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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews


The older generation of twentieth-century novelists—Mr. Lewis catalogues Joyce, Mann, and Proust—were obsessed by death and took refuge from their fears in the City of Art. But now that is a ruined city, and the responsible novelists of another generation are driven (somewhat existentially, it seems) to the “rather desperate strategy” of finding “certain grounds for living in life itself.” Their heroes, sharing the misery of all humanity in an age of nihilism and legalized murder, are often rogues and worse, yet they aspire to be saints. It is Mr. Lewis’s main theme that this impure holy man is the central figure in the work of Moravia, Camus, Silone, Faulkner, and Graham Greene, as in that of their immediate “ancestor,” Malraux.

As in his earlier book, The American Adam, Mr. Lewis shows that he must work with an archetype, moulding it into a Gestalt. So far so good: at least the essays are connected, are not just unrelated heaps of statement. Unfortunately, an urgent necessity for unity can lead to oversimplifications that sometimes require a bending and squeezing of ideas to fit preconceptions. For example, Mr. Lewis suggests that “one writer of the first generation” of moderns created a picaresco saint—Thomas Mann in Felix Krull. But surely Mann presented others (what is Settembrini?); so did Lawrence (not alone with Mellors), and Joyce (with Bloom and Earwicker, to say nothing of Stephen Dedalus); and is not even Proust’s Charlus rather grotesquely and ironically in the category? Mr. Lewis says that there is one writer of “the third generation” who has added to the gallery: Saul Bellow in Augie March. But surely there are others in English, if not so talented as Bellow, who are, in some estimates in this tricky labelling, at least close enough to him in ability to be mentioned if he is: Bourjaily, Amis, Donleavy, Gold, two or three others—Kerouac if you will. Indeed, a recent book has put together Kerouac and his fellow-Beatniks under a title quite similar to Mr. Lewis’s: The Holy Barbarians.

The point is, Mr. Lewis has hit upon a good idea, but he tries to apply it too exclusively to his “middle generation.” In order to keep all this going, he exerts himself in critical legerdemain which is often admirable and flashing with insights. But he is frequently too solemn about limiting his focus and pretending that it is the only view possible of the turbulent literature of our time. If you accept Mr. Lewis’s claim that the six authors he particularly deals with have certain qualities in common, well and good; you can relax and enjoy yourself. For, within the terms of this acceptance, the book is a very fine one indeed.

Mr. Lewis calls his Epilogue “The Shared Reality: The Shadow of André Malraux,” and certainly Malraux’s shadow falls across the whole book. Malraux is slightly older than the other authors considered here (Mr. Lewis is right in saying this, though he scrambles chronology rather wildly on p. 276); and Malraux began writing significant work when fairly young. He was the first of these
writers to become established. The chapter on Camus, early in this book, shows that Malraux, who had emphasized the absurd, was "the intellectual hero of Camus's youth." In the Epilogue, Mr. Lewis points out that Camus is the only one of these representative writers directly influenced by Malraux, but further says: "If, in the generation-wide struggle to come alive, Moravia represents the erotic motif; if Camus represents human reason in its compassionate workings; if Silone represents the conversion of the political ambition into the charitable urge, and Faulkner the conversion of darkness into light and the old into the new; if Greene represents the interplay of the more than human with the less than human—then Malraux may be said to represent all of these things or versions of them. Thus, he may be said to typify the strongly marked evolution of the whole second generation."

Mr. Lewis has here summarized so many of his conclusions that we need no further synopsis of them; the space so made available can be used for some particular comments. Back to Malraux, then: one of the most valuable contributions to the estimate of this author is Mr. Lewis's discussion of Les Noyers de l'Altenburg (The Walnut Trees of Altenburg, not yet translated into English). Published in Switzerland in 1943, this novel is only the fragment of a larger work, most of it destroyed by the Gestapo before the almost legendary Malraux escaped from a German POW camp. Mr. Lewis, though he carefully relates this book to Malraux's other novels, gives it most emphasis because it is the least known of them over here and because it represents a high point in Malraux's fictional development. The setting is an Alsatian abbey where a group of intellectuals gathers for a colloquy; the story revolves around the experiences of Vincent Berger, a Malraux-like character divided between action and reflection who at last comes to the realization that the sense of life, as Mr. Lewis phrases it, "is to experience the happiness of fraternal pain."

Compassion of this kind, which so often occurs in the European novel, is rare in the American, where it tends to become melodramatic sentimentalism, as in Steinbeck. Mr. Lewis, in a fine comparison between Steinbeck and Silone shows how the former grew more mechanistically toward sociology and politics ("however emotionally intensified") while Silone's career registered "a defeat of political ambition that is at once a triumph over it, in the name simultaneously of humanity and of art." Steinbeck also became too involved in Emersonian "oversoul" ideas, leading to "a zestful and insufficiently examined confidence in human nature" (sentimentalism, surely); on the other hand, the one American writer to whom a chapter of this book is devoted, Faulkner, has in Mr. Lewis's opinion a rich endowment "of the tragic and ironic spirit," corrective of sentimentalism. Unfortunately, Mr. Lewis's chapter on Faulkner is only partial, unlike the others in the book which provide excellent total surveys of the careers of the writers discussed; here, only two of Faulkner's works are seriously examined, a novel (A Fable) and a short novel ("The Bear"). This chapter gives a rather uneven view of Faulkner, though it helps Mr. Lewis keep his eye on that author's picaresque-saint characters.

In A Fable, whose hero is more saintly than picaresque, Mr. Lewis sees "a deadness at the center," though "the amount of life that is thereby stricken remains enormous." But essentially it is one of those "impure" novels (Mr. Lewis draws upon R. P. Warren's term) in which no operation of the ironic or the skeptical prevents the good or the ideal from becoming too "misty." Conversely, mistiness of this kind is avoided in "The Bear" by Faulkner's "brilliant strategy
of representing it exactly as mist.” Another flaw found in *A Fable* is that, in Yeats’s concept, the central figure is rhetorical, an outcome of the author’s quarrel with others rather than of his quarrel with himself. Yet Mr. Lewis finds more good to say about this novel than most other critics find; again it seems all the more regrettable that he didn’t investigate more thoroughly Faulkner’s major novels, the product of his earlier period. Like all American writers of stature, except Henry James, Faulkner as he has grown older has become more transcendently fuzzy.

This is not ordinarily true of European authors, even of Graham Greene, the only genuinely religious writer considered in this book; the religious sense, Mr. Lewis points out, is now often regarded as “hostile to human aspiration” as well as to the narrative art: “But out of both forms of hostility, Greene has drawn a peculiar anguish and a peculiar tension which are the determining features of his work.” To Mr. Lewis, Greene’s finest books are *The Power and the Glory*, whose wandering priest is an incomparable embodiment of the saintly rogue, and *The Heart of the Matter*. Mr. Lewis, who believes that Greene’s dramatic talent is increasing as his narrative gift wanes, rates *The Quiet American* rather low. In John Atkins’s book on Greene (a book not worth Mr. Lewis’s single chapter on the subject), the objection to *The Quiet American* is (oddly enough for an Englishman) that the novel is unfriendly to America; Mr. Lewis’s objections, largely technical, center around his claim to the effect that the book is flabby. But perhaps Mr. Lewis misses the parodic value of the quiet American himself, as a take-off on the picaresque-saint type.

Throughout, Mr. Lewis provides opinions that not everyone is going to agree with; he constantly joggles perspectives and challenges earlier evaluations. He seems happiest with Silone, though he is perhaps overcautious in his statement about *Bread and Wine*, put forth positively enough as Silone’s best novel but, at another level, only as “possibly the best and probably the most representative novel of his generation.” Always expert when he gets into the technical, Mr. Lewis shows how this book, although defying the Aristotelian strictures against the episodic, can nevertheless, along with other modern picaresque novels (and one play, Camus’s *Caligula*), “fulfill many of the traditional requirements of form.” But art alone is not Mr. Lewis’s main consideration, and he makes it clear that it is not Silone’s, either: if Silone’s journey has taken him farther and farther along the road of art, it has also led him increasingly toward charity; and if this somewhat parallels the journey of Malraux (a point Mr. Lewis does not labor), at least Silone has kept at creative art more consistently than Malraux, whose last novel (the previously mentioned *Les Noyers*) appeared sixteen years ago. Silone’s recent book, *The Secret of Luca*, represents a new phase, in which the author “is altogether and unqualifiedly a novelist,” writing of a “new type of saint” which “is the best image of sacrificial human heroism that contemporary fiction can offer.”

There is little enough of this in Moravia, and indeed Mr. Lewis never makes it clear what the devil Moravia is doing in this gallery—though the essay on him is perceptive and in places entertaining. Moravia sees the world through sex—in a different way from Lawrence, as Mr. Lewis explains, and certainly there is far more than sex in Lawrence’s work: Moravia seeks the enigma of life in the erotic, though his aim is identical with Silone’s in the political and Greene’s in the religious: “to recover a more faithful image of man at a time when that image has been singularly deformed and betrayed.” Mr. Lewis adds, “measured
against that purpose, Moravia's achievement is impressive, but partial," and we can thank Mr. Lewis for the shrewdness of that partial.

For Moravia, for all the attractive skill of his writing, does not go so far along Mr. Lewis's course as these other writers; Camus for example is a far more appropriate choice, for the picaresque saint glares out from both his life and his works. Even the monster Caligula, in Camus's play, "is a tormented picaro—a rogue beyond all roggery who yearns to be a saint," who "at every step in his unspeakable career . . . gives the impression of being only a step away from holiness." In many ways, Mr. Lewis's essay on Camus is the key chapter of his book for, as he says, "Camus is the most philosophical" of the writers discussed in it. Mr. Lewis sees Camus, with his recognition of the absurd and his cultivation of the indifferent, as the climax of a century's malaise. What Mr. Lewis does not note is that, more than any of these authors he talks about, Camus is in mid-career; and he belongs to the future more than any of them, not only because he may still have many books in him but more importantly because his subject matter is already more distinctly "modern," in the latest phase, than that of any of the rest."

Two things remain to be said about Mr. Lewis's book, beyond the statement already made to the effect that one needn't give too rigid an acceptance to his idea of a central pattern. First, this remarkably fine book is all the more emphatically useful because it is virtually the only recent international book of critical studies—and how much better it is than books of this "comparative" kind we used to get, such as the late William Boyd's Studies From Ten Literatures and its many cousins and progeny. If Mr. Lewis's book seems limited in breadth, it is certainly not limited in depth. There are excellent individual studies of some of these authors—such as Germaine Brée's Camus—but there is no other single volume in English that so richly presents a group of representative authors from several literatures.

Beyond this, one more point, which has surely been implicit throughout this review: Mr. Lewis is a first-rate critic of techniques. His approach might seem primarily thematic, because of his title and his efforts to string ideas together, but he is always perceptive of the modes of writing that make an author effective. Several examples of this are suggested above; the book itself is full of such considerations. Incidentally, Mr. Lewis is not afraid to make use of some of the so-called fallacies, such as biography and intention, when use of them is germane, as it often is; but all the way through his finest employment of means is of the technical. Granted, this cannot be intrinsically separated from the thematic, except that in this book one trusts Mr. Lewis oftener with the technical. Too many volumes of this kind are limited to the thematic; they approach various authors as if the men under discussion differed only in their ideas. Mr. Lewis, on the other hand, deals specifically with the expressional: deals with it specifically, concretely, believably. This also helps to give this book a value beyond others of its kind.

Harry T. Moore
Southern Illinois University

* Though the death of Camus since this review was written obviously invalidates part of this sentence, it is allowed to stand since Mr. Moore's critical point remains pertinent despite the tragic alteration of fact. [E.R.M.]

Composite volumes by a varied group of authors have become a familiar phenomenon in the modern literature about music. Often they are, as in the case under review, centennial memorial offerings. The essays in such volumes are, in the nature of the publication, usually short. They have the character of the "smorgasbord," and rarely fail to offer in every item something of interest to some consumer and, at least, a few titbits of great relish to any and every sympathetic reader.

The Purcell tercentenary volume is no exception. In fact, some of its titbits are, for all their brevity, of a truly substantial character. The editor is Miss Imogen Holst, daughter of the reputable and prolific English composer, Gustav Holst (1874-1934). Miss Holst points out that most of the contributions "are the result of trying to solve some of the practical problems of editing Purcell's works for performance." Most of them were written by sound practical musicians (composers, organists, singers).

The slim volume contains nine essays and three significant appendices. The names of the authors, with a brief parenthetical remark to indicate the specific nature of the essay, are as follows: Peter Pears (homage), Benjamin Britten (the continuo in songs), Eric Walter White (new light on Dido and Aeneas), Imogen Holst (librettist Nahum Tate), Michael Tippett (continuity in English drama and music), Jeremy Nobel (Purcell and the Chapel Royal), Ralph Downes (an organist on the organ works), Robert Donington (performance today, with a section on dances by the editor), Franklin B. Zimmerman (Purcell's handwriting), Nigel Fortune and Franklin B. Zimmerman (Purcell's autographs), Robert Donington (17th and 18th century evidence on performance), the editor (the Nanki [Japan] collection of Purcell's works).

Benjamin Britten, one of England's notable composers, explains his own practice of making subjective, expressive song accompaniments on Purcell's continuo basses, using judiciously all the devices of modern piano texture, in preference to the plain four-part chordal harmony of the text-books, which has often, in modern, practical editions, burdened Purcell's suggestive music with a weight of dull and uninspired monotony.

For this reviewer the most satisfying item in the volume is Mr. Eric White's contribution: "New Light on Dido and Aeneas." It is one of the very substantial titbits mentioned earlier. Dido and Aeneas was the only true opera or music drama among Purcell's works. All of his many other works for the theater, which were probably his chief source of income, were series of vocal and instrumental pieces, sometimes with more, sometimes with less dramatic coherence, which were interpolated in spoken plays (about forty in number) in more or less appropriate places.

The history of this work, written originally for performance by "Young Gentewomen" at "Mr. Josias Priest's Boarding School at Chelsey," has never been entirely cleared up. Its first performance by the young ladies seems to have been in 1689 or 1690. No autograph or other written score of this form is known. Five years after Purcell's death it was known to have been revived in a revised version for adult singers, male and female. According to Mr. White's
minute and searching studies in the theater history of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it was performed in the form of additions ("music" or entertainments) inserted directly into the text of successive acts of Charles Gildon's adaptation of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, as performed by Betterton's company at Lincoln's Inn Fields early in 1700. It was performed on its own as a "masque" at Lincoln's Inn Fields, following the Anatomist on January 29, 1704 and following The Man of Mode on April 8 of that year.

The score of Dido and Aeneas was first printed by the Musical Antiquarian Society in 1840, edited by G. A. Macfarren, and again in 1889 as Volume 3 of the Purcell Society's edition by W. H. Cummings. These printed editions were based chiefly on two manuscript scores; one now in the library of Saint Michael's College at Tenbury, and one owned by W. H. Cummings. Cummings' valuable library was sold in 1917 after his death. A Japanese nobleman, the Marquis Tokugawa, purchased about four hundred items including the score of Dido and Aeneas as well as several other works by Purcell, printed and manuscript. These were taken to Tokyo and deposited in The Nanki Music Library there. The present owner of this score is Mr. Kiyuhei Oki in Tokyo.

For some years after Cummings' death the purchase of the Marquis Tokugawa remained unknown to many British music lovers and historians, and a legend of the lost manuscript of Dido began to spread. However, Mr. White learned that it had gone to Japan, but could not locate it. Inquiries were set on foot by Miss Holst, but were not completed when Mr. White's essay went to press. Before the book came off the press the mystery was cleared up, and Miss Holst explains it all in the four pages of Appendix C. The present owner consented to the study of a microfilm of the score. The results were startling. Cummings does not enjoy a completely unblemished reputation as a reliable historian. In his preface to the Purcell Society's edition he states his belief that his score was probably written in Purcell's time. The sales catalog assigns it to the eighteenth century. Miss Holst states that the first nine pages date from the second half of the nineteenth century and that the remainder was written "approximately 1800 to 1810."

A comparison of the microfilm of Cummings and the Tenbury manuscript shows that the two contain practically the same material. Both are incomplete, and the missing parts are about the same in both scores. The Cummings score seems on the whole to be more accurate. The Tenbury score was believed to date from the eighteenth century, but Mr. White discloses the fact that its paper bears the watermark of "J. Whatman" and hence cannot be earlier than the latter part of the eighteenth century. It is supposed that both these scores were copied from the same earlier source, which might, quite possibly, have been a score provided for one of the theater performances in the early eighteenth century. Up to the present this earlier source has not been brought to light.

Miss Holst's chief contribution to the main body of the volume, "Purcell's librettist, Nahum Tate," has a literary as well as a musical interest. It is known that the Dido libretto, which was printed for the performance in Mr. Priest's school, was not his first attempt to dramatize this incident in the fourth book of the Aeneid. His earlier work was a drama. It altered the names of the characters and the scene of action, and was published under the title of Brutus of Alba in 1678. Miss Holst makes a valiant attempt to defend him in this instance against
accusations of lack of musical understanding, of mediocrity or even of banality, 
often heaped upon him. Purcell's many incidental theater works of necessity show 
a lack of unity. "The astonishing unity of Dido and Aeneas," says Miss Holst, 
"is often mentioned, but Tate's share in it has seldom been acknowledged. He 
was Purcell's only real librettist in our sense of the word." She gives two musical 
examples of how Purcell used Tate's words for dramatic characterization.

Mr. Jeremy Noble's essay, "Purcell and the Chapel Royal," is an interesting 
and highly informative picture of the organization of the Chapel Royal in 
Purcell's time. It provides us with a list of fifty-two Gentlemen of the Chapel 
who were active from 1682-1695, that is, the time from Purcell's admission as a 
Gentleman (organist) until his death. Members of Purcell's family had been in 
the Chapel, and our Purcell, as a child, had been one of the twelve boy choristers. 
The usual number of singers (including organists) in Purcell's time was twelve 
boys and thirty-two men.

Mr. Robert Donington's "Performing Purcell's Music Today" deals with such 
problems as accidentals, embellishments, continuo accompaniments, tempo and 
rubato, rhythms: dots and inequality, phrasing and articulation, instrumental 
style and technique. Appendix A by Fortune and Zimmerman, "Purcell's Auto-
graphs," gives a surprisingly large list of music in Purcell's handwriting. The 
compilers do not agree with earlier bibliographers and have included a number 
of manuscripts formerly not regarded as autographs. The main body of the list 
numbers about 232 titles. Thirty-six are works by other composers (Humfrey, 
Blow, Locke, Tallis, Byrd and others) copied in Purcell's hand. Ten supposititious 
autographs are added, and finally ten reliable non-autograph manuscript sources 
of major works.

It must be evident from this account that the tercentenary volume affords 
interesting reading and offers many new facts or new points of view.

Otto Kinkeldey

South Orange, New Jersey

The Interior Distance by Georges Poulet. Translated by Elliot Coleman. 

It took courage for an American press to undertake the publication (and it is a 
handsome one) of this profound but abstruse volume of criticism, forbiddingly 
subtle and persistently philosophical. At least as much determination, industry 
and insight were required from the translator: his version is expert, faithful to 
the literality of the original and to its often involved meaning. Our sole regret 
is that the verse quotations were not given in the original French in the footnotes, 
for their impact fails to be forcible when they lose their rhythmic and evocative 
qualities.

This series of essays on space (loosely and diversely understood) in ten 
different French writers (four of them poets) is in the same vein as the critic's 
previous Studies in Human Time, translated by the same Johns Hopkins professor. 
Georges Poulet, a Belgian-born critic now teaching at Zurich, is one of the most
distinguished representatives of that philosophical school of literary critics which gained ascendancy in France between 1935 and 1950. Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Blanchot are his two greatest predecessors; Roland Barthes and Jean-Pierre Richard stand among his most gifted followers. Lately a mood of revolt against the philosophers' quasi-monopoly on criticism appears to have emerged in France. "Pourquoi des Philosophes?" was the title of one of the books by a younger man; Ionesco and iconoclastic dramatists, the novelists of "la nouvelle vague," fascinated by the meticulous description of the concrete and intent upon beheading the hydras of philosophy and of psychology, are attempting to demystify theoretical disquisitions on literature.

Their revolt is no doubt a healthy one. In France as in America, many a reader of those ingenious works, in which the interpreter proves to be far more intelligent than the creative writer ever was or meant to be, whispered the remark once made by La Bruyère: "The pleasure of criticism . . . takes away that of being intensely moved by very beautiful things." The question is of immense import and must indeed be raised. Meanwhile, the serious reader must bow before the great merits of this work: it is honest, piercing, often highly illuminating; it is all instinct with the austere pride of understanding mysterious writers and of exposing their mental structures. It is imperious, but tactfully and gently so. It imposes a system upon a variety of creative temperaments, and that scholastic system might become a constricting straitjacket; but it does not. If M. Poulet reads Cartesian and Mallarmean obsessions in every French writer, just as M. Blanchot sees in every practitioner of letters a Kafkaesque or Hoelderlinian personage, asserting "the right to death," he also takes into account the diversity of temperaments. His Marivaux is too philosophical: a metaphysician reaching, beyond the Cartesian cogito, to an astonished emergence out of non-existence, the portrayer of characters basking delightfully in the ephemeral and finding "le style du coeur" in absolute instantaneity. Vauvenargues is depicted as more profound than he really was, apprehending the being as activity, seeing in love only a craving for the exteriorization of oneself in action. Laclos, again, is explained as obsessed by a "project," minutely contrived scheming. His novel shows characters animated by "the will to substitute for an undetermined future that is the work of chance, another future, predetermined, which is the work of the will." Musset's need to love in order to live, his hurried greed for fulfillment in an immediate present obliterating time is compared, not very illuminatingly, to Kierkegaard and to Proust.

The implicit conviction of these French philosophical critics (and not a few American students are close to the French in that respect) is that literature in itself (that of Musset, of Marivaux, of Herrick, of Keats, of the early Yeats) is but a paltry thing unless it be exalted to a philosophical plane and translated into either a dialectics (with subtle structural secrets pointing to a conciliation of tragic opposites) or into an ethical message on sin, or on the one thing which, says T. S. Eliot, "does not change . . . the perpetual struggle of Good and Evil." It probably reveals how deep the survival of Victorianism is among us and how didactic and Jansenist the French, once charged with incurable levity, are in truth (M. Poulet is Belgian, taught for many years in Scotland, then in the city where Poe died and where Mencken robustly pontified. But his acclaim has come from France). Goethe admonished Eckermann more reasonably when, on
May 6, 1827, he warned him against always seeking ideas in a work of art: “Do not believe all the time that everything must be worthless if it is not an abstract thought or idea . . . a poetic creation is the better for being . . . rationally incomprehensible.”

The present reviewer, and many a reader of this rich and thoughtful work, are oftentimes tempted to lay aside a critical work which has to resort to obscure and ugly style and which compels writers, whose fancy might have roamed free, to enter a cage with bars built by the Scholastics, Descartes, Hegel and Mallarmé. They may even be provoked into exclaiming that the best literature is that which is not reducible to philosophy, and that time and space have not obsessed pre-Proustian or pre-Joycean writers quite so tragically as we are nowadays led to imagine. The terms “space” and “distance” are not, in fact, very satisfactorily defined in M. Poulet’s two-page introduction. Every thought, he explains, is of something exterior to it, to be sure; but it is also an interior depth which perceptions and images from outside come to fill. “My thought is a space in which my thoughts take place, in which they take their place . . . All that I think is in myself who think it.”

Objections to M. Poulet’s method could be many: the context of the time, which makes Marivaux’s or Chamfort’s concern with interior distance vastly different from Guérin’s romantic pantheism or from Balzac’s possessive will to be and to turn desire into appropriating domination of things and men. The historical background cannot be so lightly dismissed. Nor can the biographical data: what sort of man was Marivaux, Balzac, Musset, and through what circumstances? The critic adduces extremely ingenious phrases culled from each of the ten authors studied; he juxtaposes them, but without analyzing them, and rather arbitrarily he derives far reaching and very subtle conclusions, sometimes from a single word or image. All commentary of form properly speaking is left out; the sensuous and suggestive values of poetry hardly seem to matter.

Still, in the best studies in the volume, those on Balzac, Hugo and Mallarmé, even the most cantankerous reader’s resistance must avow itself vanquished. The Mallarmean move to deny the existence of all that is, in order to assert the future existence of that which does not exist, namely a book, is splendidly described; incidental commentaries on the mirror, the glass of distance, the myth of absence, the worship of death in Mallarmé are equally perspicacious. Hugo is dissected with no regard for the vast differences between his early poems and his late apocalyptic ones; sentences uttered by fictional characters like Quasimodo or Jean Valjean are interpreted as revealing Hugo’s own thought. But very curious passages from the prose masterpieces of Hugo (as we believe them to be), his Choses vues, le Rhin and especially Alpes et Pyrénées (published only in 1890), have led M. Poulet to an illuminating dissection of Hugo’s imaginative processes. The rhetoric of the poet appears, not just as a device to cover up vacuity of thought, but as the necessary equivalent, in words heaped upon words, of the visionary amassment of swarming forms which was Hugo’s “faculté maitresse.” No poet has thus naturally succeeded in replacing introspection, for which he was not especially suited, by a massive espousal of enormous and proliferating wholes, a solidarity between the self and the world.

M. Poulet’s volume will arouse irritation, opposition, but it will also compel respect and in the end win our admiration for all that, in it, independently from
its central point of view, is profound and lucid. Much too little is known in America, outside specialists of French, of the very rich critical movement which has taken place in France since Rivière, Du Bos, Fernandez and Thibaudet. This volume is one of many which should be translated into English.

HENRI PEYRE


This book constitutes a significant development in contemporary Shelley criticism; it is the first predominantly critical study of Shelley's poetry in many years that is neither a defense or an attack. Mr. Wilson is calm, objective, balanced, unexcited. His approach is, in his own words, "the kind of sympathetic yet exacting consideration with which Shelley deserves to be recalled by the modern reader." Thus Shelley's Later Poetry is an important achievement, though it doubtless owes much to the Time Spirit and to recent criticism: it could hardly have been written even five years ago.

Wilson's method of analyzing Shelley's poetry permits him to find faults in it without finding the faults disastrous. He is immune to the insidious charms of organicism, so that he is able to point out partial defects in a poem without thereby condemning the whole in which they occur. No poem, in his view, actually attains the totality of integration, the complete fusion of form and content defined and assumed by the theory and the method of organic unity, nor is any poem entirely self-contained and autonomous. Shelley's poetry looks before and after; it is in a state of becoming rather than being; its execution, even at best, does not merge with its conception. But these are conditions common in a greater or less degree to all poetry. Shelley, as a "prophetic" poet, indeed presents a special problem, but it is special in degree rather than in kind.

Wilson submits a number of Shelley's briefer lyrics to detailed examination, with very good results. His explication of "When the Lamp is Shattered" is the most illuminating that I have seen, and he achieves a surprising success with apparently slight effusions like "The Keen Stars Were Twinkling." His method is logical and syntactical without being dialectical, in that he treats a poem as an argument developing from point to point without feeling obliged to deal with it as a thematic statement self-subjected to the test of paradox, thus dissolved into contradiction, and resolved by imaginative paralogic, after the fashion of most modern explicators. His analysis of grammar is unusually close and detailed, but he manages to avoid giving the impression that grammatical relationships are the critic's sole concern.

To Wilson the central problem of Shelley's later poems is the unresolved stress between Shelley's radicalism and his Platonism that is almost everywhere to be found in them. "The radical world is, roughly speaking, the world of the philosophes... It is empirical in its epistemology and centers upon the egoism-
altruism opposition in its ethics. Its historical goal is the Earthly Paradise, its means the regeneration of the will. The Platonic world is . . . Plato’s world of discontinuity and rivalry between the One and the Many and between the Form and the Image (without too much Christian and Renaissance blurring of the opposition). It is otherworldly in its epistemology and negative in its view of evil. Its (nonhistorical) goal is the City of God or ‘the burning fountain,’ its means Death and the ultimate Apocalypse” (p. 51). Shelley is not able to bring these two worlds together, and thus Prometheus Unbound, which is the principal object of Wilson’s attention throughout Shelley’s Later Poetry, establishes only an unstable relationship between them. There is confusion between Prometheus as Man and as Platonic Ideal; the Earthly Paradise is achieved, yet the hero retires to a remoter paradise of contemplation; and Man, almost perfectly enfranchised, is yet incapable of reaching

The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

Even with the millennium achieved, the play ends on a note of doubt with Demogorgon’s suggestion that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, that the old serpent may rise from his pit once more. The same confusion is present, according to Wilson, in the Keats of Adonais, who becomes “a portion of the Eternal” in two quite different senses.

The author effectually dispels a widespread but irrelevant criticism of Prometheus Unbound’s dramatic quality by aligning it with Prometheus Bound, Oedipus at Colonus, and Samson Agonistes as a “drama of revelation.” This genre is primarily concerned with the protagonist, whose character is widened and deepened rather than developed. That the crisis of Shelley’s Prometheus occurs in the play’s opening scene is therefore not a damaging circumstance, but simply a necessary aspect of a legitimate genre. The body of the drama is the unraveling of the consequences of Prometheus’ victory. It must be confessed that Wilson, no doubt excusably, is a little uncertain what to do with Demogorgon, upon whom a more monistic approach to Shelley might cast a brighter and more favorable light. The Epipsychidion and Adonais, he considers, approach without attaining a resolution of the difficulties of Shelley’s radicalism and his conflicting Platonism, while his final Triumph of Life, which is of course a fragment, retrogresses.

Shelley’s Later Poetry furnishes a trenchant though incomplete account of some key-images of Shelley’s, in particular the mirror, the wheel, and the veil. The mirror represents the problem of the self, which belongs to the selfishness-altruism ethics that Shelley derived from eighteenth-century empiricism. Here one might remark that Wilson somewhat underrates Shelley’s psychological content in emphasizing the ethical, and makes him a little less a Romantic than he is. It would be possible to ignore Shelley’s wheel-imagery entirely if one were not alerted, as is Wilson, by Eliot’s use of the wheel to resolve the Time-Eternity opposition in Four Quartets. Of the veil the author comments acutely but incompletely that it “points up a central paradox in the work of any poet who works within a merely Platonic frame of reference,” since there is always the vexed question whether the veil embodies, conceals, or distorts the truth within it.

The phrase “merely Platonic” points to a central contention of Shelley’s Later Poetry—that what Shelley basically lacks is the Christian concept of Grace. “He
does not point any complementary force outside the individual which meets the imaginative impulse from within and transforms self-love into charity.” Without this sense of Grace there is “merely Platonic” duality—unresolved opposition between conception and execution, idea and image, eternity and time, so that one continually notes in Shelley a fatality that dogs all aspiration, a Shadow, to follow Wilson in citing The Hollow Men, that falls between the potency and the existence. The demonstration is interesting, perhaps a little too neat and pat, as is generally the case when religious dogma is applied to literary criticism. Its certainties deprive the literary problem of the necessary interest of suspense. Wilson’s emphasis upon Shelley’s dualism provides him with a sharp weapon for analysis, and his lack of anxiety to press toward a Shelleyan center of vitality (as it were) permits him to see Shelley’s qualities separately with admirable clarity and fullness. His book should stand in the first rank of recent studies of Shelley’s poetry. Yet one wishes for a more unified approach to Shelley, which would still preserve Wilson’s richness, his balance, his scrupulous attention to parts: a study that would penetrate to the one idea behind both the radicalism and the Platonism of Shelley. There is much advantage in taking them separately, as Shelley’s Later Poetry convincingly shows; but they might finally be drawn together.

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The neoclassic poems of which Mr. Wasserman gives readings are Dryden’s Epistle to Charleton, Denham’s Cooper’s Hill and Pope’s Windsor Forest; and the romantic poems are three by Shelley: Mont Blanc, The Sensitive Plant and Adonais. In his introductory and middle chapters Mr. Wasserman sets forth something of his conception of the function of poetry, points out fundamental differences in poetry before and after the late eighteenth century, and speculates on the causes.

Poetry is the subtler language (the phrase is from Shelley’s Revolt of Islam), subtler than discursive language, because its extraordinary syntactical possibilities enable it to create its own self-sufficient organization of reality, “its own self-containing poetic cosmos.” Mr. Wasserman has chosen for explication poems which he believes “are notable for the high degree to which they became autonomous realities through the syntactical capacities of language.” He distinguishes between two fundamental forms of poetry which he arbitrarily labels lyric and dramatic. Until the end of the eighteenth century, poetry was essentially lyric; from then until the present it has been essentially dramatic. Mr. Wasserman’s habit of giving to familiar terms his own special definition is disconcerting and confusing; and in this case it is detrimental to what is otherwise an important and useful distinction for the comparative examination of neoclassic and romantic poetry. For lyric is the term most apt to come to mind in connection with
romantic poetry, and least apt in connection with neoclassic poetry; and
dramatic is too Protean a term to have much definitive value at all. The distinc-
tion Mr. Wasserman is trying to draw demands fresh terms as free as possible of
contradictory and confused associations.

The neoclassic poet, he says, could take for granted a commonly accepted
world order which he could draw upon for the world of his poetry. He could
expect his audience to recognize his use of such "cosmic syntaxes" as the
doctrine of analogous planes of creation, the Great Chain of Being, the dialectic
of *concordia discors*, and pagan and Christian systems of myth. The poet's task
was to "imitate nature" by giving poetic reality to nature's principles as embodied
in these organizing patterns. But by the end of the eighteenth century men no
longer shared in any significant degree a sense of cosmic design, and the poet
was forced to formulate his own cosmic syntax, to create with it his own poetic
world, and then to go on and explore it imaginatively for the truths it could
unfold.

The three neoclassic poems that Mr. Wasserman has chosen to examine have
in common, as he explicates them, the fact that they are fundamentally political
poems, celebrating the rule of the Stuarts. Dryden's *Epistle to Charleton*, ostensi-
bly congratulating him upon his presumed discovery that Stonehenge was the
place in which the ancient Danes crowned their elected king, was written
shortly after the restoration of Charles II and becomes, as Mr. Wasserman
plausibly demonstrates, a means of asserting that all events, including scientific
discoveries, "providentially acclaim, and are in accord with the restoration," at
the same time expressing Dryden's hope for a limited monarchy. Denham's
*Cooper's Hill*, written in 1642, is interpreted as "consistently and coherently
political at its core." It is first of all an eulogy of Charles I, but beyond that it
is an affirmation of the doctrine of *concordia discors*, harmony through strife,
as the law of nature and therefore the law for men. The political harmony
arising from the conflict of king and people reflects and imitates the cosmic
harmony produced by the clash of opposing elements. The primary function of
the descriptive elements in the poem is to create a realizable and meaningful
structure for the political concept being formulated.

Mr. Wasserman's explication of *Windsor Forest* is extremely elaborate and
ingenious. When Pope published the poem he added a section celebrating the
Tory Peace of Utrecht (1712) but Mr. Wasserman sees this as simply the logical
conclusion to a poem which from first to last is a celebration of the restoration
of Tory rule under Queen Anne. Windsor Forest is throughout the controlling
symbol of the cosmic principle reflected in the Tory state. The three hunting
episodes which constitute the first section of the poem are all variations on the
unifying theme of *concordia discors*, making a dialectic in which the first and
last depict scenes destructive of order and the central scene the ideal of har-
monious conflict. The first, the ruthless hunting of William the Conquerer,
Mr. Wasserman interprets as a thinly veiled allusion to (through Tory eyes) the
tyranny of Whiggism under William of Orange; and the last, the ravishment of
the huntress Lodona, as an allusion to the way in which the people of England
were misled into a ruinous foreign war by the Whigs. The central episode, the
hunt as conducted now in the age of Anne, presents the proper balance.

At this point the reader grows impatient. The learned and labored elucidation
of these episodes has taken 40 pages and there are 25 more to go on *Windsor*.
Forest. Aside from the fact that interpretations like those of the myth of Lodona seem too forced, and the dialectical progression too pat, the question of value suddenly becomes important. By choosing to devote half his book to three minor Tory poems, Mr. Wasserman, whether he so intended or not, has placed neoclassic poetry in its narrowest, pettiest and least defensible frame of reference. One could almost suspect him of sabotaging neoclassic poetry for the benefit of romantic poetry or at least of Shelley. And certainly these poems become a poor argument for his central thesis. Presumably the subtler language of poetry expresses a reality beyond the reach of the discursive; self-contained and perennially meaningful to men. Yet these poems are frankly period pieces, enshrining not universal truths but false scientific hypotheses and distortions of historical facts to fit immediate political ends, and the subtler language becomes an elaborate play of wit and fancy for the glorification of a particular social and political order. They seem ironically anticlimactic after the promise of the introduction; and it is hard to understand why Mr. Wasserman did not put his skills of elucidation to the service of more significant poems by Dryden and Pope.

The same objection cannot be raised against the poems of Shelley, which illustrate perfectly the kind of poetic world the Romantics tried to create imaginatively when the old public "cosmic syntax" was no longer acceptable. Perhaps the best explication in the book is of Mont Blanc. Here Mr. Wasserman shows effectively how Shelley, beginning with the key image of the sceptical or "Intellectual" philosophy—"The everlasting universe of things/Flows through the mind"—proceeds to examine separately in terms of the imagery of Mont Blanc the relative claims of mind and matter, finally coming through contemplation of the cold silent summit of the mountain to a recognition of transcendent power beyond both mind and matter, the limits of reality as defined by the Intellectual philosophy. Mr. Wasserman's reading demonstrates persuasively that those portions of the poems which most critics have found to represent inconsistent or contradictory philosophical positions are in reality part of a coherently developed pattern of exploration and discovery.

He does not seem to me to have been as successful in his readings of The Sensitive Plant and Adonais. Though he steers clear of imposing a consistent external philosophy, he is tempted to read into the poems too strict an internal logic. He tends to equate internal reality and intellectual coherence. The cosmos of the neoclassic poet was, it is true, highly rational. But by the very nature of the breakdown Mr. Wasserman has described, the cosmos of the romantic poet became almost inevitably tentative and changing, a projection of desire rather than a reflection of accepted reality. The romantic poet is subject to suddenly shifting moods of extreme affirmation and extreme despondency, depending upon a complex of circumstances affecting his sense of well-being. And the movement of the poetry is more likely to be controlled by the moods than by a carefully premeditated plan. Mont Blanc, because of its compact symbolism and its relatively straightforward progression, lends itself to logical explication. But The Sensitive Plant and Adonais both reflect the conflicting moods engendered by Shelley's contemplation of mutability and mortal frustration. There is a very real clash between the third section of The Sensitive Plant describing the decay of the garden and the conclusion which asserts that it is a modest and pleasant creed to own that death is a mockery and that the garden has never passed away. But Mr. Wasserman is convinced that the clash is only apparent and that the
conclusion is implicit in the structure of the poem from the beginning, and by an exhaustive and relentless analysis of the imagery he forces the poem to fit into a Procrustean bed of Platonic consistency.

In a similar fashion he ignores the turbulent passion of Adonais and reduces the poem to a coldly classical and logical argument. He analyzes its development through three highly wrought movements: the first seventeen stanzas in which death appears as the only reality and all things move to annihilation; the next twenty stanzas in which physical Nature is presented as endlessly reviving and only mind dies; and the concluding section in which mind is seen to be eternal and all else mutable. He argues that “the poem gains its energy from a system of ironies whose function is to compel a progressive revelation” and traces Shelley’s use of the methods of satiric and dramatic irony to weave the movements together. But when he has finished, the vital core of the poem is missing: what Burke would call the symbolic action has been stilled. From reading the explication, one would never know how violent is the castigation of the critic, how bitter the revulsion against mortal life which leads to the sudden Platonic affirmation. One would not be aware of the shift from the perspective of what Mr. Wilson in his recent book on Shelley’s Later Poetry calls the Promethean World in which the contrast is between the murderer and the victim, to that of the Platonic world in which the contrast is between all men, mourners as well as murderer, “decaying in their living death,” and the Eternal.

Nor would one be aware of the intensely emotional quality of Shelley’s Platonic vision which enables him to leap quite unselfconsciously from the contemplation of Adonais’ absorption in the impersonal One to the contemplation of a personal poetic immortality. And most of all one would not be aware of the intensity of the death wish at the last. “Taken in conjunction with the other occurrence of similar imagery, it becomes clear,” writes Mr. Wasserman, “that the conclusion of the elegy is not a plea for suicide, but a prayer that the limited spiritual existence expand into a pure and infinite spiritual life. . . . The emphasis is not upon the destruction of the mortal self, but upon the enlargement of the earthly soul until ‘Heaven’s light’ which burns bright in proportion as the earthly soul mirrors it will remove the mortal atmosphere.” Well, perhaps the conclusion is no plea for suicide, but it is not what Mr. Wasserman says it is either. The distortion in his explication is evident when we set it beside the hypnotic incantation of the lines beginning “Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek.”

Mr. Wasserman’s treatment of Adonais illustrates what keeps his readings of the poems in general from being wholly satisfying. Though the conception of poetry which guides him is admirable, he cannot in the end avoid the temptation of making explication the subtler language.

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