideals that arouses, Altieri claims, the suspicions of younger contemporaries who are less ambiguously disenchanted with history. But one wonders if Lowell is so completely isolated and without influence as this account, moving as it is, suggests. Or is this simply a minor instance of Altieri's "logical geography" leading him to overstate his case, and thus to expose the extent to which that geography is a version of literary history whose explanatory power depends as much on what it excludes (those poets, for example, who value Lowell's work) as on what it reveals (the paths pursued by other poets consciously attempting a more complete break with humanist values)?

What is most important in this discussion, in any case, is Altieri's insistence that for all the appearance of casualness and contingency in Lowell's poetry, it is in fact in the process of discovering or appropriating conventions whereby it continues to generate interpretative patterns or structures that make possible the emergence of generalized perspectives on experience. This is especially true in *Life Studies*, where concrete images or incidents in individual poems acquire larger significance as they are absorbed into patterns in the volume as a whole. Thus, as a theorist of a poetics of immanence or presence, Altieri stops short of J. Hillis Miller's position in *Poets of Reality*, where, in advancing a similar poetics, Miller claims that a poet like Williams achieves an unmediated apprehension of the world, the poem as the thing itself. In the aesthetic of presence, Altieri points out, "poems do not present direct experience but the aesthetic illusion of direct experience that depends on style and form as means for seeing the world freshly."

All the poets Altieri examines after his treatment of Lowell represent a variety of positions and attitudes within the full context of the aesthetic of presence. The work of Bly, Olson, and O'Hara offers three distinct but related ways of moving beyond Lowell's despairing nostalgia for humanism, based on the idea that "the moment immediately and intensely experienced can restore one to harmony with the world and provide ethical and psychological renewal." Then Snyder and Duncan are presented as essentially religious poets with few doubts about their faith in the satisfactions to be derived from the fullness of ongoing experience, or "process as plenitude." It is precisely this faith that Creeley and Merwin, however, cannot summon, and they serve Altieri

as instances of a more skeptical and ironic attitude toward the immanentist imperative, "be here intensely." This attitude, moreover, is based on a radical awareness of the inadequacy of experiences of presence that are simply not abiding or that do not somehow take account of their opposite, experiences of absence.

On the whole, these chapters constitute the best criticism of these poets that we have had. Altieri is able to place them within his historical and theoretical context and provide richly detailed accounts of their work, and one must be grateful for the tremendous sense he has been able to make of a period that up to now has often seemed to be dizzyingly varied, a welter of styles, forms, schools, and attitudes with little if anything in common. Despite this, he seems to me to be less than entirely successful in his sections on Olson and Duncan, in the sense that his discussions of their work sometimes exhibit nearly the same degree of difficulty that their work itself does, and so readers who find these poets turgidly involuted or esoterically involved with their own private visions may not be encouraged to persist with them by Altieri's corresponding density. In the section on Olson in particular, I found myself wishing for less theory and for a greater focus on poetry, especially given the extent to which, as Altieri shows, Olson's value as a writer lies in his conscious efforts to extend the boundaries of the lyric and to push toward the epic—a push demanded by all the implications of his thought. The one poem by Olson discussed, "Variations Done for Gerald Van de Wiele," is dealt with beautifully, but as Altieri himself admits, it is "essentially a pastoral poem in the Romantic meditative mode," and as such it cannot exemplify the fullest reach of Olson's thinking as it emerges in the discussion. In fact, Altieri's almost exclusive orientation toward the lyric may be a limitation, since one imagines that attention to larger forms, particularly in the work of a poet like Olson, might have necessitated some qualification of the claims made for the aesthetic of presence as a definitive concept for the period. The lyric, after all, has traditionally been the most fundamental form in which to address a present moment of intense experience, and Olson clearly grew impatient with conventional notions of lyricism, or at least with what he regarded as its inherent subjective interference with the perceptual act. For these reasons, despite the degree to which most modern poems approximating epic shy away from narrative, one wonders how far an aesthetic of presence can support an epic ambition—a poem, as Pound defined it, including history. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that Olson's *Maximus*, whose postmodernism might best be defined by the way it includes not history per se but its own history, continues itself to be governed largely by lyric procedures, Olson's redefinition of such procedures notwithstanding.

On the general issue of limitations—not of the poets but of the aesthetic of presence itself—Altieri provides a final chapter, and it is the most problematic of the book. He deals here with Denise Levertov, but his interest is less in her work, which he sees as a fairly standard version of immanentist poetry, than in her discovery of the inappropriateness of her poetics to the ethical and public themes occasioned by the Vietnam War. In pursuing this interest, Altieri deviates sharply from the structure of his earlier chapters, which are all balanced and developmental considerations of the work of one or more poets, and

engages new themes in a way that dilutes or at least complicates the thrust of his book. His concern now is to raise questions about the philosophical adequacy of postmodernism from the perspective of its failures with social and political issues, and his argument, taking a series of jarring twists and turns, leads him first to congratulate Levertov for arriving at a crucial awareness of the insufficiency of her immanentist stance—oriented as it is toward particular and personal experiences of presence—in a time of political turmoil. But she is then criticized harshly not only for the poverty of her methods of accommodating larger issues but for her failure to avail herself of models and traditions that might provide the greater discursiveness and generalizing ability required by a style seeking, in Altieri's words, "to formulate an ethic and an aesthetic that might help restructure the consciousness of society." The lapses in this phase of Levertov's work, as Altieri demonstrates them, are clear, but what seems less than fair is the way she is made to bear the brunt of the attack here for problems endemic to postmodern poetics in general and thus potentially to most of the poets with whom Altieri deals.

It is then somewhat ironic that the alternative models and traditions Altieri has in mind for Levertov are those of modernism—ironic because so much of the book is devoted to showing why poets of the sixties could not accept modernist procedures. Yet even though these procedures are capable, as he suggests (without full demonstration), of generating a valuable public poetry, Altieri goes on to acknowledge that "no poetry is likely to have much direct impact on the social order." His concern, then, is that poetry not be "embarrassingly simplistic," regardless of its political or ethical effectiveness. Its value is essentially aesthetic, or that of an act of mind, and even modernism, for all the nobility of its efforts to work out a viable relationship between the poet and society, did not and perhaps could not wholly succeed in the public realm. But how satisfied, one must ask, would Levertov have been with an appeal to aesthetics in the midst of her urgent attempts to end the war? Though Altieri distinguishes between poetry and politics as modes of consciousness and action respectively, is it not precisely impatience with this kind of dichotomy, and with the resulting divorce between thought and action, that prompted the various breaks with modernism in the sixties?

Despite these difficulties of his last chapter—difficulties of tone and sheer haste more than actual content—it is a mark of Altieri's originality and energy as a critic that he does not simply let the entire matter rest by offering one more example of the aesthetic of presence—even one which happens to turn against itself critically out of frustration with its inability to engage social and political themes. Instead, Levertov's crisis provides him with an opening for a general discussion of "the limitations of all modern political poetry" and an opportunity to reconsider modernism in the light of its relatively greater achievement in this area. Moreover, in concluding with what must be regarded as a resuscitation of modernism in a book otherwise devoted to what replaces it historically, Altieri suggests that literary history is not simply progressive or developmental but, as he puts it in an interesting note, "a kind of differential field in which there is no progress, only a series of permutations and oppositions that sustain one another." The danger, of course, is that he is throwing his book off balance,

as well as undermining its teleological design, by introducing new themes and an altered perspective at the very end. One requires a little reminding, after this last table-turning chapter, that Altieri's basic argument, after all, concerns the success of the poets of the sixties in finding alternatives to modernism.

ROBERT KERN

Boston College

Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature by Frank McConnell. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. xv + 303. $13.95.

Frank McConnell's *Storytelling and Mythmaking* violates the sacred cows of many academic *cinestes*, but those who would be horrified by his methodology and his results are unlikely to read this review, much less understand what McConnell has to say. McConnell assumes a sophisticated, literate (books and films) audience, and plunges ahead without shame into an investigation of the roots of storytelling common to both literature and film. His book is both the presentation of a critical approach and an interpretive application of that approach. The title is accurate: he is concerned with the juncture of storytelling *and* mythmaking as they are imagined in film *and* literature. His process is synthetic and, quietly, syncretic.

McConnell is mercifully direct and clear about his critical tastes and premises: "This book is about film and literature as kinds of storytelling. It argues that stories matter, and matter deeply, because they are the best way to save our lives." He goes on to say that vicariously playing the hero of stories "...is still the best version of 'self-help' our civilization has invented." Consequently, anyone who looks at the title and glances at the first page has a pretty good idea of the critical precepts informing what follows. McConnell then deals with the relationships of both film and writing to storytelling. But his task in the first few pages is to make the reader aware of his views on these issues, to make clear the premises from which all else will follow. Avoiding the polemical traps of so many other writers on film and literature, McConnell explains only what the reader needs to know to grapple with the ideas of *this* book. After giving the reader enough to grasp his critical premises, he sets out on his real chore.

That chore is a worthwhile one: to reconsider Northrop Frye's notions of the relationships between stories and mythic patterns. McConnell summarizes Frye's ideas and acknowledges his debts to Frye for illuminating the importance of archetypes and the great cycle of stories. McConnell rightly sees his reconsideration of Frye's work as "...more a matter of focus than of field." McConnell then examines a central part of Frye's system (one which has always bothered me as well): Frye's temporal basis for the cycles of storytelling. In Rousseau's *The Social Contract* McConnell finds a set of principles which solve the problems of Frye's system by allowing "...us to see how the archetypes themselves are present, at any given stage of history, within a single phase of civilization."

Rousseau points out four types of law (i. e. determinants of the relationships of individuals to each other and to the state) which adapt nicely to the numerical morphology of archetypal critics: laws establishing order in a society; laws setting forth the ways in which people relate to each other (civil laws); laws defining crimes (and therefore punishments); and finally the the "laws" of conscience—what human beings simply know to be right and just. McConnell adapts Rousseau's ideas to a four-cycle division of story forms similar to that offered by Frye, with types of laws becoming the archetypal foundations of various story forms. The four literary forms are, predictably (I mean that in a positive sense), epic, romance, melodrama, and satire.

The remainder of the introduction defines the four kinds of stories. The epic is a tale of beginnings whose hero, a king, incarnates and imposes a code of myth (i. e. political law) on a city (culture) he founds. Thus the hero initiates what becomes the normative basis for a society. The romance begins with a culture whose primary laws (the guiding principles provided by the king of the epic) have already been established. The king therefore recedes into the background and the figure of the knight becomes prominent. His mission is to make the life of the culture tolerable (rather than to establish any principles); consequently, the knight focuses on training the citizens of the culture to observe basic codes of behavior.

Eventually, however, the culture becomes increasingly corrupt, ushering in a new kind of "hero," a descendant of the knight, who tries to restore the culture to its original principles; McConnell calls this figure the "pawn." The hero of melodrama moves through a corrupt culture; the city (the culture) is itself the problem and no longer the end worth establishing and building as in the first two movements of the cycle. For McConnell, such a world is best characterized by the qualities of the detective—a man who is both victim yet somewhat able to affect his culture (or at least a segment of it).

As the hero of melodrama becomes increasingly disenchanted, the cycle moves on to satire. The city is a place no longer worth saving, nor can the hero find in it the detective's remnants of honor. The satirist is so surrounded by corruption that he can only look inward to discover truly moral laws and, using those laws imbedded in the human heart, attack the corruption of the culture in hopes of demolishing and (re)establishing the principles which would begin the cycle again.

The pattern is one which is both convincing and useful, and McConnell moves on in the succeeding chapters to show how the pattern illuminates individual texts. In doing so, McConnell strains at times to balance his attention to both film and literature. Literature obviously offers the most fertile ground for studying epic. McConnell casts about for films which have epic concerns, spending time on films such as THE SANDS OF IWO JIMA and THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (which he aptly dismisses). Finally, *The Iliad*, *the Aeneid*, and *Beowulf* are examined next to IVAN THE TERRIBLE, INTOLERANCE, and MAN OF ARAN. While the three films support McConnell's thesis, they seem woefully mismatched against such literary giants. (I have no better suggestions, however. Ours is scarcely an age of epic. One wonders whether the present sense of apocalypse will turn full circle to soon produce genuine epics for our culture.)

McConnell's ideas become more interesting and more pressing to me when he enters the world of romance. While the knight and the western hero have been juxtaposed before, McConnell's perspective on the juxtaposition is interesting and informative. And while we may have some difficulty today with notions of establishing a culture, we have no difficulty with works presenting the tension between chaos and culture, between the heart of darkness and civilization. McConnell moves easily from traditional literature to contemporary film in this section: *Sir Gawain, Lancelot, The Song of Roland* and St. Paul's epistles help illuminate THE PRISONER OF ZENDA, RED RIVER, MY DARLING CLEMENTINE, and PATTON.

As we move into the world of melodrama, we keep moving toward a view of society more immediately recognizable. The world of melodrama is the world of pawns, a world in which people have increasingly lost their vision of the founding principles. In the western, for example, the transformation to melodrama can be seen in heroes who attempt to sustain personal ethics in a culture which no longer respects the values of the traditional western hero. But McConnell suggests that the key figure in melodrama is the detective—the man who works along in a morass of corruption, maintaining (albeit cynically) a personal code of honor. Money or matters of property are the central issue for stories in this part of the cycle, and the detective is the person who quests for information about such issues. While traditional literary works are given front stage in the section on epic and middle stage in romance, the balance shifts in the section on melodrama. Films like THE BIG SLEEP, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, CITIZEN KANE, THE LAST LAUGH, NORTH BY NORTHWEST, LITTLE CAESAR, and THE GODFATHER dominate a consideration which also includes Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Franz Kafka.

Similarly, cinema dominates the section on satire, although McConnell carefully covers traditional bases beginning with Aristotle and moving through the Greeks, Pope, Swift, and Petronius. McConnell discusses the films of the Marx brothers, Chaplin, Woody Allen, Fellini, Renoir, as well as such films as ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, KING KONG, THE GRADUATE, and COOL-HAND LUKE. The distinctions of the basic kinds of satire and of the ways satire returns toward epic are especially well handled in this section.

Appended to the treatment of the four phases of the cycle is the text's most problematic section: "Images and Archetypes." McConnell presents a series of stills with one-page glosses. The stills function much like the quotes from literary works throughout the book, and I think would have been better placed in the text and integrated with the discussions of individual films. Perhaps the economics of publishing dictated gathering the pictures in one place; even so, the separation drains energy from the development of points key to McConnell's central concept. The stills could have been centralized and ties made to them at the appropriate places in the author's discourse.

The problem with integrating the stills points to a larger problem of integration. The book is a bit too formulaic, a bit too mechanical, a bit too much like a Ph. D. thesis. He lays out a theoretical base in the introduction and then illustrates his theory chapter by chapter. His level of insight and his knowledge are clearly mature, yet there remains a sense of very impressive pieces squeezed

in as convenient. Control exists primarily over the individual pieces (many of which could be excised and many more of which could be added) but not over the whole; the writer's knowledge and expression finally seem more mature than his sense of structure.

Two other objections. The text is not always consistent in what it assumes of the reader and how it therefore treats the reader. At times I felt I was being talked down to, as if the intended reader had a sophomore's sophistication, and yet to understand what the author says one must be intimately acquainted with a broad range of works of film and literature. The other objection is to the bibliography. Its strangely weak, especially on books about film, given the apparent breadth of primary and secondary reading evinced in the book itself.

I need to make clear, though, that my reservations are minor. The author writes well and clearly (perhaps accounting for the occasional spasm of condescension since he must articulate complex matters), and what he has to say is interesting, challenging, and worthwhile. I learned a good deal from this book, and it is now making the rounds of my colleagues.

JOHN HARRINGTON

California Polytechnic State University,
San Luis Obispo