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Book Reviews

Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination by David Aers. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980. Pp. xii + 236. \$25.00.

The "creative imagination" of the title is dialectical in its perception of the gap between traditional ideologies on the one hand and new forms of consciousness and social being on the other. David Aers associates Langland and Chaucer in this study because each possessed such an imagination, which led him to an awareness of the problematic nature of traditionally-sanctioned views of reality.

The first three chapters deal with occasions in the B-text of *Piers Plowman* in which Langland acknowledges a tension between his own consciously-held ideological positions and the imaginative versions of social reality which he has imported into his poem. Chapter 1 argues that the poet-narrator and other spokespersons endorse a view of society as a static hierarchy of estates, but that this view is rendered problematic by representations within the poem of social fragmentation and self-interested social practice. Chapter 2 applies a similarly structured argument to Langland's treatment of the Church. Although Langland regards the Church as a centralized, hierarchical, and wholly authoritative institution, his imaginative engagement with contemporary ecclesiastical realities leads him to acknowledge its corruption by secularism and economic individualism. Aers notes that revealed contradictions between traditional ideologies and social practice could well have led to apocalyptic resolutions, and he devotes Chapter 3 to an examination of instances in which Langland ultimately rejects the "temptation" to adopt such systems with their promises of total clarification. He views Langland's resolution as private, anti-institutional, and anti-millennial, expressed through Conscience's final exit from Holy Church in quest of Piers and Grace—"a lonely and individualistic pursuit of grace outside the traditional institutions" (p. 79).

Framing Aers's four chapters on Chaucer is a discussion of the "reflexive" imagination—an imagination which "discloses the processes by which authority is constructed, its grounds in individual and social consciousness and practice" (p. 82). Unlike Langland, who was impelled into such critical thought only by the clash between his ideology and his imaginative rendering of social reality, the mature Chaucer seems to have been predisposed to such habits of mind by personal tendency and social context. In the course of Chapter 4, we are shown several instances in which characters either exhibit or refrain from reflexive thinking: the Wife of Bath (with her "de-sublimation" of authoritative texts), the Pardoner (who reminds us of the human perspective of those who create authoritative texts), and the Parson with his implicitly criticized failure of reflexivity. Chapter 5 returns to the argumentative line of the Langland chapters, revealing a contradiction between Criseyde's aspirations and the vulnerability of her social situation, and defending her conduct on that ground. Chapter 6

continues in a complementary vein with certain of Chaucer's "critical and reflexive meditations on medieval marriage" (p. 151). The concluding chapter returns to the early theme of social hierarchy, arguing that the *Knigh't's Tale* actually undermines notions of benign social harmony and that Theseus's "Firste Moevere" speech represents a ruler's effort at sacralization of his own government.

This study is praiseworthy in its determination to move beyond superficial consideration of social "backgrounds" into the interplay of traditional ideology and social developments which challenge traditional formulations. In my view, its strengths derive from those sections in which its thesis is most fully illustrated, its weaknesses from those at the moments at which it is most taken for granted.

By this standard, the Langland sections—while more brief—are more authoritative in their demonstration of the clash between his consciously-held beliefs and his imaginative engagement with social issues. A further aspect of these sections is their attempt to mobilize in the service of literary criticism such terms and concepts of social analysis as ideology, mediation, and dialectic. These concepts enrich this line of argument, though some further definitions and explanations would be desirable. "Ideology," for example, seems at times to refer in a neo-Marxist sense to the biased or illusory views promoted by a dominant social class, and at times to refer more neutrally (in a sense based on Kuhn's theory of paradigms) to all traditional systems of belief as they become subject to the strain of new social issues.

Chaucer's disinclination to put forward overtly ideological statements necessitates a shift in Aers's argumentative strategy, and his emphasis on Chaucer's "reflexive" imagination is a reasonable adjustment. Yet he might have done more to describe the social considerations which engendered this habit of mind. He suggests in several provocative asides that Chaucer's reflexivity was paralleled by contemporary trends in theology, that Criseyde's social situation duplicates that of fourteenth-century women of equivalent social class, and that the political world of the *Knigh't's Tale* exhibits significant "continuities" with Chaucer's own. These promising suggestions are not, however, developed into a full theory of Chaucer's imagination in its social setting. In consequence, his "reflexivity" often seems to differ little from those qualities of ironic awareness noticed by formally-oriented critics of the previous three decades. In a series of local arguments, Aers shows with considerable verve that Chaucer held humane views on such issues of twentieth-century interest as militarism and the position of women in society. Despite their interest and presumable congeniality to the twentieth-century reader, these arguments do not advance his overall social hypothesis as much as would a more systematic demonstration of the relations of Chaucer's art with fourteenth-century social existence.

Even with such criticisms taken into account, this remains an invigorating study. It worthily joins works by such British medieval scholars as Rodney Hinton, Gordon Leff, Derek Pearsall, and Elizabeth Salter, who have raised parallel questions in several interrelated disciplines in a similarly probing and undogmatic spirit.

PAUL STROHM

Indiana University

Tennyson and Clio: History in the Major Poems by Henry Kozicki. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. Pp. xvii + 185. \$12.50.

Tennyson and Tradition by Robert Pattison. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. 178. \$14.00.

New studies of Tennyson perhaps inevitably begin with attempts to show that he was intelligent and well-informed, something more than a sensitive plant. This is not just because W. H. Auden once stupidly called him "the stupidest" English poet. The very structure of Tennyson's poetry—self-doubting, presenting "vacillating" states of mind, idyllic and elegiac—suggests a poet more concerned with heart than with head. But there cannot be much question that Tennyson followed the social, scientific, and theological controversies of his age closely and intelligently.

Whether such attention to the main intellectual currents of his age led Tennyson to develop a systematic philosophy is another matter. Defenses of his intellectual cogency run the risk of making him out to be too systematic, too philosophical. This is the major weakness of Henry Kozicki's discovery in Tennyson of an evolving "philosophy of history" on a nearly Hegelian scale. Of course Tennyson's muse is Clio: there is nothing controversial about the claim that "if any single interest appeared to dominate Tennyson's work and thought, it was his concern about the whence and whither of human affairs" (p. xii). What Kozicki very usefully shows is not that Tennyson developed a full-fledged "philosophy of history," but that his thinking about history, responsive to many of the intellectual currents of his day, was more complex, subtle, and profound than a mere unfocused curiosity about whence and whither.

Kozicki's decade approach at times seems mechanical and unconvincing, as when he claims that Tennyson's "philosophy of history... breaks apart in the seventies and even more so in the eighties as the three main ideas that once had composed it begin to fragment into independent units" (p. 164). This only begs the question of the extent to which these "three main ideas" (providence, historical process, heroism) formed "a unity of thought" during earlier decades. Kozicki shows that they more or less did hang together earlier, but not that they fall apart in the seventies and eighties. Tennyson grows more pessimistic; providence seems more remote; the historical process looks more muddled than ever; and heroism seems more infrequent than ever. But these are still main categories in Tennyson's thinking about history.

If Kozicki does not always acknowledge the confusions and lack of system in Tennyson's ideas, he is still full of insights, perceptive readings, and useful information about the contexts of Tennyson's social thought (the Cambridge Apostles, Broad Church theology, and so on). These contexts he explores as helpfully as anyone since John Killham (*Tennyson and the Princess*, 1958). And the demonstration that Tennyson had coherent although changing ideas about history is itself a valuable addition to our understanding of his complex greatness. Because Kozicki interprets Tennyson's conservative social ideas as ideas, having philosophical depth beyond mere emotional reactions to immediate events, the

poet as social and historical thinker joins the poet as intellectual reconciler of science and theology.

Robert Pattison's fine study of Tennyson's classical sources is not so wide-ranging nor so risk-taking as Kozicki's, but it is also about history. By treating poetic tradition as a synecdoche for tradition (or history), he suggests that his hunt for sources and influences is also an analysis of tradition and innovation as Tennyson's central values. Whether poetic tradition can actually stand for tradition in general in Tennyson is questionable. But Pattison is very good at showing how the poet adapts classical forms—idyll, epic, elegy, epithalamium—to his own uses, thus viewing him as an innovative traditionalist or, perhaps, as a romantic classicist.

Pattison almost does for Tennyson and the idyll what Robert Langbaum did for Browning and the dramatic monologue, except that the Tennyson who emerges is not unfamiliar. After Christopher Ricks, Dwight Culler, James Kincaid, and the other recent critics mentioned in Pattison's acknowledgments, no one will find this portrait of Tennyson "as a craftsman consciously working within a long and complex tradition of poetic forms" (p. 1) at all moot. J. M. Gray, Douglas Bush, and others have already covered much of the ground of Tennyson's classical sources. And there is something forced about Pattison's framing of his argument: he returns through G. K. Chesterton all the way to John Churton Collins to find critics to do battle with. But Pattison's first chapter is his weakest. Once he delves into the "long and complex tradition" of Theocritean idyll, Homeric epic, and the rest, he produces numerous useful judgments, based on solid scholarship, about how the poet worked and grew, and about how the tension of tradition and innovation yielded the organic unity that is often not visible on the surface of the poetry.

Pattison may err on the side of making the poet out to be too conscious and systematic in his classicism, just as Kozicki errs by making him out to be too systematically philosophical. Between the bleeding heart melancholic and the intellectual systematizer most recent critics have preferred the latter. But perhaps all efforts to rescue Tennyson from Auden's accusation and its variants are welcome and useful, as are these.

PATRICK BRANTLINGER

Indiana University

Gérard de Nerval: The Mystic's Dilemma by Bettina L. Knapp. University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 198. Pp. viii + 372. \$21.50.

Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) is the first French writer to have used his dreams as primary subject matter in his writings. His images attain an archetypal and universal significance. Attracted to the occult, he introduced alchemical images and objects into many of his works.

Bettina Knapp explains that her study attempts "to evaluate Nerval's dreams along philosophical, aesthetic, and psychological lines." Nerval's dream motifs express his interest in a vast range of mystical topics and religious sects. The

critic describes the latter in the course of the book, enabling the reader to draw parallels between Nerval's approach and ours to questions of sin, guilt, redemption, and death. Having lost his mother at an early age, Nerval idealized all women, but suffered when his picture proved untrue. As a way of release, he resorted to figures such as Isis and the Virgin Mary, withdrew from life into his dream realm, losing touch with reality and ending his life in suicide.

Knapp interprets Nerval's growing insanity, stressing his interest in the occult and dreams, discussing their impact upon his literary productions. The first of the book's three parts ("The First Darkness") deals with the young writer's attraction to the dead and to Germany, the country in which his mother was buried: at nineteen he translated *Faust I*. Under the influence of a great-uncle, he became interested in mythology and the occult, responding later to his friend Charles Nodier's encouragement to explore the unknown. In 1834 he met his life's passion, the singer Jenny Colon, who, as an *anima* figure, joined his former Platonic loves, but also became for him the Divine Mother and Wife: he was sure that if she did not love him in this life, she would in another one. He associated her with the Queen of Sheba and wrote for her the libretto of an opera of this title. After her marriage in 1838, he wrote her eighteen letters (probably never sent) in which he developed the themes of sacrifice, of mother and child, and of the son-lover. His love for her, after she died in 1842, took on the proportions of a myth. Not surprisingly, he wrote, with Alexandre Dumas, a drama called *The Alchemist*. In 1840, he started to translate *Faust II*, which confirmed his belief in reincarnation. The next year, he was committed to a mental hospital for the first time. From then on, he constantly mixed fantasy (or dream) with reality, experiencing repeated episodes of insanity.

The second part of Knapp's study deals with Nerval's travels in the Middle East, from which he brought back his strange *Voyage in the Orient*, an odyssey of his soul and of his initiation into the mysteries of death. Fascinated with the dream visions of Francesco Colonna, with the legends of Caliph Hakim and of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, he made them into archetypes. The third section of the book examines Nerval's *Daughters of Fire*, which consists of six tales, about six heroines, all fire spirits. For him, fire was associated with solar symbolism, the sun synonymous with creative energy, a guide to man in his daily ventures. On the whole, this is an interesting study of the hermetic sources and symbols of a sometimes radically esoteric writer.

FERNANDE BASSAN

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Henry James: The Later Novels by Nicola Bradbury, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979. Pp. 228. \$32.00.

Not since Ruth Yeazell's *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* has anyone given the close attention to verbal structures in James's fiction that is manifest on every page of Nicola Bradbury's study. Without overly insisting on the sanctions in precedent and theory for her

critical procedure, she takes her cues from William James's insights into the expressive connections between linguistic units and states of consciousness, from de Saussure's definition of language as a "system of differences" that grounds meaning on differentiations of verbal forms, and from Seymour Chatman's analysis of grammatical and syntactical forms in James's late style. Intensive, at times microscopic, attention to such linguistic and stylistic matters enables her to define subtleties in motive and attitude among characters, but also to heighten the significance of non-verbal forms and to discover, in a reader's response to the process of "representation"—to the acts of expression and communication that constitute full "representation"—the central concern that links reader, author, and protagonists in James's novels.

"The" reader is decidedly the alert reader for whom James wrote, described here as at times puzzled or partial in his understanding but elevated finally, as in most "reader-response" criticism, to the hypothetical status of "the most alert reader" imaginable, who proves to be completely in tune with the author's design, though protagonists are slow to attain, or incapable of attaining, that status, and though earlier, even "attentive critics," have failed to qualify.

Bradbury's first chapter is devoted to the representational functions of silence as she can demonstrate them to be in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the novellas *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awakening Age*, and *The Sacred Fount*: the unspoken dialogue of exchanged glances, tacit elisions, the "hush" of approaching death, or the "narrative silence" created by the evasion of crucial episodes and the resort instead to indirection. Silence, whether helpless in the face of the inexpressible, or deliberate in the face of the unspeakable, is a representational resource for James because it operates at the "interstices of formal expression" and, "reaching toward moral and even metaphysical significance" as a symbol of isolation, it is flexible, "unquantifiable" in its "form, or lack of form." It can reveal the machinations of "conspirators" and "manipulators" in certain roles and contexts, or the integrity of moral paradigms in others. The chapter is lucid in establishing its distinctions but too cursory in its coverage to provide convincing readings of the works it takes up.

To provide such readings becomes the aim of separate chapters on the three novels of the "major phase," and Bradbury's approach is adjusted significantly for each. Her approach to *The Ambassadors* responds to the predominance of visual and painterly imagery in the work. She applies Rudolph Arnheim's analysis of visual perspective as terminating in a "vanishing point" that is suggested rather than actually drawn, and that projects therefore an "infinity" beyond the converging lines that graph it. Correspondingly she finds that Strether gradually is brought to a completeness of vision that writer and reader have earlier attained, a "still point" (defined by T. S. Eliot's high Anglican *Four Quartets*) that lifts Strether, for all his limitations, into the "freedom of absolute morality"; the "vanishing point" becomes the "absolute" realm of "right and wrong."

Bradbury's meticulous examination of linguistic patterns, the particularities of language, in the chapter on *The Ambassadors*, is the strongest feature of her book, but it becomes increasingly apparent that other considerations, imported and imposed or less intensively examined, are governing her analysis,

leading her to ignore the charged clichés and the usages of social decorum in Strether's speech (Chad would be a "brute," and "guilty of the last infamy") when transporting Strether to the realm of "absolute" moral vision.

In *The Wings of the Dove*, Bradbury finds "no guiding rule of technique dominating every expressive element," a shifting stance or a "disjunctive tendency" in place of "central perspective." Accordingly she grounds her analysis on the attempt of characters to read their own story and, helpless to alter their fate, attain an "understanding" or "awareness" that becomes, in the case of the heroine, an "objective appreciation" that is "on a level with the author and reader," an "understanding inseparable from the author's own." Verbal analysis implements this forced severance of Milly from her world without convincingly justifying it. After first stripping Milly of any archetypal or national significance that has been claimed for her by other critics or by characters in the novel, so as to insist on her personal and human presence and her movement in the social world of Kate and Densher, Bradbury views Milly in her ethereal "transcendence" as "unscathed" by her usage at the hands of others, free of the world's "constraints." Verbal analysis, however, is not sufficient to distinguish characters' "manipulative categorization of other people" from James's own. Bradbury's reaching for parallels (often based on echo and "half-echo") to *Vanity Fair* and *Othello*, her clear cut differentiation of protagonists from villainous "conspirators" and other characters, and her emphasis (following John Bayley and A. C. Bradley) on characters themselves at the expense of dramatic action, are no substitute for the concern with the book's dramaturgy that the work demands.

The culmination of Bradbury's study is the chapter on *The Golden Bowl*. (A "Conclusion" largely reiterates claims already fully presented, and the penultimate chapter on the "Last Works" takes up the later fiction and non-fiction swiftly in an effort to declare that they will not sustain the interest of the three great novels.) Here she acknowledges explicitly what has been implicit in her analysis all along: that the novel's language must be considered in its interaction with "actions" and "characters," or with the larger contours of "scene-sequences." Although Bradbury's focus is thus widened as it must be, her rhetoric is channeled narrowly into the effort to exonerate Maggie from charges brought against her by her harshest critics ("We suspend narrow condemnation in the interests of a larger propriety") and to smooth out the moral complexities of the action and of James's responsibilities in writing it. The verbal analysis is at times finicky (there are virtually ludicrous claims made for the repetition of "for" in one sequence), and a firm though vaguely defined decorum is invoked as a standard against which to measure stylistic features which become conspicuous and suspiciously expressive in James: the "stylistic exuberance," the "excess" of melodrama, verbal statement, and imagery in the fiction. Some such features, Bradbury has explained earlier, elicit "the" reader's sympathetic engagement with the characters, while others provoke a more detached "intellectual, rather than imaginative, attention." In either case Bradbury responds to them in such a way that they indicate corruptions, distintegrations, or incompletions, blindness or groping apprehension, on the part of fictive characters, while indicating at the same time that James's control is "flawless," that he and his narration are not implicated in the characters' fantasies or maneuvers. Only

in *The Golden Bowl* does he acknowledge that some "excesses" of imagery, easily excused by Bradbury, are also his own.

The issue that proves to be central to her reading of James is the issue of his authority, the complications of which she suggests at points despite her overemphasis on James's and the readers' relation to protagonists or "centers of consciousness" among the fictive characters. Recognizing at the end that six characters in *The Wings of the Dove* are, "to some extent, authorial figures," she can only conclude: "how different are their authority and reliability, and how little relation this bears to their worldly position!" James grounded his authority on analogies to painting and drama which Bradbury recognizes but does not examine, and, as *The Golden Bowl's* Preface makes clear, on a complicitous involvement with his characters that eludes the moral perspective which enables Bradbury so easily to distinguish "conspirators" from protagonists, or the "materialism" of a character in one novel from the purchasing power of a millionaire in another. The "exploiting" and "manipulating" that she remarks in James's use of his materials bear no relation in her view to the exploitation and manipulation that she condemns in the behavior of his characters. James's exercise of authority entailed hazards, moral risks, of a kind that Bradbury is eager to recognize in some of his protagonists but would deny to James himself. The "ideal" in *The Golden Bowl*, she declares, "approximates" Keats's "'Negative Capability,'" the capacity of "'being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.'" This is an enabling imaginative power that Bradbury rightly relates to the novelist's "power to guess the unseen from the seen," as James claimed in "The Art of Fiction," the "uncertainty" of the "guess" that Bradbury asks us to recognize in James's best fiction. Yet when she finds Strether the exemplar of negative capability she lifts him into a realm of "absolute right and wrong" and finds "no uncertainty" in his final words. James's guesses finally, and those of an alert reader, have no irresolution in her view; the hazard of guessing dissolves in righteous certitude.

Indeed the term "category" in Bradbury's critical vocabulary defines the conventional moral perspective that circumscribes her responses to the verbal textures and movement of James's novels, and her use of it suggests problems in critical methodology that critics have not resolved and this study dramatizes by throwing into relief. Bradbury exposes as reprehensible the "manipulative categorization of other people" (including the "myth-making process"), or "the tendency to categorize experience" in Kate's and Susan Stringham's imaginations in *The Wings of the Dove*, and, while she exonerates the protagonist Milly from the charge, she presents no ground for dissociating James from the same activity. Indeed "preserving moral categories of judgment" is crucial for Bradbury, and the "miscarrying of the various plots of *The Wings of the Dove*, and of the good intentions of all the characters in the first volume of *The Golden Bowl*" is attributed to "inadequate categorization of experience." The hazardous experience of reading James eludes the categories that Bradbury applies with so firm a hand to the sensuous surface and the deeper rhythms of James's fiction.

LAURENCE B. HOLLAND

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Literary Impressionism, James and Chekhov by H. Peter Stowell. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980. Pp. ix + 277. \$17.00.

What is literary impressionism? That is one of the most vexing questions on the critical scene today. H. Peter Stowell is aware of the many dilemmas which plague the field his book addresses. As he notes, "Impressionism has always been a difficult concept to pin down"; even worse, "there is little agreement about who is and is not an impressionist." The reason for this confusion is that impressionism is not one thing but many. It includes, for example, Ford Madox Ford's doctrine of novelistic technique, a tradition of unreliable narration in fiction, a movement in French painting, a concern with perception in philosophy and literature from Hume to Pater and Conrad, and a period of transition in the history of the novel from realism to modernism. The list could go on and on. No single essence underlies the diverse group of elements which make up impressionism. Instead, impressionism is inherently pluralistic—a "family," in Wittgenstein's sense, like the group "games" which has no uniform set of features shared by all its members, from chess to football. A "family" consists of a series of resemblances and differences, convergences and divergences. The challenge for students of impressionism, then, is to clarify and organize the relations among its members without overlooking its multiplicity.

Stowell seems to accept this challenge in his very choice of James and Chekhov as his central figures. After acknowledging that the differences between these two writers might seem more striking than their similarities, Stowell suggests that "both their disparities and their affinities reinforce the argument that literary impressionism was a widely cast and loosely held net that bound together the most unlikely writers, all the while allowing them to swim freely." James and Chekhov are related, in Stowell's view, because both respond in their works to what Henry Adams calls the "supersensual multiverse." This is a fluid, pluralistic world where change prevails over stability, where there are many "truths" which refuse unification into the "Truth," and where the meaning of "reality" is open to infinite variation as perceiver and perceived shift in relation to each other. By focusing their dramatic attention on the workings of consciousness, these two writers (and their kindred literary impressionists) "discovered modernism." Among their many differences, however, James tends to depict characters who struggle relentlessly to master and order the flux; Chekhov may lift his characters into a privileged moment of synthetic perception, but then he plunges them all the more deeply into the tedium of disconnected drifting from moment to moment. By mapping convergences and divergences in this way, Stowell takes an important step toward understanding impressionism.

Elsewhere, though, Stowell lapses into monism. He often refers to "impressionism" as if it were a single entity. His long and interesting chapter on the distinguishing features of impressionism contains many statements of the sort: "impressionism is this" and "literary impressionists do that." One frequently wonders whom he has in mind, since many of his claims fit some members of the family but not others. At one point, adopting Joseph Frank's controversial argument about spatial form in modern literature, Stowell asserts unequivocally that "Literary impressionists, working in their temporal art, strove to spatialize time." But this does not hold for the complex temporal structure of *The Good*

Soldier. By dramatizing Dowell's rambling efforts to make sense of his past, Ford emphasizes that we live forward but understand backward—and that no spatial haven of synchronic comprehension can rescue us from the diachronic vagaries of anticipation and retrospection. Nor does Stowell's assertion explain why Conrad disrupts the time-line of the story in *Lord Jim*. Conrad's bewildering, fragmented narrative aims to upset the complacent confidence of his readers in cultural constructs and moral values which are not eternal verities but only historical fictions and hence radically contingent. Ford and Conrad, in their different ways, seek not to overcome time but to prompt their readers to reflect about the inescapable temporality of understanding and existence. Stowell is right that many literary impressionists explore the nature of time by experimenting with traditional conventions of narrative order. But "spatial time" is not an essential feature of literary impressionism, a value shared equally by all of the writers who swim in its wide, loose net.

When he describes the multiplicity of impressionism, Stowell argues that it is "not a movement, but a far-reaching cultural phenomenon" which encompasses not only literature and painting but also philosophy. Because it heralds the modern preoccupation with the status of meaning and the limits to perception, Stowell suggests that impressionism anticipates phenomenology. There are two advantages to establishing this relationship between art and philosophy. It not only advances our understanding of cultural history by charting the emergence of modernism across disciplinary boundaries; it also makes available to the critic a useful conceptual framework for analyzing the impressionists' explorations of the vicissitudes of consciousness. Stowell's book exploits these advantages with mixed success. His study draws on only a very limited range of phenomenological concepts, and it is sometimes imprecise in its use of them. Stowell claims, for example, that "The impressionist attempts to capture the feel, texture, and consciousness of the phenomenological *tabula rasa* or, in the impressionist lexicon, 'the innocence of the eye.'" But it is misleading to attribute to phenomenology (and to all impressionists) an epistemology which believes that the mind can make itself a blank slate. Stowell seems to refer here to Husserl's procedure of "bracketing"—the "reduction" which suspends the "natural attitude" of unquestioned engagement with the world in order to describe the structures of consciousness and experience which go unnoticed because we take them for granted in everyday life. The "reduction" is the work not of an "innocent" mind, however, but of a trained philosopher with sophisticated assumptions and procedures. Furthermore, "bracketing" reveals that consciousness is intentionally active rather than blankly receptive. From Husserl through Heidegger to Gadamer and Ricoeur, phenomenologists argue that knowing cannot be innocent of presuppositions; in their view, understanding is always directed by the assumptions and interests of the observer, always guided by his expectations, molded by his temperament, and limited by his situation.

Stowell quotes Merleau-Ponty frequently, and the passages he cites are often illuminating. Except for an occasional offhand reference to Sartre, however, he makes no mention of the other leading figures in the phenomenological tradition. Like impressionism, phenomenology is a diverse family. Although Stowell uses the term as if it referred to a single set of precepts, its net is wide enough to include

Husserl's early idealism and his later turn to the realism of the lived world, Heidegger's quest for Being and Sartre's existential Marxism, Poulet's criticism of consciousness and Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the symbol. The diversity which marks the community of phenomenological thinkers might even provide a helpful guide for mapping the multiplicity of impressionism. Henry James seems to share Husserl's interest in how consciousness persistently composes the world by projecting itself beyond the side of an object presented to it. Ford anticipates Merleau-Ponty's fascination with the ambiguities and obscurities of unreflective experience. With Heidegger and Sartre, Conrad exposes the nothingness at the foundation of existence. Stowell also misses the opportunity to take advantage of phenomenology's research on aesthetics. Although he explores the role of indeterminacy in impressionist fiction, he ignores Roman Ingarden's theory of how literary works represent objects through a stratum of aspects made up of gaps and blanks. Stowell discusses the reader's "role as co-maker" and "active participant" in constructing a work, but his bibliography is silent about Wolfgang Iser's seminal studies of the reading process.

Stowell divides Chekhov's and James's growth as writers into three stages: "The Emerging Impressionist," "Hesitation and Achievement," and "The Impressionist." After an initial period of discovery and exploration, each writer makes some progress but also digresses or falls short before attaining his ultimate vision. Stowell's own book belongs in his middle stage. Both in what it accomplishes and in what it fails to do, his book points in directions where answers may eventually be found to the questions which surround impressionism.

PAUL B. ARMSTRONG

University of Virginia

Conrad in the Nineteenth Century by Ian Watt. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979. Pp. xvii + 375. \$21.50.

Ignoring the deconstructive fibrillations of Derrida, the archeological pyrotechnic displays of Foucault, and all similar innovations, Ian Watt gives us a plain, unvarnished Conrad. The elusive Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* originates with the agent Klein whom Conrad saw dying on the Congo steamer *Roi des Belges*. Yet, there is an overlay of Arthur Eugene Constant Hodister, a reformer who was director of the *Syndicat Commercial du Katanga* for a time. Yet, again, Kurtz differs from both Klein and Hodister while showing similarities to numerous other celebrities: Emin Pasha (born Eduard Schnitzer 1840-92), Major Musgrave Barttelot, and Charles Henry Stokes (141-45). Watt follows his method thoroughly and judiciously. He tries to find the origin of Conrad's fiction in his experience, carefully sifting other scholars' scattered evidence. Within the limits of Watt's plan, his work will stand as one of the most important studies of Conrad. Watt's unswerving adherence to his method is both the strength and the weakness of his work.

Beginning with a sketch of Conrad's earlier life (1857-94), Watt defines several

ways in which Conrad was a man divided, *homo duplex*. The outlines of this period are well-known: Conrad's family's sufferings as a result of his father's opposition to the Czarist rule of Poland, his Uncle Bobrowski's constant scolding about the boy's irresponsible ways, his apparently self-inflicted wound in Marseilles. In these experiences Watt locates the major themes of Conrad's fiction: his pessimistic perspective, his distrust of bourgeois values, his concern to transcend Byronic individualism to reach a larger loyalty, his interest in doomed resistance, heroic defeat, and fidelity. These themes set Conrad apart from other English novelists of his time and are rooted in his personal experience as well as in the literature of his native Poland. Conrad is torn by emotional and intellectual contradiction. His painfully created fiction is his attempt to resolve these anxieties. Watt believes that in the face of all forces which dwarf individual human effort, Conrad clings to the moral imperative of "solidarity" or commitment. As Conrad himself noted, his theme is fidelity. Watt devotes a chapter each to explication of four works written in the 19th century (*Almayer's Folly*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*). When the curious reader turns to the series of Concordances and Verbal Indexes to these works by Conrad, it is a bit surprising to see that the word *solidarity* does not occur at all in *Almayer's Folly*, nor *Heart of Darkness*, and the single occurrence in *Lord Jim* does not refer to human relationships. The theme unifying these four works is undesignated in the texts.

Intuitively, most readers feel that there is a process of development evident in these four works. Clearly the shapeliness and economy of *Heart of Darkness* is of superior quality to the interesting but slack first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. Watt's explanation of this development is not completely satisfying. Almayer himself, of course, originates in the Dutch trader Olmeijer and the topography of Conrad's Sambir reflects actual settlements astride the Berau river. The fiction transforms these experiences to conform to "current market formulae" (43), which are contradicted by a drive toward the very serious French models of Flaubert and Maupassant, so that "Almayer is a Borneo Bovary" (51). These aims are incompatible, for the reader luxuriates in the romantic fantasies of Nina, while ridiculing her father's inability to escape from his dreams. Watt sees this problem as primarily commercial. Conrad was trying to reach a much larger audience than Flaubert and so he created "the more serious issues" (55) embedded in a cocoon of moonshine. He also notes that Conrad's English is a bit awkward in his first novel in its sentence structure, repetition, and over-qualification; and he observes that Conrad's prose becomes more fluent with each succeeding book. Finally, he sees Conrad as using the ironical stance of Flaubert to evade confronting the problems in the character of Almayer which were painful for the author personally.

In *The Nigger of the Narcissus* Watt sees a sharpening of thematic focus, which can be clarified by ideas stated by Emile Durkheim's *De la division du travail social*, even though it is unlikely that Conrad had read this work. Durkheim argues that the division of labor in modern society creates an organic unity. In order for such a group to function, it must have a consensus of values and attitudes. Watt sees *The Nigger of the Narcissus* as the examination of organic unity, the ship's crew, under such extreme stress that its solidarity

crumbles into a state of *anomie*, to use Durkheim's vocabulary. The figure of old Singleton, after thirty hours, still steering at the wheel of the ship is Conrad's affirmation of "The ultimate and universal basis of human solidarity" (125). The diachronic movement Watt is tracing in Conrad's works appears to be a process of clarifying the author's ideology. *Almayer's Folly* involves issues which are clarified to some degree in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and which will become even clearer in the masterpieces *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*. While readers may agree that *Heart of Darkness* crackles with a power, found only faintly pulsing in the earlier works, it is not so obvious that *Heart of Darkness* compels because of its ideological sharpness. Is *Heart of Darkness* remarkable because it is Conrad's "ideological summa" (148)?

When Watt turns to *Heart of Darkness* his study repeatedly turns up matters of biographical and historical fact which significantly color our understanding of the text: when Conrad began to write for *Blackwoods*, he acquired a new sense of audience; in the current myth of "going native," Conrad might see the process of his own denationalization; in the vision of the Imperial mission in popular writers like Kipling and Rider Haggard, the virtues of duty, military discipline, and technological efficiency provide the assumptions scrutinized in Conrad's story. Watt is less satisfactory in dealing with the problem of normative judgment in the work. If this text sums up Conrad's worthwhile thinking on historical and social problems, why is it finally so opaque, so inconclusive? The argument that "inconsistencies in Conrad's attitudes to colonial and racial problems must in general be understood in their historical context" (160) does not explain why modern readers should find an "inconsistent" ideological position gratifying. Watt's judgment that "*Heart of Darkness* . . . endure(s) as the most powerful indictment of imperialism" (161), is not self-evidently true. Marlow, in the final scene, does lie to the Intended bride of Kurtz, so concealing the true horror of the European presence in Africa. Conrad, too, does not publish his diary of horrible observed facts in the Congo, but softens these facts into fictional ambiguities for public consumption. To account for the improvement of *Heart of Darkness* over *Almayer's Folly*, we must acknowledge that *Heart of Darkness* is systematically obscure, and that growing obscurity does not fit easily into the theory that Conrad's works are best when most ideologically incisive.

Watt explains the artful ambiguity of *Heart of Darkness* as the consequence of Impressionism and Symbolism. Literary impressionism has been the subject of lively discussion for at least the last decade. Watt refers to the "Preliminary Papers" distributed for seminar # 8 at the 1975 annual convention of the Modern Language Association. In fact, there have been five seminars in the last six years discussing this topic, as well as recent books on impressionism in Stephen Crane, Henry James, and Chekov. Watt's judgment that "it is very unlikely that Conrad either thought of himself as an impressionist or was significantly influenced by the impressionist movement" (179) is, at best, only partially correct. Watt's study plays down the impact of Ford on Conrad and does not see the full implication of Conrad's move toward an ambiguously structured text, demanding a highly constructive role of the reader. Watt's consideration of the phenomenology of art is deficient. He treats language under the realist assumption

that it refers to an external subject, such as the Belgian occupation of the Congo. He also considers the possibility that language is expressive of certain mental states and anxieties in the author's or in a character's mind. But he rarely looks at a text as an experience. This is a serious shortcoming in any critical survey of a piece of literature, but it is especially crippling if the author in question is apparently a pioneer in exploring the use of language as a model of perception and as a means to manipulate the reader's process of reading or his encounter with the artifact of the text.

Given Watt's method of analysis, his examination of the biography of the author and his definition of how the text refers to historical situations, it is natural that he should conclude, "What makes reading *Heart of Darkness* so unforgettable is surely the harrowing power with which Conrad convinces us of the essential reality of everything that Marlow sees and feels" (252). Working on the theory that stridency of assertion always rises when the speaker's doubt in his position increases, we are suspicious of the words "is surely." How is "essential reality" different from just plain "reality"? We can certainly imagine the opposite assertion, that the reader is captivated by Conrad's work because he is constantly reminded that it is a fiction, a tale told by Marlow on the *Nellie*, twice-told by the outside "I" narrator to us. If we want to get near "reality," why not read Conrad's Congo diary? Take the entry of 3 July, "Met an off(icer) of the State inspecting. A few minutes afterwards saw at a camp(ing) place the dead body of a Backongo. Shot? Horrid smell." These lines are a good bit nearer the historical reality than the inconclusive fiction of Marlow, yet they lack the power of the verbal artifice, the conventions of fiction which Conrad constantly manipulates precisely to remind his audience that they are reading a story.

Consider Watt's anthropomorphic assumption in sentences like these: Lord Jim "may even have identified with Brown to the extent that *he thought that*, like himself, Brown ought to be given another chance" (342, italics added). It is not unusual for Watt to vivify characters when he summarizes stories, constructing what these characters must have been thinking, what their motives must have been, imputing a life to them independent of the words of the text, like studying what Hamlet's curriculum at the University of Wittenberg must have been before the play began. So long as the reader knows that he is participating in an activity, generated in him by the manipulation of conventions in the story, and knows that literary characters do not really have thoughts and motives beyond those stated by the text, such constructions are quite properly part of the experience of the artifact. But as an explanation of the artistic power of the work, Watt is on much sounder ground when he acknowledges that Conrad had a theory for manipulating an effect in his reader and that he marshalled the techniques of delayed encoding, symbolic deciphering, and anachronic oscillation to that end.

But if we grant that "there is little question that Conrad conceived his fiction in terms of a planned sequence of effects on the reader" (306), how does his practice square with the aims of the naive moralist? Is Conrad's work powerful because he discovered gradually that in this hostile world man must maintain his solidarity, his fidelity, to what appear to be shortsighted goals of

conduct (as Watt seems to argue on p. 125) or is it powerful because the artful author contrives verbal effects which let his reader glimpse only partially, and hidden in a mist of anachronic oscillation and unreliable narration, his kernel of truth? Watt wants Conrad to give us maxims to live by, like *Tom Brown's School Days*. But what the critic of Conrad must explain is why we continue to read his work when it is most cunningly contrived to make the extraction of such maxims from the text virtually impossible.

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Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist by Frederic Jameson. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980. Pp. 190. \$11.95.

Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis by Timothy Materer. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979. Pp. 231. \$12.50.

"I do not think I had ever seen a nastier-looking man," Ernest Hemingway once said of Wyndham Lewis. "Under the black hat, when I had first seen them, the eyes had been those of an unsuccessful rapist." Lewis's self portrait, leering from the cover of Frederic Jameson's new book, confirms that impression—as do the violence, mysogyny, and fascist rhetoric in much of his writing. He was a mean customer, and partly for that reason he is the least read of the so-called classic moderns. Critical studies like Jameson's (or Hugh Kenner's earlier work, *Wyndham Lewis*) are quite rare. Lewis is one of those leopards who has not yet become part of the ritual in the academic temple, and when he is pulled out of his relative obscurity he can be made to seem as sensational and radical as modernism itself once was.

Jameson makes a point like this in the introduction to his book, which of the two volumes under review is easily the more complex, demanding the closer description. It is a small book with a remarkable theoretical ambition, trying not only to reclaim Lewis as an object of attention, but to resolve a couple of the oldest problems in Marxist criticism. First is the longstanding debate over modern art, represented on one side by the followers of Georg Lukács, who see modernism as a decadent, escapist retreat from social realism, on the other by the followers of the Russian Formalists and the *Tel Quel* group, who see it as a complex, often contradictory type of revolutionary *praxis*. Second is the debate over Freudian interpretation, which seems to be a "materialist" method, but which has a tendency to subordinate the political to the personal. Freud gives a useful model for the understanding of history and myth, but he is easily diverted to ahistorical or purely individualistic concerns, and for that reason Marxists have always had an ambivalent attitude towards him.

Wyndham Lewis is a good subject upon which to focus these problems. He is an obsessive, pathological type whose work invites Freudian analysis, but as Jameson points out he is also an overtly *political* writer, rather like a

Bernard Shaw grown up in a "Dostoyevskian social world." A determined opponent of bourgeois democracy, he might have become a fascistic mirror-image of Shaw, except that he shares the modernist need to reinvent language and narrative form. Within modernism, however, he takes up a contentious position, placing himself in opposition not merely to nineteenth-century ideas of progress and realistic representation, but to the twenties' fascination with *la durée* and private, impressionistic styles. According to Jameson (and Kenner before him), Lewis has an "expressionistic" style similar to the early Brecht, and can therefore be exempted from the charges of escapism and abstraction Lukács once levelled against the modern novel. As for Lewis's racism and sexism, these are part of what Jameson describes as the "grinding contradictions" in his work; they have at least the virtue of being presented openly, "as unbound impulses released from the rationalizing censorship of a respectable consciousness intent on keeping up appearances." In plain talk, the man was no wishy-washy liberal.

Jameson's book seems to me to accomplish a good deal of its purpose, which is a workable synthesis of ideological interpretation, narrative analysis, and psychoanalysis. He borrows freely and eclectically from the whole range of French post-structuralist theory, and despite his tortured language he often makes brilliant points about Lewis. Ironically, however, he is most persuasive when he approaches Lewis's ideology quite directly and traditionally, showing the contradictions and buried wounds of social class behind writings like *Hitler* and *Time and Western Man*. As stylistics and psychoanalysis the book has a good deal to offer, but it is somewhat weakened by a tendency to overstate Lewis's difference from the other moderns, and by a slight evasion of the tensions between Marxist and Freudian theory.

Jameson is concerned to show that Lewis's novels are "decentered" and destructive of what recent French writers call the "humanistic paradigm." Lewis's prose breaks down the "illusion of an autonomous, centered 'self' or personal identity," and according to Jameson it should be contrasted with writers like Joyce and Woolf, whose internal monologues are part of a "subjectivising and impressionistic" tendency within modernism. Of course Lewis was also a vigorous proponent of the strong individual, and in a passage Jameson does not quote he once claimed that "the Absolute would be the individual of individuals, the self that has never broken down... reality is to be sought in the self or the person." Jameson argues that such notions are in vivid contradiction with Lewis's fiction, and he reads that fiction as if it were a refiguration of Lacan's revolution. In Lewis's work, Jameson says, notions of the "self" or of "character" are shown to be merely an "effect of structure." Meanwhile Jameson assigns the other moderns to the place Lukács put them years ago: the realm of bourgeois individualism, where the cult of private personality is followed to its logical extreme.

Repeatedly Jameson holds up Joyce and Woolf as Lewis's opposites—artists preoccupied with depth psychology, the *not juste*, and realistic characterization. In fact, however, the internal monologue, like art for art's sake, was always more advertised than practiced, and by the late twenties it had begun to disintegrate in the very pages of its best authors. Virginia Woolf attacked the early chapters

of *Ulysses* precisely because they were centered in a "damned egotistical self," and *The Waves* is surely one of the most sustained demonstrations in literature of the illusory nature of individual identity. As for Joyce, he began to dispense with interior monologue and realist characterization midway through *Ulysses*. (Jameson seems to me quite wrong when he claims that the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses* "serves to reconfirm the unity of the psyche.") *Finnegans Wake*, which is not centered in any consciousness, and which replaces traditional characters with Beckett-like "psuedo-couples" such as Shem and Shaun, has recently emerged as the ultimate post-structuralist text. See, for example, Stephen Heath's articles in *Tel Quel*, or Colon McCabe's, new book, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*—both of which champion Joyce for having virtually the same qualities Jameson has assigned to Lewis.

On the level of psychoanalysis, Jameson proposes a method that will circumvent the vexed relation between Freud and Marx. Lewis's perverse ideas, he says, should not be analyzed as if they were "familial or archaic," nor as if they were located in the "inaccessible" regions of the "private, biographical individual"; instead they should be placed in the "objective configurations of the political history of pre-1914 Europe." He never tells us why the history of the private individual should be any more "inaccessible" than the presumably "objective" history of the continent, but he does offer vivid illustrations of how Lewis's art, like psychoanalysis itself, was affected by political and economic changes.

One of the most impressive instances of Jameson's skill at merging psychoanalysis and ideological interpretation is his penultimate chapter, "How to Die Twice," which demonstrates a contradiction between Lewis's belief in the "gifted individual" and the satire he constructed to defend that belief. Beginning in 1928, in the series of books entitled *The Human Age*, Lewis devised a genre described by Jameson as "theological science fiction," in which he violently satirized the puppet-slaves of modern society and ruthlessly killed them off, preserving their "souls" in an imaginary afterlife, where their squashed and maimed bodies were displayed in special containers. Because these were such obvious puppets, Lewis was to some degree absolved of any guilt he might have suffered for imagining their deaths; the genre itself gave reassuring proof that they had somehow survived, and since they were not "personalities," they could not be subject to real death anyway. In the later volumes, however, Lewis began to imagine a sort of Auschwitz-Hell, where the resurrected victims and the angelic citizens of the afterworld could die once again, and this time for good. This "second death" was a necessary feature of Lewis's imaginary system, because a more "real" death had to be constructed in order to preserve the notion of individualism. On a deeper level, however, Jameson suggests that Lewis's vision of Hell was an enactment of Freud's "death wish." Drawing on Lacan's interpretation of Sade, he describes the fantasy of second death as "an index of the way desire, exasperated by the unsatisfactory immediacy of its nominal fulfillment in the here-and-now, seeks perpetually to transcend itself, and to project the mirage and the 'beyond' of a fuller imaginary satisfaction." Nor is this fantasy peculiar to Sade and Lewis; Jameson claims it is felt in the attempt of modernism as a whole to construct what Barthes has called a "miraculous

stasis," a still-point of genuine Experience, which will relieve the tensions of the libido in some ultimate way.

At this point Jameson pauses to observe that the psychoanalytic framework he has been using is "ahistorical." "However that may be," he adds, "it is clear that such dynamics are peculiarly intensified by that process of reification which differentiates our social life from that of every other social formation . . . and which is uniquely specific to capitalism." I have italicized one of his phrases because it opens his argument to some important qualification. If Freud's *Thanatos* is present in all social situations, then "reification" could be determined as much by it as by capitalism. Furthermore the cult of Experience and imaginary stasis, which Jameson and Barthes claim are historically specific to modernism, are well-known themes of the Romantic movement; indeed one of the major problems of *Fables of Aggression* is that it makes the obsessions of Wyndham Lewis sound a great deal like the obsessions which recur in English literature from Wordsworth to Virginia Woolf.

In raising these objections I do not mean to discount Jameson's argument as a whole. His book is the best piece of criticism we have on Lewis, and will certainly revive interest in his work. More than that, it is a valuable, sustained demonstration of post-structuralist method, addressed to real political issues. Compared to it, Timothy Materer's *Vortex* seems to occupy a sheltered world. A conventional scholarly study, Materer's book describes, largely through quotation, the evolving ideas of Lewis, Pound, and Eliot, who were never exactly a "school," but who remained a friendly axis from the 1912-1914 period of the London vortex until Lewis's death in the fifties. In seven chapters, punctuated with illustrations from the paintings and sculpture of Lewis and Gaudier, Materer surveys the failed attempts of this group to make an artistic revolution. The major flaw in his book is that he never gives an adequate explanation of why the revolution was significant.

Pound, Eliot, and Lewis were linked by their American origins and by their essentially reactionary protest against democracy; nevertheless, in print they often made what Pound called "eye-gouging" attacks on one another. Egoists all, they never found a journal or a project that would unify them, and their culture criticism lacked what Materer describes as a "positive" program. Materer discusses the ideas of the group largely in terms of their debates over various dualisms: art versus nature, the mechanical versus the organic, the mind versus "reality," artistic detachment versus commitment, and so forth. Along the way, he takes excursions into the ideas of Gaudier-Brezska and Joyce, who were only loosely connected to the central trio, but whose art seems more impressive and less doctrinaire.

Materer's approach is a perfect example of the kind of criticism Jameson is reacting against. He performs a useful service in collecting the ideas of Pound, Eliot, and Lewis, but he treats these ideas as if they existed in a realm of pure thought, and he seems to accept the romantic ethos behind them. Frequently he mentions the wars and political events that influenced the moderns, but he never stresses the connections between their politics and their art. He leaves their ideology largely unexplored, and speaks in the same idealized language they once used. The complex, overdetermined relation between art

and society never troubles him: instead he moves complacently through quotations about "poetry," "culture," and "nature" as if we were all agreed on what these terms mean. Ultimately he praises Pound, Eliot, and Lewis for their "brave but often embittered campaigns in the field of philosophy and politics," and for "the still center of their achievements as artists." Their only deficiency, according to this view, was that their tone was wrong, and their politics occasionally misguided. Their work is therefore reduced to a set of liberal pieties, and their "achievement" goes unexamined.

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The Rhizome and the Flower: The Perennial Philosophy—Yeats and Jung by James Olney. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980. Pp. xv + 379. \$20.00.

Readers of James Olney's unusual and original book will find in it a great deal more than a comparative study of the poetry of W. B. Yeats and the psychology of C. G. Jung. Given the absence of contact between these two so like-minded contemporaries and the lack of influence of either on the other, the manifold similarities in their thought provide striking evidence of the vitality of the philosophic tradition that is the true subject of this fascinating project, "the Platonic system, shaped by Plato himself out of his four great predecessors" (9). The informing perspective of this ambitious "exercise in the history and psychology of ideas" (x) is set forth in an elaborate "prolegomena," where the author argues that "the Yeatsian and Jungian blossoms" draw their life from "both an historical rhizome and a psychical rhizome." He proposes, accordingly, to trace these flowers back to their roots "in ancient Greece and in the collective depths of the unconscious" (13). Whether the book succeeds as an analysis of the psychical rhizome will depend in the last analysis on the reader's willingness to make a Jungian leap of faith. Clearly Olney has done so, for he assumes that "the Perennial Philosophy" is "the natural and necessary creation of a corporate human consciousness" (12). Thus his reconstruction of the temporal development of ancient Greek philosophy is to be construed at the same time as a dramatization of "the nontemporal story of the human psyche in its efforts, conscious and unconscious, to analyze and synthesize all the experience that it encounters" (19).

Two-thirds of the book is devoted to a reading of Plato and the pre-Socratics, and Olney's saturation in the original Greek texts gives his account an involving and authoritative immediacy. His decision to focus his presentation of Platonism on Plato himself and his predecessors rather than on his post- and Neo-Platonic successors wisely avoids duplication of the existing Yeats scholarship on the subject by Kathleen Raine, F. A. C. Wilson, Morton Irving Seiden, and others. A more important reason for this emphasis stems from the author's conviction that by pushing his historical inquiry further back in time he is approaching the unconscious origins of human thought: thus he can speak of Pythagoras as

an exemplar of "archaic man," "who . . . remains in the shadowy darkness at the bottom of every man's mind as he is also at the bottom and the beginning of the philosophic mind of mankind" (81-82). These chapters are arranged, to be sure, in a diachronic sequence from Pythagoras to Plato, yet Olney's assumption of the continuous presence of a psychical rhizome in the human mind is displayed in the synchronic unfolding of the argument, which moves freely back and forth across the history of Western thought. The effect of the constant juxtaposition of the views of Yeats and Jung with those of their counterparts in ancient Greece is to stress the ubiquitous presence of certain fundamental human ideas rather than their identification with the particular individuals who espoused them. In accordance with this synchronic perspective, the discussion of each thinker develops a particular topic: the chapter on Pythagoras, a theory of aesthetics; the chapter on Heraclitus, an account of process philosophy; the chapter on Parmenides, a theory of the symbolic mode; the chapter on Empedocles, a thesis on time and history; and the chapter on Plato, an investigation of myth and the concept of the whole man.

The essay on Heraclitus, "*Logos* and the Sensible Flux," is perhaps the finest of the "rhizomatic" chapters. The name of Heraclitus, of course, is synonymous with the doctrine that all things are always flowing. His uncompromising vision of both *psychē* and *kosmos* as a pluralistic reality of endlessly warring opposites is compensated, nevertheless, by a second and complementary teaching: "behind all change is a constant law, a secret order behind chaos, *λόγος* in *πάντα ῥεῖ*" (99). The tension between these doctrines of Heraclitus embodies the same balance between pluralism and monism that characterizes the thought of Yeats and Jung. Olney concedes that his synthesis of Heraclitean doctrine "goes far beyond anything Heraclitus ever said or perhaps could have said" (122). Embracing the example of Yeats, Jung, and Nietzsche, he readily acknowledges that he is teasing "a system and a universe . . . with all the assistance Heraclitus can give us, out of the shadows and tendencies of our own minds and out of the dark depths of the collective human mind" (123). This is the author's approach to his subject here and throughout the book, and with it he illuminates as never before the dark, paradoxical utterance of the cosmic fragments.

With the treatment of myth in the chapter on Plato, Olney reaches the heart of his argument: man's limitations compel him to resort to "mythic speech" in his unending quest for knowledge. It is this myth-making propensity that links the myths in the Platonic dialogues to the quantum theory of Werner Heisenberg, the poetics of Yeats to the analytical psychology of Jung. Jung is the key figure here, for his work not only exemplifies but addresses the psychological dynamics of man's creation of symbols. A later chapter, "Psychology of the Pleroma," develops Jung's conception of the psyche as a system, and given the intrinsic difficulty of both the concepts involved—the collective unconscious, the archetypes, the individuation process—and Jung's sometimes cryptic, often shifting account of them, the exposition is admirable for its clarity.

Much the same could be said of the chapter on Yeats, which persuades that the apparent eccentricities of his thought—his preoccupation with the arcane and

the occult, with gyres and cones—are “centric” in every way. In the experience of revelation, recorded in *A Vision* and in so much of the visionary poetry, personal emotion is transformed into general truth, the mind of the poet becomes one with the mind of mankind. Yeats’s poetry reenacts this lived experience of the truth of “the Perennial Philosophy,” and in a series of masterful readings—of “Easter 1916,” “The Circus Animals’ Desertion,” “Lapis Lazuli,” and “Among School Children”—Olney demonstrates the pervasive presence in the poetry of a progress “from *ego* to *eidos*,” from the “temporal world about us to the eternal world of the work of art” (278).

The concluding chapter formulates the fundamental question posed by the entire inquiry: whether man’s building of systems is not merely a wishful projection of his need for order. The author’s own answer comes in the form of a *credo*: “All varieties of system—whether philosophical, psychological, theological, cosmological, aesthetic, musical, or poetic—are all, by their structural order, hierarchical imitations of the prevailing harmony that is the creative principle behind and throughout the universe” (368). James Olney’s searching analysis of the psychology of system-making parallels Frank Kermode’s anatomy of man’s creation of fictions in *The Sense of an Ending*, and it deserves to be similarly valued for its breadth of vision. At the last, his research emerges as a spiritual and autobiographical quest: “The individual discovers meaning in discovering a system—a myth, a likely story, a noble risk, call it what we will—that he can believe in” (369). And so it is with this book: *The Rhizome and the Flower*, consciously designed as itself an imitation in the Aristotelian sense of the very subject it addresses, is the latest bloom of that “great-rooted blossomer,” “the Perennial Philosophy.” The intent of this book of wisdom is evangelical, designed to bring the reader to ask, with Socrates, “What is the right way to live?”

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Just Play: Beckett's Theatre by Ruby Cohn. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980. Pp. ix + 313. \$18.50.

In her third book devoted to the writings of Samuel Beckett, Ruby Cohn has decided to “play with Beckett’s plays.” She wishes to write “an implicit appreciation through isolation of functional devices and theatre aspects,” and not “an introduction . . . still less . . . summary, paraphrase or substitute.” It is this latter, however, that furnishes the best capsule description of what she has written.

The book is divided into three sections: in the first, she summarizes the plots of Beckett’s twenty published plays in six chapters; in the second, she devotes a chapter each to two unpublished plays and the evolution of *Fin de Partie*; the third section’s three chapters are a personal appraisal of Beckett directing, persons with whom he has worked, and works which are performed in genres for which they were not originally written.

The first section of the book contains little that is new or important. Cohn selects lines or scenes, for the most part chronically, analyzing them in terms of place and time, as soliloquizers and fictionalizers, and through repetition. This has been done before with varying degrees of success by Cohn in her two previous books and by many others.

If we might liken play to sport, this first section might be her compulsory figure skating exercise, in which she dutifully selects the familiar lines and passages that, since publication of *Waiting for Godot*, have been judged the most important for scholarship. Pozzo's "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more," does double and triple duty throughout these six chapters, as do Clov's "Finished" and Hamm's "You remain." These are only two of the most noticeable examples repeated and made to stand for variants of the same information.

Cohn takes *Not I* through four separate explications which differ only slightly with each telling, not nearly enough to merit (if we may borrow from the author's own vocabulary) so much time and place. Her discussion of this play in these first six chapters is a mirror of her discussion of all the other plays: she deals with structural variants and offers little discussion that is critically interpretive. By Chapter four, the conclusion is obvious that all her writing thus far in this book is simply one more version of the enormous body of criticism devoted to the reading of these plays, and it demonstrates what is already well known, that there is virtually nothing left to say about them. Cohn makes much of Hamm's "yawn" in this chapter, and like Hamm, we, too—yawn.

In her chapter on fictionalizers which follows, Cohn seems to be taking enormous care to keep from saying anything critical or judgmental about these plays. Rather than risk interpretive commentary, she prefers to skirt the issues. She is almost finished with her compulsory skating, but rather than move into the center of the arena to dazzle us with figure skating, she prefers to hug the safe and comfortable boards along the edges of the ice.

Cohn writes that "fiction may camouflage and contradict so as to reach a deeper truth," but she is not willing to heed her own words. She moves on in the last chapter of this section to verbal repetition, choosing Beckett's "wordshed" from *Cascando*, "...risking tedium," hoping that "this 'churn of stale words' yields new precipitates." Unfortunately, it does not. All this counting, even though bolstered by her creation of new categories (doublets, triplets, distanced repetitions, pounders, volleys) is still just a number game that demonstrates more the author's patience and ability to count, separate, and make arbitrary distinctions rather than aid in the integral understanding of a Beckett text. Only rarely does she impart something important, as when she speaks of Beckett dividing a 1971 Director's Notebook for *Happy Days* into segments called "Repetition Texts" and "Variation Texts," but we wait in vain for more information about this notebook because Cohn does not divulge it in its entirety but gives several teasing examples of what she meant. For the most part, this section relies on studies that have already covered this familiar ground, giving credit to (among others) Clas Zilliacus, Porter Abbott, and John and Beryl Fletcher (who are among the noticeable omissions in her index).

What makes this book of value is the middle section, in which Cohn discusses *Human Wishes*, Beckett's 1937 fragment based on the last years of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and *Eleuthéria*, the finished three act play that Beckett wrote shortly before *Waiting for Godot* and which has never been published. She also devotes a chapter to *Fin de Partie* and, as she states in her footnote, it must serve as an interim study until the fragment of the play sold in July, 1973 at Sotheby's becomes available for scholarly perusal.

Beckett gave the entire manuscript of *Human Wishes* to Cohn, along with two notebooks filled with information about the Great Cham's circle of friends and his household. They have rested in a safe deposit box until now, and although Cohn has printed the manuscript fragment in its entirety, she only reveals partial notebook contents. Of course they are too long to appear within this book, but one can't help but wish she had shortened the first six chapters to one longish one and devoted more space, perhaps another appendix, to the notebooks.

Again, this collection of material is important, but again, what she has to say about it lacks any kind of critical force. She is not above charging that any conversation pertaining to Johnson had by Beckett outside her hearing or any opinion voiced by him but not in her presence cannot possibly be valid, and she goes to great lengths to misread and discredit scholarship that is not to her liking. This makes more for suspicion of the reason and rationality of her findings rather than of the studies of which she disapproves. Her opinion, for example of why Beckett abandoned the Johnson play: "He could not resolve the conflict between the realistic biographical drama he had painstakingly prepared himself to write and the verbal ballet he actually found himself writing." But at this time, 1937, Beckett's published and unpublished writings demonstrate clearly that there was no "realistic biographical drama" that he had "painstakingly prepared himself to write." This did not come until well after his war-time novel, *Watt*. Cohn cannot bring herself to accept Beckett's own reason for giving it up, and she invents this explanation which she contradicts on the very next page in her chapter on *Eluthéria*, where she expresses surprise, "—almost incredible," that Beckett could have written this conventional three act play immediately preceding *Waiting for Godot*. It makes her strained convolutions of why he abandoned *Human Wishes* even more puzzling, indeed suspect. Her "playing" with Beckett's texts once again becomes personal diversion rather than textual exegesis worthy of serious consideration.

Cohn is careful to correct errors she has made in her previous books, but it is puzzling (one hesitates to say damaging) that she attributes this reviewer's discussion of *Eluthéria* in the biography of Beckett to a manuscript at Humanities Research Center, Texas, when Footnote 42, page 690 of that book states quite clearly that the manuscript's provenance is Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

In the third and final section of this book, Cohn coins another neologism, "Theatricians," (to go with her earlier "Theatereality"), for persons who have been associated with productions of Beckett's plays. She gives capsule biographies of Roger Blin, Alan Schneider, Billie Whitelaw and a man named Rick Cluchey, saying she has chosen to limit her discussion "to those I most appreciate." Of these, her discussion of Whitelaw's performance in *Not I*

is the most satisfying, simply because it presents new information. Her discussion of Cluchey, a former prisoner at San Quentin, now deeply involved with a group of actors committed to work in prisons and theatres called the San Quentin Workshop, is probably intended to show Beckett's deep humanity and to boost that struggling company's fortunes. It is an interesting vignette, but out of keeping with the rest of the book.

In "Jumping Beckett's Genres" and "Beckett Directs," we again have Cohn at play, taking information which suits her and changing what does not, shading it into a gray area that falls somewhere between kindly intended misinterpretation and deliberate misrepresentation. For example, Beckett's ongoing differences with Madeleine Renaud concerning her roles in his plays are not the genteel encounters she hints of here, and her account of his problems with Patrick McGee in recent years is a travesty of reality. She states emphatically that "There was no problem about obtaining Beckett's permission" for David Warrilow to turn *The Lost Ones* into a dramatic performance, but permission was not granted to the Mabou Mines Company until the late George Reavey and his playwright wife, Jean, interceded. This is a typical example of the kind of generalization that makes one regard the entire book with caution.

We see, in Cohn's Beckett as director, a kind, munificent, entirely admirable figure. Reading between the lines we see the rigidity, stubbornness and intractability that makes many fine and brilliant actors refuse to have anything to do with one of his productions. This is nothing to be ashamed of, and why Cohn and others choose to keep it hidden is a mystery. Beckett is that most fortunate of artists, one who enjoys such a demand for his work that he has the luxury to insist upon its being presented in all the perfection of his own personal vision. This makes him difficult to work with, but it is nothing to distort or to hide.

Cohn continues, however, to reside in the mainstream of the kind of criticism known among many scholars of modern literature as "Becketteering." This is not a kind term, rather, it describes that group which insists upon presenting to the world a man so far removed from reality that—to quote a remark Cohn often makes—"he is a saint." He is not. He is a perfectionist in his work, and this makes him sometimes seem inflexible, determined, even quirky. He is an artist who cares about his work, a quality often found in human beings, but Cohn insists upon portraying him hagiographically.

This is true of much of her writing about Beckett. She has known him for many years and he has given her manuscripts and notebooks which would be of enormous value to scholarship. All was given to her in a spirit of open and scholarly generosity, but unfortunately, she chooses to divulge it piecemeal, thus restricting any critical commentary and evaluation of what she has written. It is this insistence on the "insider" approach that gives this book, like her previous writings, an aura of acerbity that sometimes borders on the crochety.

In general, this book does contain a certain amount of important information for any Beckett scholar, but it is ultimately dissatisfying. It is so timid. Professor Cohn plays, but the play is hesitant and cautious. She takes no chances, makes no daring moves, has no sudden darts of intellectual vivacity. One thinks of other kinds of play, of daring to steal home in baseball or even in the children's

game of hide-and-seek, or the seemingly magical penetration by the runner of a football line, but here there is only the careful shooting by a solitary player of one lustreless marble around an otherwise empty circle.

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Wallace Stevens: The Making of the Poem by Frank Doggett. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Pp. xiv + 160. \$12.00.

In one way or another every reader of Stevens must confront his peculiar form of obscurity, a deliberate pattern of elusiveness using various registers of diction and consolidating nearly every kind of image with highly abstract concepts. In one line he might make a generalized declaration about the nature of poetry or language or some other theoretical subject one would more likely expect in discursive prose. Then in the next line he might offer another broad aphorism seeming to contradict the first one, or if not that, he might present an abruptly sensual image with no apparent bearing upon the philosophy preceding it. His early poems (1915-1931) are not as explicitly theoretical as the later ones (1932-1955), but these first lyrics still exert the same kind of expository pressure, a force inducing a reader to search out in a work some thematic model abstract and general enough to encompass all of that work's disjointed enigmas.

In the fifties and sixties, the period when the American academy first turned to Stevens in an extensive way, the typical approach to this obscurity was fairly direct. Critics like Louis Martz, Joseph Riddel, and James Beard tended to see their task as one of unearthing the thought which the verse was presumably concealing or only half revealing. But beginning with Helen Vendler's *On Extended Wings* in 1969, a different approach emerged. Stevens, Vendler stressed, was a poet before he was a philosopher. "Abstractly considered," she observes scornfully, "Stevens' 'themes' are familiar, not to say, banal, ones." Accordingly, her own inquiry would not concentrate on the poet's ideas but would instead explore his art, in particular, the way the voice of the long poems becomes its own protagonist, one heroically affirming a world that is inherently tragic. The extent of Vendler's influence remains an open question, but whatever the causes, the seventies did see, with several exceptions granted, a general shift of concern away from Stevens' thought in favor of questions of style and influence. The advantage of this more recent emphasis is that a poem is easily treated as a poem, i. e., a text governed by conditions of meaning that are quite different and in some ways far more complex than those governing, say, a philosophical treatise. By this same token, however, the great disadvantage of this approach lies precisely in its weak focus on Stevens' ideas. It characteristically assumes that his thought is "familiar" or hopelessly inconsistent or vaguely indeterminate or relevant mainly in what it reveals about the influence of other writers—

some predicate, in other words, that will make the conceptual content of a Stevens poem no longer as problematic as it was, thus enabling the critic to get on with the real task of studying Stevens' art. The difficulty is that Stevens' thought constitutes a good part of his art. In fact it does not take much pondering to realize that an accurate description of the rest of his art depends upon an accurate understanding of his thought. Certainly some of the critics of the fifties and sixties did on occasion treat Stevens as if he were some systematizing philosopher and were doubtless guilty of other sins of reductiveness, but on the whole they more squarely addressed the question of Stevens' obscurity; and to my mind his obscurity is a problem that has not gone away.

Standing among the most important critics of these earlier years is Frank Doggett, who in his book, *Stevens' Poetry of Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966) and several essays of this same period addressed the relation between the poet's obscurity and his ideas as closely as anyone ever did. The *Poetry of Thought* is a carefully wrought book that both compares Stevens' ideas with a number of general themes in Western philosophy and at the same time cautions continually against the temptation to ascribe a body of doctrine to the poet. One feature of Doggett's work at this time is its immediate, unpretentious pertinence to a Stevens poem. Consider, for instance, a point he makes in an essay, "This Invented World: 'Stevens' Notes toward a Supreme Fiction'" (first printed in *ELH*, 28 [1961], 284-99): "personification . . . is the staple rhetorical device of 'Notes toward a Supreme Fiction' . . . Each personification is a kind of man and at the same time a kind of idea." You can turn to almost any part of "Notes," or for that matter many other poems, and see how central personification is to the poet's peculiar kind of self-reflexive verse. Doggett's point is of the type that may seem obvious only because the principle to which it directs us is—once it has been pointed out—so clearly manifest. Doggett continued his research on Stevens into the seventies and has now culminated this later effort with *Wallace Stevens: The Making of the Poem*. Following the trend of recent years, this study lays enormous stress on what is assumed to be the indeterminacy of Stevens' thought. The explicit theory in the poet's later style is thus described by Doggett as "tentative and undeveloped" (p. 112), and the younger Stevens of the twenties is supposed to have considered ideas as "extraneous to the real work of the poem" (p. 107). Doggett has always been cautious in discussing Stevens, but this latest book turns caution into a methodology. In spite of obvious similarities, the *Making of the Poem* represents a different direction from the earlier Doggett, and I must say I like the earlier one more.

In fairness to this book, I should also note that it has the same undecorated clarity and shows the same acuity of the earlier work. Although much of the material covered is not exactly new, its commentary still represents a genuine contribution; the impression is of someone who has read and struggled with the verse for years, someone who can bring a sense of the whole Stevens to everything he says about him. Whereas the *Poetry of Thought* looked outward toward Western philosophy for its discussion of the verse, the *Making of the Poem* confines its scope to the Stevens canon. It first correlates the poet's prose statements about poetic theory to his actual practice of poem-making, then moves to show

how the lyrics themselves reveal as a body general semantic regularities that underlie the meanings of any single work, and finally demonstrates how certain stylistic features (like the poet's complex syntactic patterns) are intimately involved with a poem's themes. In using the prose to define Stevens' poetics Doggett concentrates more on the *Letters* (1966) than the lectures of *The Necessary Angel* (1951). This emphasis is unusual but quite appropriate, since the letters, especially the correspondence with Ronald Lane Latimer and Hi Simons, are closer to the specifics of Stevens' own views about poetry (even though the relation between the letters, the theory, and the poetry is more complex than Doggett seems to assume).

The most innovative part of the book is the chapter discussing the "possibility" of the poetry. Doggett sets one of Stevens' favorite words, "possible," in opposition to the term "given" as a way of discussing the inductive and deductive processes involved in poetic meaning: the "given" is to refer to the indisputable information a text furnishes, "its sound and statement" (p. 43) and the "possible" to the figural connections and conceptual conclusions a reader makes as he performs a text, an activity that is virtually endless, since, according to Doggett, "the possible... is a wordless and indeterminate meaning open to conjecture... and, after each conjecture, the possible is still unresolved and open for another conjecture" (p. 43). The possible depends on the given, and so "not just anything that might come to mind is useful; to be credible, explication must be concerned with what is appropriate to the poet's customary usage and to the context of the poem" (p. 66). What is interesting here is the paradox that seems to emerge: poetic meaning in Stevens depends on his obscurity. Although this obscurity obviously does not promote communication in the ordinary sense of the term, it nevertheless establishes those conditions through which a text is performed again and again, each time in a different way, each time with a momentary and unique "life." Under such a program complete intelligibility is the very death of meaning. As Stevens says in a letter to Latimer, "as soon as people are perfectly sure of a poem they are just as likely as not to have no further interest in it; it loses whatever potency it had." This notion that the darkness of a text can be the source of its renewability is what makes Doggett assume that indeterminacy is built into the very structure of the poem itself. Such a conclusion seems to make sense, but I think it is invalid.

Let me suggest an alternative position by way of a brief example. In discussing the 1944 poem, "The Creations of Sound," Doggett claims that, according to the view expressed in this piece, "it is better to think that the poem is independent of ego consciousness" (p. 18), that, in other words, the actual composing of a poem derives from unconscious processes. Below is a passage from that poem with a comment by Doggett immediately following it. I have italicized the part of the clause that Doggett does not cite:

[T]here are words

Better without an author, without a poet,

Or having a separate author, a different poet,
An accretion from ourselves, intelligent
Beyond intelligence, an artificial man

At a distance, a secondary expositor,
 A being of sound, whom one does not approach
 Through any exaggeration. From him, we collect.

In "The Creations of Sound," Stevens is concerned almost entirely with the theory of the involuntary imagination. Many contradictory statements of his about the source of poetry can be considered as emanating from a bias for one or the other conception of the nature of creativity, as when he wrote Latimer that "writing poetry is a conscious activity. While poems may very well occur, they had very much better be caused . . ."

Most commentators read a Stevens' poem as if it were a direct reference to some aspect of the poet himself; and often, as in this remark by Doggett, there is applied a psychology of creativity equipped with the standard oppositions: rational/irrational, voluntary/involuntary, and conscious/unconscious. Indeed, Stevens does indicate in his prose a profound interest in understanding the nature of poetic creativity and often, as the quotation from the Latimer letter suggests, uses the same oppositional categories I just mentioned. This interest, moreover, involves itself in the themes of the poetry in a number of ways. But this is not at all to say that "The Creations of Sound" thematizes the imagination in the way Doggett claims it does. His remark on what he feels to be Stevens' contradictions is typical and is of a piece with other features of his study, for instance his emphasis (but with qualification) on the fact that the poet often formed his lyrics in his head so that "essentially a poem was composed before it was written" (pp. 36-37): we should not be surprised, the general message seems to be, to find the poetry something of a muddle as far as determinate thought is concerned. But what is most worthy of note about Doggett's remark is that it does not move an inch to resolve the enigmas themselves; it merely leaves us to feel that some of the phrasing could suggest the involuntary imagination. Presumably, we are to let the enigmas keep their cloud of indeterminacy.

But the obscurity of the passage derives not from actual indeterminacy but from outright deception. The sense of the poem is, as the title of one lyric has it, "The Sense of the Sleight-of-hand Man." Stevens knows very well that we shall read "The Creations of Sound" in terms of the poet himself, even when the poem baldly warns us that "there are words/Better without an author, without a poet." Doggett omits the first part of the clause, "there are words," but as it turns out, the poem is literally about its own words. Consider the following opposition:

The voice of the poem as that
 of its originator (i. e., the his-
 torical figure, Wallace Stevens)

The voice of the poem as that of
 the text (i. e., the words them-
 selves here and now under your
 performance)

As you read the poem, the words create Wallace Stevens, who in this strict linguistic framework is not a human being (that would be an "exaggeration") but a conception evoked by the words, "an artificial man/At a distance, a secondary expositor," who is literally a "being of sound." In this most literal sense, the words themselves are the speakers of the poem: they tell you that it is better without an author, without a poet. They—the words right in front of

you—are the poet for the moment, or if a different poet is to be considered (i. e., Wallace Stevens), he must be conceived as only an “accretion” from these words. The poem, which is intelligent beyond the intelligence of the poet, is thus the creator whenever it is performed by anyone, be it Wallace Stevens as he writes it or any reader at any subsequent moment of the text’s history. Elsewhere in the same lyric the poet is called “X”: he cannot be named because he is indefinite. Two levels of ambiguity are involved: 1) the poet X is both the text and the performer, because at the moment of performance the two become one; 2) the poet X is any performer who enacts the language by either writing or reading it. Thus the crucial ambiguities of the poem are to be found in those small relational terms, the pronouns and the prepositions, in which a multiplicity of identifications between poet, text, and audience can be played out. For example, two of a number of ways we are to read “From him, collect” are

We (all the performers of the poem) come together here by means of him (this conception of the poet) that is part of this language.

We (all the words of the poem) come together here through him (the actual author who wrote the poem).

The key to this riddle poem lies in the preposition “of” in the title, “The Creations of Sound”: obviously poems are creations *in* sound, but the things of which they speak—including even the poet—are creations *by* sound.¹

In this poem poetic ambiguity, which is not the same thing as indeterminacy, is used to portray the ambiguities inherent in language itself. Because a poem is language, we can say that in one sense the poem is the poet, that in another sense it is the text, and that in still another it is the reader (but notice how arid the idea becomes in my prose!). In a recently discovered letter to R. P. Blackmur—appearing in Holly Stevens’ “Flux 2,” *The Southern Review*, 15, No. 4 (1979), pp. 733-74—Stevens writes that “ambiguity does not mean obfuscation. The clearest possible definition of things essentially ambiguous leaves ambiguity.”

My discussion of “The Creations of Sound” illustrates my more general quarrel with Doggett: generally speaking, the enigmas in Stevens’ verse are not inscrutable and the thought which they work to conceal is anything but undeveloped and indeterminate. Such enigmas are in fact riddles resolvable according to a consistent self-reflexive model, one based on the idea that a poem may talk literally about its own words. In many of the early poems, at least those published after 1916, and almost all the later ones, Stevens centers the theme of the creative imagination, not on the nineteenth-century ideal of a genius-originator but on the here-and-now of the language that is being performed. It is not that he shifts the focus of concern from the poet to the reader; it is rather that he thematizes the language of the text-performance itself, which he sees incorporating *both* poet *and* reader. As one aphorism from the “Adagia” has it, a poem may reveal a “poetry of words”: “Poetry is a poetic conception,

¹ Much of my discussion of “The Creations of Sound” appears in my review of *The Southern Review*’s Fall, 1979 Stevens centennial issue in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, (1980), 26-32.

however expressed. A poem is poetry expressed in words. But in a poem there is a poetry of words. Obviously, a poem may consist of several poetries." Doggett himself seems close to this very idea when he notices how in some poems references to the act of reading suggests the creative imagination (pp. 59-62) or when he talks of the ghost in "Two Tales of Liadoff" and "The Weeping Burgher" as suggesting the absent poet who haunts the poem (p. 79). But Doggett is far from incorporating these insights into some recurrent and specifiable theory; in fact he uses the very passages referring to the act of reading to illustrate a discussion of Stevens' indeterminacy.

Within the scope of a review like this present one, I have no space to demonstrate that "The Creations of Sound" is the rule and not the exception. Neither can I discuss the enormous questions raised by the idea of a literal "poetry of words."² And yet I do wish to propose, at least, that Stevens' obscurity derives from a very different source than the one Doggett suggests: where he sees the enigmas issuing from thought that, out of its own lack of formation, resists precise definition, I see the thought not only fully formed but remarkably powerful, so much so in fact that it "plays" with highly educated readers in the way a magician uses legerdemain to play with an audience of children. Why are we so easily deceived? One reason is that the poem's subject is unexpectedly and literally under our noses. Nothing is so elusive as the obvious. Of course this is not to say that there is only one idea in a Stevens poem and that a piece can only be read in a single way, but this principle of conceptual pluralism is part of the polysemantic nature of the artistic text in general and would apply equally to works of other writers whose thought is more manifestly determinate.

The deception involved in this "poetry of words" derives from the representational power of language itself, which as so many philosophers and linguists emphasize, makes itself "invisible" to our attention so that we can focus instead on the thing to which it is referring. It is a simple principle but a slippery one nevertheless. Consider this line from "Credences of Summer": "It is the visible rock, the audible..." On the screen of his mind, a reader could picture a mountain with perhaps the wind howling around it. But in context the verse is also to be read as a reference to the poem's language, which is also visible and audible. In the lines following this verse the rock is called "a sure repose," "this present ground," and "the vividest repose." In short, the one immediate and impregnable thing the voice of "Credences" can believe is the language of "Credences" itself. "The word," says Stevens in another aphorism from the "Adagia," "must be the thing it represents; otherwise, it is a symbol. It is a question of identity." The "question of identity" is in part a question of reference, of taking "rock," say, as either a mountain or a word. But in a poem like "Credences" and "The Creations of Sound" is not

² I am writing a book on this entire question, *A Poetry of Words: A Study of Self-Reference in Wallace Stevens*. See my "The Semiotic Poetry of Wallace Stevens," *Semiotica*, 23, No. 1/2 (1978), 78-79, and "'Certain Phenomena of Sound': An Illustration of Wallace Stevens' Poetry of Words," *TSL*, 20 (1978), 599-614.

a matter of either/or. The "question of identity" may also suggest the deceptive play, in poems like these, of two modes of reference in one and the same text.

Doggett, it is clear, dislikes the notion of this kind of secrecy in the verse, the idea, in his words, of "the poem's sealed letter to the reader, to be opened by the poet or some ideal intuitive critic" (pp. 43-44). But why would Stevens' "ideal" reader be the one to uncover his deception? The possibility of poetry, we recall, depends on the *lack* of intelligibility. "Poetry," Stevens admits in one Latimer letter "... cannot be made suddenly to drop all its rags and stand out naked, fully disclosed." It should also be noted that in the letters Stevens' consuming desire for privacy in his personal life and his religious commitment to poetry seem part of one another. He is the kind of man who can write to Hi Simons that "there is a kind of secrecy between the poet and the poem, which, once violated, affects the integrity of the poet." When he writes of other authors, he sometimes has this same relation in mind, as when he speaks in a letter to Barbara Church "of the difficulty Valéry shared with other poets of not being explicit as to his real conception, which he likes to suggest or imply, not state."

In "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" we read that one of the aims of poetry is "plainly to propound." On the other hand, Stevens' aim is also to write genuine poetry, not just versified essays about language and the performance of the poem. The letters reveal that the French Symbolist ideal of "pure" poetry exerted a profound influence upon him, especially in the early years. Hence the conflict: the more clearly defined theory becomes in the poetry, the more didactic the final result tends to be, for even theories about poetry would constitute a pollutant in verse striving in some degree to be "pure." Stevens' resolution is to bury his thinking within the strategies of the text, in "the secretions of the words," to borrow a phrase from "The Lack of Repose." As the pun on "secretions" suggests, poetry is to conceal meaning as it releases it. In another letter to Hi Simons, Stevens admits that "a man who wrote with the idea of being deliberately obscure would be an imposter. But that is not the same thing as a man who allows a difficult thing to remain difficult because, if he explained it, it would, to his way of thinking, destroy it."

Of course Stevens is not the only one who wants his enigmas to keep his poetry pure. Doggett's point about "the poem's sealed letter" is interesting because the question of actual secrecy is almost never raised in connection with the obscurity and, as I say, today discussion of even his obscurity is comparatively rare. It seems that the more enshrined Stevens became in the American academy as one of the great poets of the century, the greater the tendency to leave his obscurity in the golden mist of its apparent indeterminacy. To borrow from my earlier analogy, a large part of the child who watches the magician *requires* wonder, the same part that does not want to see through the mystery of its own astonishment. The secrecy I am imputing to Stevens is a function of not only certain features within a text, but a dynamic between a text and a certain kind of audience, one that reads and valorizes poetry within a given field of expectation. The more one reads the *Letters* the deeper the impression that Stevens wanted not so much to inform an audience as to train one. Secrecy

after all is a form of control, and the *Letters* do reveal a man who, to say the least, liked to control things that were important to him. In one letter to Latimer, after explaining the role of the letter C in "The Comedian as the Letter C," Stevens requests that "if you refer to the role of the letter C in this poem, do, please, refer to it as your own explanation and not as mine, although it is mine."

"Every poem," declares Stevens in another aphorism from the "Adagia," "is a poem within a poem: the poem of the idea within the poem of the words." Here is the same "question of identity" mentioned by the aphorism cited a moment ago: we may treat a word in terms of the idea it evokes (as if the word "rock" were the image of a mountain) or we may treat it as a thing in itself. According to Doggett, however, "the poem of the words" refers to the "given" of a work and "the poem of the idea" to its "possibility" (pp. 42-43). Here he is not quite following Vendler, who begins *On Extended Wings* discussing the two "poems" as if they were markers for the old form/content opposition. And yet the effect of Doggett's whole book leads us to infer essentially the same creed as Vendler's: protect Stevens' art from his thought by first making-believe the two are separate and then showing reverence for the former and contempt for the latter. On the contrary, the most extraordinary part of Stevens' art is his thought.

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A Literature Without Qualities: American Literature Since 1945 by Warner Berthoff. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979. Pp. 204. \$10.95.

Certain works of fiction, as everybody knows, manipulate not only distance but height. Flaubert, narrating his movement toward Yonville, draws closer not only horizontally but from above. And Hardy, especially Hardy, renders his world, at crucial points, as if from the Goodyear blimp. One rarely thinks of expository works as if they manipulate height in any way analogous to works of fiction. Yet that is the illusion that Warner Berthoff's book most firmly leaves—an elevated, Jovian ordering of a long, diverse period in our cultural life. The illusion of height has something to do with the tone of the scholarship: footnoting Barthes' *The Pleasures of the Text*, Berthoff remarks that it is translated "(very accurately)." It has something to do with the style, which is heavy, at times involuted, and fond of laying out the collective traits of "us." "How, most particularly, within our inter-locking system of collaborative-competitive existence (of which language itself is the most extended, but our established political custom and economic division of labor scarcely less so), do we respond to and impinge upon one another as centers or as vessels of energy and possibility?" And the Olympian angle of observation has quite a bit to do with the scale of the book: a work on the whole of American literature since the war—some thirty-five years—all done in one hundred seventy-seven pages of small format text. But the illusion of height finally has most to do with the

quality of Berthoff's judgments. Taking the measure of thirty-five years of American literature, he judges it against certain prior, transcendent standards; and having so judged it, he decides that he doesn't like it very well.

The concept that forms the title, a literature "without qualities," comes from the title of the novel by Robert Musil. What it means, as Berthoff extends and applies it, is that American literature since the war retreats from the larger world of consequence and historical significance, retreats moreover from a continuity with its predecessors, often opting for small exercises in entertainment, virtuosity, and solipsistic self-amusement. On the question of magnitude, Berthoff measures the scope and ambition of works since the war, finding that nobody any longer seeks to write a masterpiece. Of those areas of literature that have engaged most readers and writers on the subject—the emergence of a brilliant group of Jewish novelists, the extraordinary ingenuity with which certain writers of fiction have sought to move beyond the possibilities of realism, the vigor of the drama, the altogether different voice of women in the literature of the past three decades, the consolidation of an authoritative literature by and about Blacks, the movement of poetry beyond a rather limited canon of neo-metaphysicals—none of these interest Berthoff particularly. Of the Jewish novelists, for example, Malamud is mentioned in one collective footnote, Roth is cited, in a series among others, as a maker of "expert prose entertainments," and Bellow is discussed slightly and rather airily. Of the experimentalists, Barth's fiction is cited twice, with minimal respect, Barthelme is gathered, among others, as a perpetrator of "resolute performative novelties," a gathering which also includes the only mention of Coover. Of the drama, Tennessee Williams is never mentioned. Of the women, Berthoff seems intermittently fascinated by Joyce Carol Oates; but Mary McCarthy is never mentioned, nor is Grace Paley, nor Alison Lurie, nor Joan Didion. Of the Blacks, Ellison gets passing respect, Baldwin a footnote, and Toni Morrison no mention. And of the poets, it is really only Lowell who engages his sustained attention, Roethke, for a single example, appearing in a series, among nine others, as an instance of the period's struggle "with its own will to self-destruction."

Well then, what *does* he write about? Wallace Stevens for one, Henry Miller for another. The commentary on those two writers makes up roughly a third of the book. If one recalls that both writers achieved their reputations and completed most of their major works before the end of the war, one is entitled to wonder what they are doing there, especially in the face of the dismissal of so much else. The rationale, of course, is that both are seen as precursors. In the case of Miller, the linkage is pursued tenaciously but unpersuasively. It is true that Miller seems, in retrospect, to open areas of language and subject matter and to establish a relationship to experience that can be found in much fiction since. But that he is the pivot upon which post-war fiction turns seems to me dubious. Comparable claims could be made for a substantial number of figures from Kafka to S. J. Perelman. The linkage between Stevens and poetry since is less tenaciously pursued; yet it is surely implicit or the treatment of Stevens would have no justification. The idea, in any case, that the poetry of the last thirty-five years can best be seen by reference to Stevens seems to me a preposterous assumption. And the reader for whom it is good to be

alive and reading in these disquieting times will suspect, by the time he reaches that point, that Berthoff's sustained treatment of Stevens is a not-very-subtle means of patronizing a large number of poets since, who can be seen, in comparison to the Master of Hartford, to be triflers.

There is always room in the world for jeremiads. And no doubt our official sense of our own literature is in need of refinement, a refinement that may well necessitate a kind of virtuoso nay-saying. It is a function that Berthoff's book sometimes serves, in a sustained passage, for example, in which he pays tribute to the awesome accomplishment of *Gravity's Rainbow* while strenuously pointing out Pynchon's final inability to put us in touch with ourselves. Right or wrong, it is a passage that carries authority and conviction. But that angle of insight—the little boy in “The Emperor's New Clothes”—is not finally the one that gives the dominant tone to Berthoff's book. Rather it is the tone of a fairly ungenerous imagination for which the most characteristic gesture is not buoyant opposition but the back of the hand. The period, needless to say, deserves better.

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