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Book Reviews

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The Art of William Blake by Anthony Blunt. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959. Pp. xiv + 122. $6.95.

Professor Sir Anthony Blunt, Director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures, was invited by Columbia University to deliver the Bampton Lectures in 1959, and this book embodies the lectures more or less as they were delivered. It is a most valuable contribution to the literature of Blake, and gives the views of an art historian on his pictures, a view which has not hitherto found much place in Blake criticism. At least one writer on Blake has confessed to having composed a book on him almost without having ever looked at any of his pictures, although his poetry and painting are inextricably interrelated. Professor Blunt states that he has tried to summarize Blake's doctrines "without becoming involved in the details of his complex system of mystical symbolism," in which he is clearly not really interested. Fortunately, however, it has proved impossible for him altogether to maintain this innocence, and his book contains many passages illuminating this "complex system." The six chapters do not attempt to give a consecutive or complete account of Blake's art, each being concerned with a particular theme related to his development as an artist.

The first chapter examines the history of his early years, and begins with the true observation that "if he had died at the age of thirty he would hardly have been remembered as a painter." His best poetry had mostly been written before 1789, but he did not begin to produce any really memorable paintings until about 1795. His early training in draughtmanship, his seven years' apprenticeship to an engraver, and his first years as a journeyman engraver had laid the foundation for his career as a painter. It first flowered in the extraordinary series of great colour prints, or monotypes, which can be seen in their entirety only in the Tate Gallery, London. Professor Blunt gives full value to the influence on Blake's young mind of his work among the tombs in Westminster Abbey, of his early knowledge of the drawings of Michelangelo, and of his admiration for the rather grandiose "historical paintings" of his contemporaries, Barry and Mortimer.

In his second chapter Professor Blunt examines in some detail Blake's attitude toward "the sublime," a concept which came into great prominence during the eighteenth century. Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry concerning the Sublime and the Beautiful* was well known to Blake by his own statement, and, though Professor Blunt finds him in some disagreement with Burke's views, he thinks that in many respects he followed him closely. Burke's ideas influenced also Romney and Fuseli, whose designs are often parallelled by Blake's. A striking example of the unity of the artists' minds is instanced in the various versions of Milton's scene of "Satan, Sin and Death at the Gates of Hell" by Blake, Barry, Fuseli

and Stothard. Burke had singled out this episode as "the finest example of the sublime," and each artist illustrated it according to his lights. Blake's version was the most convincing by reason of his very crudity and directness.

Perhaps the most interesting and original chapter is the third on "Vision and Execution in Blake's Painting." It examines closely Blake's own statements on his "Visions" and expresses great understanding of his remark that he "looked through, not with, the eye." His categorical statements about his meetings and conversations with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel and other claims concerning his imaginary visitors gave rise in the past to accusations of insanity. They are now accepted as plain evidence of the quality of his artistic imagination, and their clarity as an explanation of his hatred of the broken outline of the colourists and of the *chiaroscuro* of the Venetians. In the latter part of the chapter, however, Professor Blunt is less satisfying in his study of Blake's "execution," where he claims to find Blake borrowing extensively for his designs from a very wide field. In his Preface he pours scorn on the vast amount of energy and "excessive amount of ingenuity" that have gone into the study of Blake's writings. Yet, as an art historian, Professor Blunt seems himself to exhibit an equally excessive ingenuity in looking for sources for Blake's designs. "Source-hunting" is a fascinating game, and offers a wonderful opportunity for the art historian to use his width of knowledge. Similarities pop up everywhere, and an equal width of knowledge has to be allowed to the artist-borrower. Blake's knowledge of both literature and art was undoubtedly extensive and he had a remarkable visual memory. But is it really necessay to believe that he could not have painted his famous picture of "Jacob's Ladder" as a spiral staircase winding up into the sky without having first seen a little bit of staircase in a picture by Salviati? Or another by Salviati of Saul raising his spear against David before he could make his small engraving of "My Son! My Son!" in *The Gates of Paradise*? Or must he have seen "The Prodigal Son" by Martin de Vos before making his magnificent design of "The Soul Reunited with God" on plate 99 of *Jerusalem*? An outstanding example of the art historian's method is given in Professor Blunt's discussion of the celebrated design of "The Ancient of Days" (or "Urizen Creating the Material World"), used both as frontispiece to *Europe* and as a separate design. Here it is stated categorically that "Blake does not follow a single motive, but combines a series of themes *taken from* different sources" (my italics). It is declared that the use of the compasses as a symbol for the act of creation is "derived from a mediaeval manuscript" and this is illustrated by reproducing a page from *Bible Moralisée*, a 13th century manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Here the Deity is holding a compass in his right hand over a globe in his left. Beyond the fact that the compass is there, it does not resemble Blake's use of the symbol in any way. He had already introduced it into a very early plate made for *There is No Natural Religion* and used it again in the colour-print of Newton, and the first suggestion may have been purely verbal, coming to him from familiar passages in the Bible and *Paradise Lost*. The wind-swept beard of Blake's Deity and his down-reaching arm are stated to be derived from pictures by Pellegrino Pellegrini Tibaldi, which were contained in a book of engravings published in the eighteenth century. There is no evidence whatever that Blake ever saw any of these, but the thought that he could have imagined any of them for himself seems to be insupportable.

Some of Professor Blunt's numerous examples of "borrowings" are probably right, but many others are quite unconvincing and seem to allow nothing for the likelihood that artists' minds frequently work on parallel lines and so produce superficial similarities. Professor Blunt does great service, however, throughout his book in relating Blake's art more closely to his surroundings and his period than is usually done. Sometimes he seems to be unnecessarily perverse in his opinions, as when he says of Blake's woodcuts for Thornton's *Virgil* that they "would hardly be remembered for their own sake," though admitting that they exercised a profound influence on several younger artists such as Palmer and Calvert. These woodcuts are almost universally admired as inspired works of art, and it is odd to find Professor Blunt ranging himself with the Philistine Dr. Thornton, who would have excluded them as "displaying less of art than of genius" from his otherwise rather commonplace book.

Professor Blunt's fourth chapter examines Blake's technique and designs in the Illuminated Books, and he is even led into some explanations of the symbolism. This chapter also considers the great colour-prints in some detail. These he regards as some of Blake's most splendid creations, and he also expresses great admiration for the small colour-prints taken from the designs on the plates of the Illuminated Books without the associated text. These, which are mostly to be seen only in the British Museum, are of extraordinary beauty, though they do not usually get from critics their due mead of praise.

The fifth chapter is devoted to Blake's designs for the Bible and Milton, these accounting for a high proportion of his total output of paintings both in tempera and water colours. Particular attention is drawn to the striking originality in some of these, such as "The Nativity," "The Procession to Calvary," and "The Agony in the Garden." The light shining in the darkness of these paintings is convincingly related to Blake's state of mind during this period of his life, when he was emerging from his earlier obsession with the problem of evil and thinking rather of the hopes of salvation through Christ. In an appendix is given a complete list of the Biblical paintings, the list being based on the illustrated *Catalogue* published by the Trianon Press for the Blake Trust in 1957.

In his last chapter Professor Blunt considers *Jerusalem*, the last of the Illuminated Books, and the designs for *Job* and *Dante*. The engravings for *Job* are acknowledged to be masterly in technique and highly original in spite of their being less eccentric than many of Blake's creations. For the Dante designs Albert Roe's book of 1953 is allowed to give a satisfactory analysis, though sometimes perhaps reading into the designs more than the artist had intended.

Anyone caring for Blake's art will read Professor Blunt's pages with interest and delight. The book is admirably illustrated with a large number of figures on 64 plates. These are presumably a selection from slides shown at his lectures, which must have been a splendid and illuminating experience for his audiences.

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The Piper and the Bard: a Study of William Blake by Robert F. Gleckner. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959. Pp. xii + 324. $7.00.

This able, scrupulous and well-informed commentary on *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* raises delicate and difficult questions of critical method. Like Earl R. Wasserman, who has been his principal guide and/or goad, Robert F. Gleckner pursues, with great pertinacity and considerable persuasiveness, the *via dolorosa* of symbolic explication. I am not yet convinced that this method is not a blind alley, except perhaps for the short critical essay, unless the minute study of text is reinforced by considerations of context. In the absence of such controls the temptations to ingenious subjective interpretation seem to be irresistible. Moreover, a more positive objection, the exclusion of the author as an identifiable historical human being addressing a specific historical audience leaves the poetic content too rarefied for most of us to breathe with comfort for much more than half an hour on end. Mr. Gleckner certainly makes the most of what is, for me, a bad job, but I should have preferred to have seen his impressive knowledge of the Blake corpus put to some other use. However, this is perhaps to prejudge things. Let me proceed to some particular discomforts.

The text to which Mr. Gleckner applies the explicatory microscope is naturally that of the engraved plates, which he reproduces *verbatim et literatim*. Blake's erratic and often unintelligible punctuation is also faithfully preserved (with one or two unexplained exceptions). But no use whatever is made of the illustrations in the original *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. A note on p. 315 is typical. "The temptation to overcome the difficulty, in this and other songs, by falling back upon the illustrations should be studiously avoided." Mr. Gleckner then quotes two contradictory accounts of the illustration to *Nurse's Song* (Experience), by Wicksteed and Damon, and concludes: "However one looks at the page, it seems to me not only right but necessary to examine the poem as poem. Only in this way will it reveal itself as a carefully worked prosodic and artistic triumph, instead of an obscure commentary on an illustration or a simple song which requires elucidation (or complication) in another medium." This is mere explicator patter. No doubt the poems are artifacts in a different medium from the illustrations, but the illustrator after all was Blake. The illustrations are Blake's own comments on the poems, a fact which must give them at least the status of the footnotes of Yeats and Eliot on their poems. It seems uneconomical, if not presumptuous, to wave them away as if they did not exist. It is true some of the illustrations misinterpret the accompanying poem, but an interval of many years often separated composition from illustration. In many cases, however, they provide clues of great interest, and the fact that Wicksteed and Damon often disagree is a gross case of argument from abuse. Mr. Gleckner can hardly have failed to notice that critics sometimes read *The Tyger* in different senses.

A similar omission is the frequent failure to use the earlier texts of the songs in the so-called Rossetti Manuscript and elsewhere. Even if one grants the implicit assumption that the engraved version always gives "the poem as poem" in its perfected form (not always true by any means), an early reading will often clear up an obscurity in the engraved text. Thus, whatever their aesthetic status, the early drafts can also be considered footnotes, like the illustrations, provided by Blake himself. A nice example of the interpretative usefulness of a cancelled

reading is the "weeping" in the MS. of *Earth's Answer* l. 12. The epithet is there applied to the divine tyrant of the poem who is the "Holy Word" of the *Introduction* to *Songs of Experience*. As the two poems are continuous the figure "weeping in the evening dew" (*Introduction* l. 7) must therefore be the Holy Word and not, as sometimes proposed, the Bard. A realisation of this might have spared us Mr. Gleckner's ingenious solution of the difficulties of *Introduction* (Experience)—which is that both Bard and Word are to be taken as saying the same words simultaneously but in different senses! The poem is one of the most obscure of all Blake's lyrics—Housman cited it to prove that Blake's meaning was "virtually non-existent" (which put him one up on Shakespeare)—and *any* attempt to elucidate it can be forgiven. But *Introduction* (Innocence) is not a difficult poem and Mr. Gleckner's long and, to me, entirely unconvincing exposition of its symbolic theme is more difficult to account for. Thus Mr. Gleckner picks out the words "wild," "pleasant," "Merry," "happy," and full of "joy," and adds: "These words occur in the poem in this sequence so that they not only characterize this state but suggest a progression of states through which the soul of the 'infant joy' must pass to attain the higher innocence." Which sounds all right until you start to re-read the poem. In fact "wild" does not refer to either the child or the piper but to the "valleys," and "pleasant" does not stand alone but is part of the phrase "pleasant glee"; the progression of states is just, I fear, explicatorial overenthusiasm. And so when Mr. Gleckner goes on to compare the sequence to Wordsworth's three stages in *Tintern Abbey*, one has to demur. There is no progression; the one proposed, had it existed, would not be in the least like Wordsworth's progress in the cult of Nature. An even sillier misreading is to take

So I piped, he wept to hear

as a "dirge." As l. 9 makes clear, the child still considers the pipe "happy," and the meaning of "wept to hear" is made clear in l. 12.

While he wept with joy to hear.

Finally, with equal perversity, "I stain'd the water clear" is interpreted by Mr. Gleckner as "magical," a repetition of the miracle at Cana (*v.* p. 232). The use of "water" as a trope for ink is, of course, no more miraculous than the use of "reed" as a trope for pen.

Such aberrations are, fortunately, exceptional, but that they should occur at all in a serious, laborious and in most respects scholarly work points to a fallacy of critical premises. The weakness, as I see it, of the explicatory method is that the verification of its readings can only be "internal," instead of being both internal and external as in the classics of criticism. To a historical critic, a species I take to be the explicator's opposite, *Introduction* (Innocence) pigeonholes itself as a Christian pastoral "told to the children"—an established eighteenth-century genre with a decorum of its own which does not permit such conceits as Mr. Gleckner proposes. To the explicator, on the other hand, I suppose any interpretation is permissible which does not ignore the "poem as poem," a concept so wide-open that it allows anything short of absolute nonsense to pass through its mesh. Is there then no irreducible minimum which both modes of interpretation require? I can think of one, viz. that the sense now proposed must conform to

English usage in Blake's time. Thus when Mr. Gleckner paraphrases "ban" (*London* 1. 7) as "religious restriction" (p. 71), he will presumably allow me to refer him to the *O.E.D.*; "ban-prohibition" was a nineteenth-century development, and Blake meant "curse" (the *O.E.D.* cites the line as an example). But is there any difference in principle between the historical criterion applied to language and its extension to style? It will be difficult to show that there is. And once the point is conceded the dogma of an extra-historical unity in Blake's two series—"it matters little which poem was written first or last" (p. 83)—breaks down. Historically there are, in fact, several stylistic strata in both the Innocence and the Experience series which correspond to different periods of composition. And a mode of interpretation applicable to one stratum may be inapposite and misleading when applied to another. *Holy Thursday* (Innocence) was written four or five years before such poems as *Night*; stylistically it is closer to some of the "Songs" in *Poetical Sketches*. To Mr. Gleckner, however, it is just one more Innocence poem and as such amenable to the same sort of symbolic interpretation that he uses, persuasively, for *Night*. And so the grey-headed beadles become representatives of "natural religion," and their white wands emblematize "the frigidity of man-made moral purity" (p. 67)! Which is not only nonsense, it is also a sheer anachronism.

I suspect that if Mr. Gleckner were to write The *Piper and the Bard* today it would be a very different book. The review of the new Keynes edition of Blake that he contributed to the Summer 1959 number of *Criticism* showed few signs of the virtuoso explicator and many of an exceptionally learned and level-headed Blake scholar. Nor are these qualities absent from large areas in the book. The chapters I liked best were those on Blake's writings more or less contemporary with *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. He is particularly helpful on *Tiriel*, of which incidentally he provides, with the help of Mr. D. V. Erdman, much the most accurate text so far available in print. The account of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is somewhat vitiated by the assumption that it was written before *Songs of Experience*. It was almost certainly engraved first, and its composition may have preceded that of the *Introduction*, *Ah! Sunflower* and *A Little Girl Lost*, as it certainly did that of *To Tirzah*, but four of the Experience pieces were originally included in *Songs of Innocence* (engraved 1789) and eighteen, including most of the masterpieces, precede the Lafayette ballad in the Rossetti MS, and must therefore have been written by the end of 1792 at the latest. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* is dated 1793 and was probably written either in that year or towards the end of 1792. There is not, as far as I am aware, a jot or tittle of evidence to suggest that it preceded *The Tyger*, *London* or *A Poison Tree*.

Blake's poetry is so relevant for the twentieth century, and still for all the devoted work done on it, so appallingly obscure, that it seems time to call a halt to the private gimmicks and stunts we have hitherto brought to its interpretation. There is no cure-all, no Open Sesame: that has been abundantly proved by the splendid failures of Ellis and Yeats, Damon, Northrop Frye, Erdman, Kathleen Raine and Stanley Gardner. What is needed is a less sectarian, less starry-eyed approach altogether. Now that he has sown his wild oats, if I may put it like that without offence, Mr. Gleckner is perhaps the man to tackle what is needed most of all today by students of Blake: a complete annotated edition, like F. N.

Robinson's Chaucer, or the de Selincourt-Darbishire Wordsworth. The Keynes text was the indispensable preliminary; it must now be filled out with separate introductions and generous explanatory notes. Mr. Gleckner has the knowledge and the knowhow, both pertinacity, curiosity and an open mind. I commend the project to him.

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The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870 by Richard Stang. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959. Pp. xii + 251. $5.00.

This book opens with the assertion that there has long been a widely held belief among critics and historians of the English novel that serious attention to the theory of the novel as an art form did not begin until about 1880. Before that time the novelist was regarded as a purveyor of entertainment rather than as a serious artist. Criticism was superficial and was likely to be directed not at fundamental principles but at tangential matters like suitability of treatment and observance of the proprieties. Walter Allen, Mark Schorer, and Bradford Booth are among those accused of having given expression to this prevailing attitude.

To see this period as a critical wasteland in its dealings with the novel is to see it falsely and to underrate the significance of its criticism, according to Mr. Stang. With commendable thoroughness he has brought together an important body of criticism, drawn from letters, prefaces, reviews, and other diverse sources, much of it lost from sight hitherto in the files of Victorian periodicals. Dealing in turn with the novelist's function, with problems of technique, and with the conflicting requirements of realism in an age which sought to avoid "unpleasant" subjects, this survey reveals that novelists and critics were becoming increasingly aware of the problems peculiar to the novel form.

Jane Austen's memorable appeal to novelists, in the fifth chapter of *Northanger Abbey*, to band together in their own defense, and leave abuse of their art to the reviewers, reminds us that the novel had not yet won a secure place for itself at the end of the eighteenth century. Scott was soon to lift its status immeasurably by his great popularity and prestige. Bulwer-Lytton, whose theorizing receives respectful attention, took a high view of the novel as art but spoiled much of his work by his extravagant theatricalism. Thackeray, unflagging enemy of the spurious, could scoff at the novelist's business, the tricks of the storytelling trade, while being in practice a careful and painstaking artist, devoted to the pursuit of truth as he saw it. Charlotte Brontë, a dedicated artist, gave new strength and conviction to the novel by the force of her passionate sincerity. Dickens insisted upon the seriousness of his calling but was not above worrying about fluctuating sales. A great writer should be a popular writer, he thought, and in his capacity as editor he complained about unhappy endings and scenes that might be painful to readers. Of the major Victorians, Trollope probably came nearest to looking upon the novel as simply a vehicle for conveying entertainment. To George Eliot the novel had a high function . It was a civilizing force that could enlarge

man's sympathies and help to liberate him from narrow and selfish desires. It could not accomplish these ends, however, by employing the rewards and punishments of the usual didactic novel, which by appealing to the wrong motives were likely to undermine true moral development rather than to strengthen it.

In a chapter dealing with the critics of the period, such characteristic features of the novel as sentimentality, didacticism, and poetic justice are analysed. G. H. Lewes, though a man of catholic taste with ability to recognize excellence in new and strange forms, was nevertheless inclined to dogmatism. Leslie Stephen's rational approach to criticism qualified him to deal effectively with excesses of emotionalism. He was able to get outside his own world—something that Dickens could not do apparently when he said of *Robinson Crusoe* that there was "not in literature a more surprising instance of the utter want of tenderness and sentiment, than the death of Friday."

The middle portion of the book, treating of such matters as the disappearing author, point of view, unity and structure, and the relation of plot to character, brings us close to the author's central thesis that the Victorians did indeed have a theory of the novel. The old loosely conceived novel in three or more volumes, in which characters could be introduced without much regard to their organic function, was beginning to be attacked. Mr. Moulder, for example, was thought not to belong to the story of Lady Mason, in *Orley Farm*. The intrusion of the narrator into his story was no longer accepted without question, and problems bearing upon point of view were taken up. It is surprising, in this connection, that there is no mention of Collins in the section devoted specifically to point of view.

One of the factors that contributed to the peculiar character of the Victorian temper was the opposition between mysticism and rationalism. The resultant cleavage with its many ramifications was by no means absolute. Although Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Brontës may be classified as idealists and Thackeray, Trollope, and George Eliot as realists, the distinction is not a hard and fast one. *Realism* and *realist*, comparatively new words to the critic, meant different things to different people. How does realism differ from idealism, for example? Was Sam Weller a real or an ideal character? These and related problems gave rise to much speculation about how art should deal with nature. Should nature be copied literally or dealt with fancifully or fantastically? Should the artist deal with what was low or ugly? Should he hint at the existence of wickedness? Meredith objected to "dirty drab," also to "rose-pink." Thackeray said, in the preface to *Pendennis*: "Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art." Admitting that he has attempted a little more frankness than is customary, he asserts that "if truth is not always pleasant; at any rate truth is best." Dickens saw a "connection between his own art and that of the folk and fairy tale" and expressed the opinion that such popular literature had survived because of its fanciful treatment. George Eliot held that the disposition of the English mind to idealize was "accountable for the false psychology of Dickens, productive of such stereotypes as preternaturally virtuous children and fallen sisters."

Although this book reflects in general a sympathetic and tolerant attitude toward views which sometimes differ strikingly from those of our own day, the treatment accorded to Thackeray is a cause for wonderment to one reader. A statement of W. C. Roscoe that Thackeray exists "entirely on the surface of things" appears

to be accepted as valid criticism. A tribute paid by Thackeray to "the innocent laughter and the sweet unsullied page" of *David Copperfield* is called a "piece of Podsnappery." When Thackeray says, with reference to the satire of Hogarth and Fielding, that "it is good to pretend to the virtue of chastity even though we do not possess it . . .," he is accused of having implied that values had so much changed since Fielding's time that "in 1840 hypocrisy was a virtue and honesty a fault." Of the endings of *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* it is said that "Becky lives happily, comfortably and respectably ever after on Jos Sedley's insurance money after poisoning him," and Blanche Amory, "we are led to believe, lives a very pleasant life on the Foker millions." The best that can be said for these last two statements, which are intended to illustrate Thackeray's defiance of the convention of poetic justice, is that they reflect a superficial reading of the novels and a tendency to confuse them with the earlier burlesques.

It seems reasonable to assume, as Mr. Stang does, that Henry James derived help from the critical speculations of the period in the formulation of his own critical position. Yet, in "The Art of Fiction" we find him giving utterance to views not unlike the ones denounced as misconceptions early in this volume. A passage in the second paragraph of the essay has a familiar ring, taking us back indeed to the place at which we started. Writing in 1884, James says: "Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it—of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison. I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that: it would take much more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. It was, however, *naïf* (if I may help myself out with another French word); and evidently if it be destined to suffer in any way for having lost its *naïveté* it has now an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humored feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it."

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Heiress of All the Ages. Sex and Sentiment in the Genteel Tradition by William Wasserstrom. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1959. Pp. x + 150. $4.00.

Professor Wasserstrom has written a stimulating study of one aspect of the "genteel tradition," a study which does much to clarify precisely what that tradition was. Genteel fiction, he argues, far from being a tedious discussion of polite living, was a serious and revealing moral dialogue, the main terms of which were "sex, love, and freedom"; the best of this fiction constituted "a profound literature of love in which the whole aspiration of society was contained within and manifested by the character of the heroine." Such a proposition

necessitates a consideration of the relationship between literature and society, and the author endeavors to show that both genteel society and genteel writers of fiction, between 1830 and 1910, sought to reconcile the purity and absence of passion of "the idealized woman" with the impurity and abundance of passion of "the vicious woman." The genteel aim was a woman—or a heroine—in whom the best qualities of sex and love were so united as to yield freedom to her and to her man, and through them to society.

Because he has examined genteel fiction from a new point of view, Professor Wasserstrom offers several striking and original observations about its nature. Not only does he show how Frank Norris, Edward Eggleston, Ed Howe, Bret Harte, Edith Wharton, William Dean Howells, Henry James, and others came to insist that the best type of heroine, like the best type of woman, joined the benignity of the angel with the piquancy of the devil; he also indicates how the popular literature of the time, especially that appearing in *Harper's Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, complemented the writing of the serious novelists. Furthermore, he demonstrates the figurative force given to certain concepts as they were employed in the moral dialogue of genteel fiction. Thus, we learn how the wild West, in popular fiction and the work of some New Englanders, came to specify sexual vitality; how writers as different as Helen W. Pierson, in a story in *Harper's* and Henry James, in *The Bostonian*, used the North to personify purity and the South to personify passion. The most interesting, and perhaps the most controversial, suggestion this study makes concerns the sources of the heroines' motives and behavior: the genteel writers came to believe that the American girl's harmony of sex and innocence, the quality which made her "the heiress of all the ages," was a consequence of her "special affection for her father." In the light of this suggestion, the author considers Aldrich's *Marjorie Daw* as a revealing cultural document, and examines key situations in Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *A Woman's Reason*, and *A Modern Instance* and James's *Washington Square* and *The Golden Bowl*. The case he makes for the female oedipal situation as providing the basis for some of the best genteel fiction is extremely persuasive.

Valuable and convincing as this study is, however, certain aspects of it are unsatisfying. In the first place, the author assumes that the meaning of the phrase "the genteel tradition" is fairly well established; but, while we may grant that this tradition was a system of values, what these values were, who held them, and what their full cultural and literary implications were—these matters seem to me to remain imprecise. Actually, one of the chief values of Professor Wasserstrom's book is that it provides evidence which should make possible a more accurate and comprehensive definition. In the second place, the relationships between literature and society are too often asserted rather than proved. Establishing and tracing the connections between "the public life of society and the private life of imagination," which the author here seeks to do, is a difficult task; among other things, one must make clear the extent to which the ideas, themes, and characters of a novel have been influenced by literature and by life and whether these elements are accepted or rejected by society, and to what degree and for what reasons. Professor Wasserstrom is eminently successful in describing the ideas, themes, and heroines of the fiction he considers; he is less successful in establishing a connection between these and the public life of the "genteel

tradition," which he sometimes seems to equate with all American society. Thus, for example, while he persuades us that, for James, Maggie Verver "fulfilled the American dream of love, the dream of all the ages," he does not convince us that she is representative either of a social ideal or of an actual group of American girls who provided for the portion of society that was genteel the same fulfillment.

Such a failure does not vitiate the general excellence of this study. Its thesis is clear, its analyses consistently interesting and challenging. Professor Wasserstrom has added to our understanding of American fiction and intellectual history, and in so doing he has opened up new areas for discussion and research. Such a contribution is worth our attention.

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