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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

*The Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* by James Nohnberg. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. Pp. xxi + 802. \$40.00.

The most immediately visible fact about this book is its bulk: 791 text pages, plus apparatus and an "Analytical Table of Contents." The largest number of these pages is devoted to the first of three projects proposed by the author: a comprehensive collection of "external" analogues for the episodes, characters, and icons of *The Faerie Queene*. In addition, Nohnberg develops a theory of "internal" or structural analogues among the various books of the poem; and finally, he attempts to interpret the titular virtues in terms of Erik Erikson's conceptual framework—"character strengths and . . . their psychogenesis"—in *Childhood and Society*. The last is the least convincing and significant aspect of the book, and even the author seems half-hearted about pushing it; Eriksonian interludes become scarcer as the argument moves into its later stages. The book is something of a dragon—at any rate, a hybrid beast, which employs and demands of its readers several different interpretive strategies.

It is offered as "a critically unified commentary," and this generic description should be taken seriously. The resemblance to medieval biblical commentaries is not casual. Like them, it has encyclopedic ambitions; like them, it is doggedly analytic, shredding the text into atoms impregnated with meaning; like them, it regards the familiarity of a reference as a positive recommendation; like them, it favors the proliferation of often identical instances. Nohnberg, a latter-day Bede or Rhabanus Maurus, sweeps into his capacious tome the discoveries of his predecessors, while adding many new ones of his own. Or perhaps the model is the Janus of the emblem-books: "he surveys what is past so that he may take in hand what remains to do with greater heed." Thus the opening chapter consists of "Essays on the Plan of the Poem" which, updated and provided with modish titles, re-work the subjects embalmed in the Appendices of the *Variorum*: the generic claims of epic and romance, the use of Arthurian materials, the choice and order of the virtues. There follow groups of "essays" on each of the books of *The Faerie Queene*.

For one scholar to attempt a commentary of this comprehensiveness is awe-inspiring, even heroic; and like most heroic enterprises, it can also look foolhardy. Actually to make one's way through these 800 pages is an enervating, indeed unnerving ordeal, and one which probably does little service to Spenser's poem. The place for detailed "commentary" is, surely, in annotation rather than in continuous discourse. This would, of course, require a new version of the *Variorum*, and one can see how a scholar of Nohnberg's learning and resourcefulness could have been tempted to make the effort singlehanded; but the temptation ought probably to have been resisted. The reasons why this is so deserve closer inspection, since they are related to the kind of

reading solicited by all the great encyclopedic works of the Middle Ages and Renaissance which locate themselves firmly in an intellectual and literary tradition. The past few generations of scholars have illuminated the demands made by such works, much as the members of the Warburg school did for the fine arts, and have established a set of assumptions now almost universally accepted. Nohrnberg's book is, depending upon one's point of view, an apotheosis or a *reductio ad absurdum* of this scholarly tradition.

Here is a mid-nineteenth-century reading of *The Faerie Queene*.

Spenser seems to have been sometimes deficient in one attribute of a great poet, the continual reference to the truth of nature, so that his fictions should be always such as might exist on the given conditions. This arises... from copying his predecessors too much in description, not suffering his own good sense to correct their deviations from truth.

Hallam's example is the tree catalogue of the first canto:

Every one knows that a natural forest never contains such a variety of species; nor indeed could such a medley as Spenser, treading in the steps of Ovid, has brought together from all soils and climates, exist long if planted by the hand of man.

The historicism of our age has led us back to a stress on "authority" over "experience," Ovid over "nature," which is almost certainly closer to the point of view of Spenser and his contemporaries. It would be idle to deny that we have made real progress in reading this poem; the fact that Hallam's remarks can no longer be taken seriously is to our credit. There remain, however, some unsolved problems arising from the new historicism that is enshrined in Nohrnberg's book.

Spenser scholars abandoned fairly early the search for specific sources, realizing that his imagination epitomized the hospitable, eclectic, syncretistic intellectual habits of his age. So we now construct "contexts" of allusiveness around the events, personages, and icons of his poem. Nohrnberg's contexts are the most comprehensively wide-ranging that any scholar has yet provided; but they are offered without adequate directions as to how we can best use them in reading *The Faerie Queene*. Nohrnberg's failure in this respect is not peculiar to him, but it is especially noticeable because his book's supply of references is so inexhaustible. If this volume represents some sort of end, then an awareness of how it comes to grief may be helpful in charting the next stages of critical attention to Spenser.

The very terms Nohrnberg uses betray the bluntness of his speculative instruments, beginning with the key word of the title. "Analogy" must cover a multitude of phenomena in the poem itself. The definite article is inappropriate; analogies exist everywhere in the poem's fabric, but they do not always work in the same way, nor is the meaning they import into it always to be identically described. Failure to analyze the concept of "analogy" leads to a blurring of focus and often to the construction of "contexts" that are unnecessary. The most important thing about analogy is that it is not identity. Analogies obtain between two or more items (a fact, incidentally, which makes a nonsense of Nohrnberg's title), and we are expected to note differences as well as the

similarity upon which any given analogy is based. But Nohrnberg does not distinguish among the bases of his analogies, nor does he notice the distinctions which make them interesting. Thus: "A comparison between Amoret and Florimell seems obvious enough at the end of the two books [III and IV], and there is clearly an analogy between their perils in the seventh cantos as well." Nohrnberg goes on to indicate structural similarities between the adventures of these two characters. But he never pauses over the fact that Amoret and Florimell are different *kinds* of allegorical beings and that Spenser, in structuring their life-histories similarly, is pointing to congruences between different aspects of reality which are informative for the over-all ontology and metaphysics of his fictive world. Unless we first perceive the differences between his characters, their similarities will seem merely repetitive or decorative.

Earlier, Nohrnberg's failure to note this distinction leads him into another sort of pitfall, a "context" which more thoughtful readers would relegate to the fringes of meaning. He inquires "as to what aspects of Venus are presented by Belpheobe, Florimell and Amoret," and answers that they embody a version of "the three Graces pertaining to Venus." Then comes an excursus on the various names of the Graces, and some quiet far-fetched "ratios" of resemblance among the three characters. But to make a triad of these feminine figures, in the first place, ignores the many crucial distinctions between the twin sisters and Florimell—differences made apparent to careful readers in the process of the poem's unfolding. The contrasting ways in which each character is first presented to us offer clues, for example, to the unlike realms of being which they inhabit, and the different ways in which they enter into and affect human life. Hence the analogy with the Graces is gratuitous and arbitrary, since there is nothing in the text which encourages us to link Belpheobe, Amoret, and Florimell, except the fact that they are all the objects of virtuous devotion by various male characters, and unvirtuous lust by wicked ones. These facts do, indeed, tell us something, but not what Nohrnberg thinks they do.

The author's unwillingness to become embroiled in theoretical problems is understandable, given the scale of his project, but he fails to accept even the challenges posed by his own assumptions. Not only is "analogy" left ambiguous, but the poem's manifold allusiveness never is comprehended; it is merely asserted. Most readers take it for granted that multiple analogues are somehow "relevant" to *The Faerie Queene*, but no one really understands, or has been able convincingly to describe, the ways in which these analogues get into, or are referred to by, the poem. In a "literary" work like Spenser's, analogues are usually allusions: references to other literary or sub-literary phenomena, rather than to "the truth of nature." It is plain sailing while Spenser chooses to keep his allusions explicit. Belpheobe is compared to "that famous Queene/ Of *Amazons*, whom *Pyrrhus* did destroy," and we can safely work out analogical patterns evoked by the allusion to Penthesilea. But, as tireless scholarship has demonstrated, such visible signals are only the blossoms on the great tree of allusion whose branches, and even more whose hidden roots, sustain the poem's life. There is no doubt that Spenser and his readers enjoyed unearthing the hidden sense of poetry, and we can be sure that large ranges of reference

were deliberately planted in the poem by the author. Yet as soon as allusion ceases to be explicit, it becomes problematic. And beyond a certain point we cannot gain sufficient access to the creative mind to be able adequately to determine degrees of intent. We are driven back, therefore, first to the text itself and to what it can tell us about the hiddenness of its own sense, and second to our experience of what it is *like* to read *The Faerie Queene*, and the sort of knowledge we need in order to understand it.

It is precisely here, however, that Nohrnberg's method of constructing contexts proves insufficient. Book I is interpreted conventionally in terms of biblical imagery: The Siege of Paradise, The Church in the Wilderness. Ever since Ruskin—indeed, since the first anonymous readers of *The Faerie Queene* whose annotations have recently been uncovered, commentators have found scriptural analogies of primary relevance in understanding the Legend of Holiness. But this relevance becomes progressively attenuated and dubious as Nohrnberg moves through his note-cards.

The old Church typifies the new Church, and the new Church, it is logically deduced from Paul's Adamic Christology, is a second Eve. If Una is an Eve, then to whom does Duessa answer? She must be the wife of Adam too, that is, Adam's other wife, or Lilith.

A reader who is willing to accept the rather breathless logic of this passage is then launched into a section of twelve pages which follows the fortunes of Lilith through the biblical commentaries, and then, because "the Lilith demon belongs to the same type as the classical lamiae," unravels the adventures of the lamia. The next section (seven pages) pursues another "parallel for Lilith" (Duessa): the sirens, said to be related to the "mermaids" which Bale, Van der Noot, and others interpolated into their commentary on Isaiah 34: 13 ("an habitation for dragons and a court for ostriches"; the dragons appear as "sirens" in the Septuagint). In all of these nineteen pages of commentary, there is not a single *substantial* quotation from *The Faerie Queene*. Most of Nohrnberg's readers may be as fascinated as he is by the material he has assembled, even though they have seen much of it before. But the surface of Spenser's poem has been totally dissolved in the process of attending to its analogues. The effect of Nohrnberg's method is centrifugal; a specific detail of the poem provides a starting-point for excursions so far-ranging that the origin and purpose of this space-time travel will be lost by the end of the nineteen pages (and they are not an end, but just a beginning). This is the justification for my earlier comment, that such information is most useful when it appears in the form of annotation, so that a reader is free to keep the text in full view and move into commentary only when the poet encourages him to do so.

Allusion always initiates a centrifugal movement, away from a text and into a related but unlike context. Many poets control their allusions carefully; Milton in *Paradise Lost* often encapsulates and limits them within the formal frame of a simile, which thus becomes a window briefly opening upon an as-yet-unconsummated history. Spenser's control of allusion is much less strict, in part because he seems himself to enjoy "wandring" in curious byways, and

in part because allegory itself is methodically allusive. If it is what Puttenham called "full allegorie," its allusiveness is taciturn; the tenor is not verbally "discovered." Hence the Spenser critic's daunting and as yet almost unattempted task: to derive the principles whereby the text points away from itself and towards the many realms of analogues. But, though the movement is always initially centrifugal, it must be followed by its centripetal complement, the return to a text illuminated by the likeness which the allusion implies.

That such principles are missing from Nohrnberg's commentary is not surprising; but because the citations are so voluminous, The Reader, that long-suffering fiction, is burdened beyond the point of tolerance, forced to drag himself through thickets of reference and make decisions, unassisted by the author, about degrees of relevance. Offered, for instance, analogues between the Sons of Agape, Geryon, and the Trinity, he must think harder than Nohrnberg does about how Christian reference may be said to be "in" Book IV, as compared with the explicit importation of such reference in Book I. We do not yet know nearly enough about the physiology of *The Faerie Queene*, how it feeds upon the multiple contexts available to Spenser. But it is clear that the starting-point for acquiring such knowledge is a sense of what it is like actually to read the poem. Critical emphasis, in recent years, on "the reader in the poem" has yet to tackle Spenser seriously, though Paul Alpers has made a start. Such concern must go beyond rhetorical analysis to examine the ways in which *The Faerie Queene*, in contact with an informed, responsive intelligence, produces its meanings.

Most of Nohrnberg's general conclusions are unstartling, which is a tribute to his own honesty and to the harmonies arrived at by the last twenty years of Spenserian criticism. In some ways his book can be read as a vast extrapolation of Frye's "Structure of Imagery" essay; the fact that there have been other developments in literary criticism since Frye is not much in evidence. Most of Nohrnberg's "internal" analogies are based on the notion that the six books are related chiasmically or as mirror-images, an idea advanced before but not developed by several critics, including Roche and Fowler. Nohrnberg is able to suggest a number of new relationships between Books II and V, and I and VI, and his analyses are more complete than any we have had hitherto. But his book's strength lies in the vast body of detailed lore with which he surrounds Spenser's text. Because that lore is so loosely controlled, its usefulness is much diminished. It will serve as a kind of reference book for future generations of graduate students, who will seize upon it gratefully for general examinations and manufacture many a thesis out of its nuggets. And strong-minded theoretical critics of *The Faerie Queene* will find here a mine of material to sustain their severer contemplations.

ISABEL G. MACCAFFREY

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*Children of the Revels: The Boy Companies of Shakespeare's Time and Their Plays* by Michael Shapiro. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. Pp. xiv + 313. \$15.00.

This is a reasonably modest book, boasting of no important new discoveries about the children's troupes and offering no very controversial theory about their performances. Its aim, rather, is to survey its subject methodically, judiciously, and (as far as information about the boy companies themselves goes) succinctly. Chapters set out to tell us who these companies were, the circumstances of their performances, the nature and expectations of their audiences, the styles in which their plays were written and acted, what sorts of plays made up their repertoires, and (by way of appendix) what dramatic use they made of songs and music. Though a general thesis informs these reviews, the style and structure of each chapter assure us that review is the genre Professor Shapiro is working in. No one will lose his way in chapters that begin with explicit signposts ("In this chapter, I propose the preliminary step of grouping together plays performed by all children's troupes, in order to consider the principal kinds of plays they acted and to trace patterns of development within their repertoires" [p. 179]), progress through labeled sub-sections, and end with clear summaries. Nor will the eagle-eyed Balboas of Elizabethan theater studies be moved, on first looking into Shapiro's *Children*, to stare with a wild surmise. W. R. Gair of the University of New Brunswick, for example, can discover to the world his posited location and reconstruction of the Paul's play-house unrivalled by Professor Shapiro, who leaves that matter still a mystery. Where the history of the companies is concerned, Shapiro's acknowledgment to Chambers and Hillebrand announces his lack of the explorer's heady ambition: "I lean very heavily on their work for documentary evidence, having only a few facts to add to the wealth of material they have assembled" (p. 2).

The book's focus is not, in fact, on the actors in their theaters but on the plays they performed. The tag-end of the subtitle ("*...and Their Plays*") really deserves a more prominent place on the cover. The two final chapters survey, through a descriptive account of the kinds of plays produced, the repertoires of the children's two active phases before and after their recess in the 1590's. But earlier chapters entitled "The Occasion" and "The Audience" veer toward similar descriptions of the plays themselves, with a good deal of space given over to individual analyses of *A Trick to Catch The Old One*, *The Widow's Tears*, *Epicoene*, and *Bussy D'Ambois*. Such analyses are by way of illustrating points about the relationship between the plays and their audiences; but here, as well as in the later chapters, a reader may learn more about the plays performed by the children than about the children's performances of the plays.

Shapiro does propose a thesis about these "plays in their social context" (p. vii). The "courtly ambiance" which presumably carried over into private theater performances lent a heightened ritualistic aura to the praise and abuse that were the plays' two dominant motives. "The strategy was to arouse and allay fears of social disintegration and to raise and dispel doubts about individual

rank, to combine flattery and insult, the opposed but related impulses inherent in all festal celebration. . . . The genius of the children's plays was to reassure the spectator that he had achieved his own wishful view of himself by encouraging him to identify with attractive characters of high rank, and to scatter his doubts about his social status by inviting him to ridicule 'others' " (pp. 38-39). One may wonder how exclusively this sort of genius was the property of the children's plays. Nonetheless, this thesis governs all assertions about the dynamics of audience response in Shapiro's treatment of individual plays. The teasing problem of the effect boy actors might have on those dynamics is left, as far as I can determine, unresolved. When satire is the evident intent, it is easy to say that the children's portrayals mocked the adult world "through miniaturization and mimicry" (pp. 212-213). But how then are miniaturization and mimicry defused in the portrayal of those "attractive characters" with whom the self-indulgent spectator is encouraged "to identify" (Shapiro would include swashbuckling Bussy among these, along with virtually all witty young gallants)? The general argument in Chapter IV about styles of acting might provide the basis for an answer, but more rigorous application of that argument to particular cases in point would help here.

Professor Shapiro's concluding hope is that his book "will provide helpful background for critical interpretation of these works and will illuminate the role of the boy companies in theatrical and literary history" (p. 231). It is a realizable hope, I believe, if we define the audience to whom help and illumination will be extended. Those who consider themselves experts in the field will not be flooded with new light. On the other hand, the book has virtues which make it a useful place to send a student of Elizabethan drama for "helpful background" about the children's plays. Perhaps most useful in this regard is the sensible corrective balance the book provides against extreme points of view. Shapiro's survey of the repertories, for example, "forces one to refine Harbage's categorization of the vast majority of these plays as 'satirical comedies'" (p. 227). And whereas R. A. Foakes and others, stressing the effect of "miniaturization," have read children's plays as wholesale burlesques or parodies, Shapiro argues plausibly on the basis of evident stylistic variation in the plays that the children's range of acting styles included the natural and the declamatory as well as the parodic. This kind of balance, as well as its general and uncluttered coverage, should make *Children of the Revels* a good starting place for any student of the subject.

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*The Consciousness of Joyce* by Richard Ellmann. New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. 150. \$16.95.

*James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* by C. H. Peake. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977. Pp. 396. \$16.95.

Professor Ellmann opens his book with a definition of the key word in its title: "'Consciousness' denotes the movement of the mind both in recognizing its own shape and in maintaining that shape in the face of attack or change." In the Introduction, the implications of this definition are developed: Joyce's exerted upon him by the institutions and the social codes of post-Parnell, Catholic, nationalist Ireland. The ambitious and important task of considering Joyce as an intensely political writer is carried out in the book only to a limited extent, however. Of its three essays, only the last is devoted to the political issue. In the first two, "Homer" and "Shakespeare," Professor Ellmann considers Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* and *Hamlet* in *Ulysses* "to demonstrate how [he] assimilated these two works into his own without giving up his individuality." Professor Ellmann thus moves from an interest in Joyce's consciousness actively engaged with a living society to an interest in his "conscious working" of literary materials. The two enterprises are really quite separate, and not surprisingly, the book never achieves unity, and never really justifies its title.

The essays on Homer and Shakespeare are, nevertheless, interesting and valuable. Professor Ellmann considers Joyce's use not only of the central works but also of the body of scholarship, commentary, and literary response that has formed around each of them—Victor Bérard's *Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssee* and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, for example. His knowledge of Joyce's life and of his reading makes him uniquely able to reveal the breadth and complexity of Joyce's mind and his ingenuity in adapting what he read to his own purposes. Ultimately, Professor Ellmann is interested in the impulse behind Joyce's manipulation of his literary sources. Thus he notes the importance of the 1909 marital crisis in the genesis of the novel as well as Joyce's annexation of the theme of sexual betrayal from his sources. It is the fascination with what are ultimately psychological questions which makes the source study so interesting, though the psychological dimension of the inquiry is suggested rather than pursued. Because of his complicated understanding of the interpenetration of Joyce's lived experience with his work, he never diminishes either author or text. The two chapters on sources leave the reader with an enhanced conception of what Joyce has done in the novel.

The real importance of this book rests on the third essay, "Joyce," which considers Joyce and politics. It is customary in Joyce criticism, in spite of the density of political allusion in all of his fiction, to insist that he was apolitical in general and vigorously uninterested in Irish politics after his disillusion, at age nine, at the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell. After this essay, most of which was recently published in *The New York Review of Books*, it will be difficult to maintain this attitude. Professor Ellmann presents specific political statements made by Joyce, which have been known before if ignored or misinterpreted,

and new information on Joyce's reading in the personal library he acquired between 1900 and 1920 and left in Trieste when he moved to Paris. This library was preserved relatively intact by Stanislaus Joyce and his heirs, and on the basis of the presence in it of socialist, anarchist, and nationalist texts, Professor Ellmann argues not only that Joyce had political interests but that they had a definite direction. More important, he suggests Joyce's sympathy with the revolutionary effort in Ireland which was moving toward separation from England all through the time in which he was at work on *Ulysses*, and he equates the revolutionary achievement which is the book with the political revolution. Even in this important essay, Professor Ellmann suggests rather than establishes the political dimension of Joyce's work. *The Consciousness of Joyce* should have been a more substantial book than it is; its arguments should have been pursued with greater rigor and consistency. Nevertheless anyone interested in Joyce is once again in Professor Ellmann's debt. His publication in an Appendix of the 600 titles from Joyce's pre-1920 library is invaluable in itself, but the wise suggestiveness of his interests in this book opens up new areas of scholarship which undoubtedly will be pursued.

The title of Professor Peake's book suggests that he, like Professor Ellmann, is exploring the question of Joyce's relation to Irish society. In fact, however, he is interested neither in Ireland nor in Joyce as a person; he is interested in "burgher" and "artist" as they exist abstractly in literary criticism, cut off from the dense social context in which citizens and artists exist in novels, certainly in the novels of Joyce. Professor Peake's book is really and overwhelmingly an occasion for that most sterile pursuit of academic criticism: close reading with moralizing commentary. The logic behind the title of the book and its thesis is that Joyce wrote one book about citizens (*Dubliners*), one book about an artist (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), and one book in which he was able to bring together an artist and a citizen (*Ulysses*). Style and symbol, defined in orthodox handbook fashion, as Mr. Bloom might say, are introduced to suggest that as citizen and artist move together, Joyce writes more skillfully and in a more complex way. Within the framework suggested by the title, armed with no critical methodology, asking no critical questions, Professor Peake sets out on the tedious jog from "The Sisters" to *Finnegans Wake*. Not surprisingly, but regrettably, along the way he finds that the *Dubliners* stories fit the scheme announced by Joyce in his letter to Grant Richards, that Stephen's theory of art explains *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and indeed all of Joyce's work. In one endless chapter, he considers "style" and "technique" in every episode of *Ulysses*. The highly personal nature of Professor Peake's enterprise is indicated by the lack of symmetry in his book. For example, in the long chapter on *Ulysses*, he devotes less than one page to "Nestor," two and one-half pages to "Proteus" and, inexplicably, eleven and one-half pages to "Aeolus." By the same token, having devoted 109 pages to Joyce's early work and 230 to *Ulysses*, he polishes off that most complex and difficult of Joyce texts, *Finnegans Wake*, in twenty-three. (The reason for the inclusion of *Finnegans Wake* in the book, since it does not fit in Professor Peake's scheme, remains a mystery.)

In his Preface, Professor Peake writes that his book grew out of his

lectures at the University of London and was intended not for scholars but for "interested readers." The book was, however, published in this country by a university press and seems clearly to be addressed to an academic audience; "interested readers" are far more likely to turn to a book like Professor Ellmann's, which is widely distributed. In effect, Professor Peake is inviting the scholarly world to join his hapless students in watching him read and respond to Joyce. He is adding nothing to knowledge about Joyce; he is suggesting no new way of thinking about him. If Professor Peake were an interesting reader, we might nevertheless, be grateful for his invitation. But he is not an interesting reader. He smooths over ambiguities, ignores difficulties, tidies up disturbances. He leaves us not with useful insight into Joyce's prodigally inventive and difficult work, but with his own sanitized and rationalized vision of that work. Against all the odds, and against the dreary but powerful critical tradition that sees Joyce as a frigid ironist, Professor Peake is suggesting in this book that Joyce is ultimately a sentimental moralist. *James Joyce: The Citizen and the Artist* leaves us with nothing that we can use.

JEANNE A. FLOOD

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*The Montecassino Passion and the Poetics of Medieval Drama* by Robert Edwards. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. Pp. 204. \$12.50.

In 1936 Dom Mauro Inguanez discovered the text of a 12th century Latin Passion play among the pages of the *Registrum I Thomae Abbatis, 1285-1288*. Although the text is incomplete it contains 370 lines mixing stage directions in prose with dialogue in the form of *versus tripartitus caudatus* consisting of two rhymed lines of eight syllables each, followed by a seven-syllable line rhyming with its counterpart in the next stanza. It is embellished with musical transitions between scenes and has blank spaces which were evidently left for miniatures. Although Dom Inguanez reedited the text and added to his conclusions about it in an article published in 1939, his discovery was largely ignored by students of liturgical drama until Sandro Sticca published *The Latin Passion Play: Its Origins and Development* in 1970. Sticca pointed out that the Montecassino Passion is the earliest Passion play known. It is therefore a key text for understanding one of the most important dramatic genres of the later Middle Ages, a genre that is still flourishing today at Oberammergau.

Edwards' book is thus the second full-dress study of the Montecassino Passion. It assumes a knowledge of Sticca's discussion of the content, paleography, and dating of the play. Edwards discusses the relation of legal forms of argument to the dialogue and structure of the play, the influence of visual art—especially Byzantine miniatures—on the unknown author's concept of his material, and the parallels between the themes of the play and the Montecassino liturgy for Good Friday. There is considerable and wide-ranging discussion of the theoretical framework within which one should interpret

liturgical drama, and discussion, which strikes this reader as too generalized to be of permanent value, of the play's music.

The book ends with a chapter titled "The Poetics of Medieval Drama" arguing that the hierarchy beginning with plot and ending with spectacle found in Aristotle's *Poetics* is misleading for drama of the Middle Ages. Edwards notes that medieval authors regarded visual images—"seeing"—as the normative means of understanding invisible realities expressed in art. He quotes Rabanus Maurus to illustrate the point: "The theatre is given its name...because in it, people standing above and looking, watch the plays" (p. 161). If so, a specifically medieval poetics should place spectacle first rather than last among the elements of drama. The visual scenes of the Montecassino Passion, often fragmented in the manner of programs of miniatures, bear the burden of expression, which is further enhanced by the use of stations (*sedes*) and simultaneous staging. Edwards argues that these facts explain the concentration of the Montecassino author on scenes that are representational, whatever secondary moral or symbolic meanings they may have.

*The Montecassino Passion* extends Sandro Sticca's work. It is interesting and frequently stimulating. Although it cannot be included among the works that might be labeled "essential" in the rapidly expanding field of studies of liturgical drama, it will repay a careful reading with fresh information and—in the last chapter—a thoughtful attempt to formulate a theory of liturgical drama adequate to the plays themselves.

O. B. HARDISON, JR.

*The Folger Shakespeare Library*

*The Situation of Poetry: Contemporary Poetry and its Traditions* by Robert Pinsky. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. Pp. xi + 188. \$11.50.

*Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation* by John Tytell. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976. Pp. 273. \$3.95.

*Marianne Moore: Poet of Affection* by Pamela White Hadas. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1977. Pp. xii + 243. \$15.00.

Virtually a commonplace in some quarters of contemporary criticism, the idea that modern poetry is continuous with romanticism, or even just an extension of it, is still a relatively recent one and, despite strong arguments in its favor, still apparently open to debate. Indeed, some recent writers, unwilling to accept the idea of an unqualified continuity, and yet also unable to follow the antiromanticism of the New Critics or to accept the modernists' own claims for their movement as a complete break with the past, have been turning in a kind of minority report on the issue, stressing certain basic differences between the romantics and the moderns in terms of their philosophical contexts while allowing that there are grounds for comparison in other areas. As one such writer—Frank Lentricchia in his recent book on Robert Frost—suggests, the

romantic idea of the primacy of the imagination as a creative and redemptive power, and the granting to the imagination of a cognitive function, particularly by Coleridge in his turn from Kant to Schelling, could obviously find greater nourishment in an atmosphere dominated by the transcendental thinking of nineteenth-century German metaphysics than they could in our own historical moment, so forcefully shaped by the work of Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Yet the notion of continuity in the literature of the last 150 years persists despite such distinctions, and what Robert Pinsky now suggests in his useful and interesting but limited book is that it be extended to contemporary poetry as well. While his argument is often a valuable one in terms of rhetorical relationships between specific poets and poems, it is precisely the broader historical and theoretical context of the issues he raises that points up the limitations of his outlook.

At a time when the term "postmodern" is much in vogue—a term avoided by Pinsky in what one suspects is a deliberate act of omission—his suggestion that contemporary poetry is traditional is not merely quaint or old-fashioned but fairly radical, though in a conservative rather than an innovative sense. His conservatism is grounded in the conviction that the poem "should be able to help us," if only "by delivering the relief that something has been understood, or even seen, well," and in the related conviction that the poem is basically an act of communication, as opposed to an unmediated event or experience. To reverse Wallace Stevens's formula, it is not the thing itself that Pinsky wants, but ideas about the thing, not a denial or transcendence of the abstract nature of language, but a full acceptance of it, seeing it not as a limitation but as an opportunity to take advantage of elements of poetic speech, such as the discursive and the descriptive, that have been largely avoided or subverted in modernism.

Pinsky reminds me here (not to mention Yvor Winters) of another conservative poet and critic, the Australian A. D. Hope, who has spoken of "the middle form of poetry" as "the form in which the uses of poetry approach closest to the uses of prose, and yet remain essentially poetry." Whereas Hope defines his position as an antiromantic one, however, Pinsky interprets the whole romantic and postromantic tradition as an ongoing internalized struggle between a nominalist view of experience and the realist view of language as an abstract medium. The good poets, for him, are the ones who do not simply accept such modernist slogans as Pound's "Go in fear of abstractions," or MacLeish's "A poem should not mean/But be," but those who pursue these goals while also registering a sense of what Pinsky calls "cost, misgiving, difficulty." It should be clear, of course, that this sense is very much Pinsky's own, even if it is a persuasive way of looking at modern poetry. Ultimately, though, it turns his book into an implicit call for a withdrawal from the experimental edge of modernism, a kind of retreat back into the safe but limited possibilities of language regarded, from a realist perspective, as an abstract web of concepts and patterns absolutely separate from experience.

Given this Cartesian or classical view of language, with its insistence on the radical isolation of words from things and of poetic forms from immediate experience, the whole modernist enterprise for Pinsky is, at best, largely a

series of strategies minimizing or camouflaging the essential, unbridgeable gap between *res* and *verba* and, at worst, an uncritical acceptance of the possibility of the nominalist poem, the poem that claims to achieve the condition of a thing. And the history of poetry since the romantics becomes a history of responses to this basic problem. It is in this sense that Pinsky insists on the traditional nature of contemporary poetry. His aim, as he points out in his preface, is not to provide yet another survey of that poetry but to explore principles, by which he means the problems and opportunities presented to writers by what he prefers to call "the current state of the modernist tradition." These problems and opportunities, in turn, are defined in terms of the role played by the poetry of the past "in the mind of one who is about to read or to write a poem," and that past, in Pinsky's conception, is unavoidable, in the sense that the serious writer must wrestle with it and master it before he can either use it for his own purposes or abandon it altogether. The point is not simply that Pinsky, like T. S. Eliot in 1919, is subordinating the individual talent to tradition, but that contemporary poets, in his view, for all the waywardness and apparent novelty of their styles and voices, are nevertheless responding to the work of their predecessors, and that response, as Pinsky sees it, is not an "anxious" one but an embodiment of tradition, or what he calls the "quiet workings of shared formal knowledge."

Thus the bulk of his argument is given over to a close textual demonstration of how poets as varied as Frost and Stevens, Williams and Roethke, Merwin and Ammons encounter problems and employ strategies that ultimately descend from a key romantic text like the "Ode to a Nightingale"; or how a triangulation of poets like "Hardy, Ransom, Berryman" constitutes a kind of affinity group within literary history (as opposed to a relationship based on a more conventional notion of influence) and suggests that similar styles have answered to similar needs at various times. Such procedures have the effect of turning all the poets he considers into contemporaries, since they are all being viewed, more or less, from the perspective of their response to one basic issue—the gap between words and things and the attempt to overcome it. Despite his distaste for Harold Bloom's notion of intertextuality, Pinsky in fact is setting up dialogues between poets that are similar to Bloom's although they lack the psychological aggressiveness and defensiveness that Bloom primarily focuses on. But in both cases the tendency is to avoid history. Though Pinsky's discussion raises the question of just what it is that constitutes change in literature, his attitude seems to be that such change is largely superficial, a series of conventions or stylistic fashions that hide the basic phenomenon of speech as a counter-point to the physical world. Implicitly, Pinsky is suggesting that poetry undergoes few real changes in a tradition that includes not only the romantic, the modern, and the contemporary, but that (in his most daringly imaginative comparison) embraces George Gascoigne at one end and Allen Ginsberg at the other. In this sense, all poetry is contemporary, or at least Pinsky is trying to locate the grounds, beyond variations in rhetoric and imagery and attitudes toward them, that would make it so.

What finally limits his argument is Pinsky's refusal to venture outside his own definition of the nominalist/realist dualism or even to consider developments

in critical and poetic theory which look beyond his own sense of the act of speech as separate from the physical world. In addition to the work of poets like Merwin, Ammons, and Snyder, who are all trying to break out of what Roethke calls "the dreary dance of opposites," an attempt with which Pinsky is not in sympathy, I am thinking here of the recent work of a critic like Hazard Adams, who, starting for such figures as Blake, Vico, and Cassirer, is trying to develop a view of language as formative or creative rather than merely representative. Or there is the view of modernism set forth by J. Hillis Miller more than a decade ago as precisely the overcoming of the sort of dualism that Pinsky so insists upon. In its thrust toward reality, Miller's version of modernism results in a poetry that, in the case of Stevens, moves beyond dualism and representational thinking, and, in the case of Williams, achieves an ego-shattering apprehension of the world that is all but unmediated.

By his own admission, Pinsky bases his outlook on modern poetry on a rather small and arbitrary handful of books and essays whose viewpoint he hopefully describes as "conservative and generous." Within the limits of that viewpoint, he manages not only to offer a series of interesting and even brilliant readings of specific texts but to organize a fluent and coherent discussion around an impressive variety of contemporary poets, poems, and styles. For some readers, however, the limits of that viewpoint will finally be too great, and Pinsky will seem to have purchased the coherence of his argument at the cost of too great an exclusion of recent thought about the issues with which he deals.

At the end of his enthusiastic account of the Beat Generation, John Tytell declares that "the significance of a literary movement may be measured by its vision of the world." As this statement suggests, the reader interested in the *literary* significance of a literary movement will have to settle here for a popularization and extension of that movement's values instead of a rigorous critical assessment of its writing. Tytell, to be sure, resists succumbing completely to the dark glamour of the beats' underground life-style and does discuss their work. His book is divided into two main parts, the first consisting of biographical narratives about the movement's central figures—William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg—while the second offers chronological surveys of their writing. But, although he speaks of the theoretical basis and political implications of Burroughs's "cut-up" method with some skill, and analyzes the "spontaneous bop prosody" of Kerouac and Ginsberg in terms of a daringly romantic expression of self in the midst of the stifling and conformist cultural atmosphere of the fifties, his acceptance of their work is finally so unqualified, and his adoption of the beat vision of the world so complete, that the book's critical value becomes negligible.

While he seems to recognize that an aesthetic of spontaneity necessarily involves certain risks, this does not prevent Tytell from lashing out at his heroes' critics for pointing to their frequent failures. In defense of Allen Ginsberg, he offers this piece of dubious logic: "The fact that the eye simply cannot contain the poem on a page, the expansive scope and surreal leaps of Ginsberg's poetry have all contributed to preventing the critics from inventing the necessary categories through which to view his work." But Tytell's own

method of paraphrase and assertion will not convince those hostile critics of the Beat Generation that he himself is any closer than they are to those categories, which by the end of his book seem more necessary than ever.

Marianne Moore's famous statement, in a poem called "Poetry," that she, too, dislikes it—a statement that subtly assumes an anti-poetic attitude on the part of the reader—immediately raises a central theme of modernism: the antagonistic relationship between the poet and his or her medium. But if Moore is anti-poetic, it is only because poetry has been so narrowly defined, invalidating itself, as it were, by discriminating against "business documents and/school-books," excluding too much of the world. In her efforts to counterbalance this narrowness, she invented a kind of poem that is characteristically modern in its impersonality and inclusiveness and yet curiously personal in its directness and indulgence of idiosyncrasy. Inviting and forbidding at once, Moore is a hard poet to write about.

Pamela White Hadas's attempt has resulted in a long, ambitious, densely-argued, and finally unhelpful book that fails largely because its focus is scattered and undefined—scattered among bits and pieces of Moore's work which are never brought together to make an impression *as a whole* on the reader. Hadas's thesis is the unobjectionable one that Moore's forbidding structures are a means not toward impersonality but of protecting an intensity of feeling. But in conducting her argument, she exchanges such conventional critical procedures as tracing her author's development or placing her work in its larger historical and intellectual contexts for a set of categories and concerns that seem private or personal to the point of solipsism. All too often she quotes lines and phrases from Moore not to illuminate the poetry but to support her own obscure musings about style or survival. Straining toward the aphoristic and at times annoyingly playful and punning, her writing is almost constantly coming between the reader and any clear focus on Moore. It is capable on almost any page of tossing off the following sort of sentence: "The faith that is originally significant is the creator's own faith in faith's significance."

Late in the book, particularly in a chapter on Moore's animal poems, Hadas shows that she can comment specifically on a text. But she conducts her argument in so thanklessly demanding a way that I'm afraid she will have lost most of her readers by then.

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*The Middle Way: Puritanism and Ideology in American Romantic Fiction*

by Michael T. Gilmore. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977.

Pp. x + 220. \$12.00.

Ever since D. H. Lawrence's exposé of the American psyche, the question of our literary and cultural origins has intrigued students of American literature. For the most part, our major literary scholars have not been content to study individual authors in their own right, or investigate self-contained "periods"



of literary history; rather, they have sought encompassing explanations for the "uniqueness" of American literature.<sup>1</sup> In general, these scholars have focused primarily on nineteenth-century American literature, neglecting almost entirely the influence of colonial thought on (say) Hawthorne and Melville's fictions. During the last ten years, however, the revolution in American Puritan studies has altered the perspective of a new generation of scholars armed with a sophisticated understanding of Puritan imagination and culture. Of late, they have been prepared to offer a new synthesis, detailing the development of American literature from its colonial origins to its flowering at mid-century. Michael T. Gilmore's *The Middle Way* is the most recent offering "to suggest," as the author declares in the preface, "new lines of inquiry into the ideological and cultural continuity of American letters."

As befits a member of a rising generation, Gilmore pits his theory of "the middle way" against the elders, specifically Richard Chase, who claimed that the American novel was characterized by metaphysical extremes and stark, Manichean polarities. In contrast, Gilmore maintains that the Puritans' ideal of mediation between extremes—the rejection of both Antinomian enthusiasm (as promulgated by Anne Hutchinson and other visionaries) and Arminian legalism (later typified by Benjamin Franklin)—constitutes the colonial legacy to American literature. The Puritan injunction to live in the world yet be not of it—the doctrine of "inner-worldly sanctity," as Gilmore defines it—serves as a model of the middle way ideal. More important for Gilmore's purposes, the theological middle way corresponds to and is objectified by the theory of romance as formulated by its practitioners. Thus our major nineteenth-century writers "appropriated Calvinism's grammar of thought for their own imaginative purposes"; they imbibed the Puritan ideal, transforming it into an "aesthetic correlative" for the American romance.

Before applying the notion of "the middle way" to the major writings of Hawthorne and Melville (and in the last chapter, to Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*), Gilmore traces its history from the first generation Puritans to Cotton Mather (who is the crucial figure in the transmission of the middle way to nineteenth-century America) and Benjamin Franklin (described as the perverter of the original ideal). In Gilmore's scenario, Mather's heroic attempt "to breathe fresh life" into his ancestral religion links him to his nineteenth-century heirs, "who undertook in their fiction to salvage the metaphysical vision of the first settlers." In contrast, Franklin labored against the religious ideal of the middle way, and sadly, by mid-century, his version of a utilitarian America, "prizing progress above all else," had emerged triumphant. The nineteenth-century romancers responded harshly to the ideological legacy of Benjamin Franklin whose spirit, they believed, had come to permeate America. Their scathing attacks on the American Way (as espoused by Franklin) were, in effect, attempts

<sup>1</sup> Among the more influential of these studies are R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955); Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition* (Garden City, N. Y., 1957); and Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literature and Cultural History* (New York, 1971).

at reformulating "in literary terms...the theological balance of the founders"; they "wished to reclaim the spiritual stance of their ancestors." That stance, according to Gilmore, was one of "taking a middle way between...extremes," and it is by this standard that he measures and interprets the fiction of Hawthorne and Melville.

In the case of Hawthorne, Gilmore posits that Hawthorne's formulation of romance as a "neutral territory" is the aesthetic equivalent of the Puritan middle way. Moreover, Hawthorne formally adapted the extremes of the middle way in his fiction. Jaffrey Pyncheon (in *The House of the Seven Gables*) and Chillingworth (in *The Scarlet Letter*) are both likened to Franklin, and both are representative of the "legalistic" mentality shunned by the Puritans and Hawthorne. Equally dangerous (and unacceptable) for Hawthorne is Holgrave's transcendental reforming zeal and Hester's anarchic antinomianism, the other extreme of the middle way. Instead, Hawthorne offers a metaphysical middle ground (in the Puritan tradition) "to curb the intensity of opposition between the extremes." As a result of this mediating process, Hawthorne assumes the role of an Old Testament prophet, a Jeremiah, warning a backsliding Israel to repent or else suffer God's wrath. Thus Hawthorne's fictions are "sermons in disguise," his art a nineteenth-century analogue to the colonial jeremiad. In this context, Gilmore interprets *The Scarlet Letter* and *Gables* as works which evince "a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the nature of contemporary American society." In *Gables*, for example, Hawthorne expresses "his revulsion from the strident, facile, and self-assertive chauvinism of his compatriots." The glorious destiny for God's New Israel (as Dimmesdale prophesies in his Election Sermon in the penultimate scene of *The Scarlet Letter*) has been "betrayed" (Gilmore's word) by the reality of Hawthorne's America.

Melville, too, says Gilmore, imbibed the spirit of the middle way. Like Hawthorne's, his fictions call upon a sinful nation to repent. Although Ahab perceives himself to be on a millennial quest, his antinomianism (which makes him feel beyond the constraints of history) signals the approaching American apocalypse, a forecast of national doom. Ishmael's seeming "salvation" is not prophetic of a brighter period for the country; he remains an "orphan in an America which has deserted its principles and turned a deaf ear to its speakers of truth." In similar fashion, "Benito Cereno" is Melville's jeremiad against the sin of slavery, his indictment against a nation that has "betrayed its calling." The ending of "Cereno" suggests, in Gilmore's reading, "that the American Israel has committed anew the sin of its predecessor...The dream... has been shattered by the reality of slavery." Only in "Billy Budd" did Melville present a character who achieves the ideal of the middle way. In confronting the dilemma posed by Billy and Claggert, Captain Vere "shuns the extremes"; his truth, therefore, "embodies the vision of inner-worldly sainthood" characteristic of the Puritan middle way.

Although Gilmore's notion of the middle way offers a suggestive context in which to interpret American literature, it serves to reduce the import of Hawthorne and Melville's fiction to a single, sad refrain: American life has betrayed the original promise. More important, however, Gilmore's "middle way" glosses over the enormous tension embedded in the Puritan injunction to live

in the world with "weaned affections." If anything, the Puritan Way bespeaks the rigors and demands involved in attaining visible sanctity, not of mediation between extremes. In Gilmore's rendering, Hawthorne's Puritan inheritance may be traced to his view of the romance as a "neutral territory," which, Gilmore asserts, "is his equivalent of the state of weanedness that the Puritans attributed to the elect." But the attempt to correlate Hawthorne's aesthetic with Puritan doctrine simplifies the complex transmission of Puritanism to nineteenth-century American culture. Hawthorne's "neutral territory" partakes of both the real and ideal—the Actual and Imaginary; it combines, one might say, the best of both worlds. The Puritans, however (at least the first generation), strenuously *avoided* compromise. As revolutionary Saints on an historic errand, they refused to settle for nothing less than the Kingdom of God in America. Their Way entailed no arbitration between extremes, as Hawthorne himself recognized, and dramatized in his Puritan tales. The American Puritan imagination translated adversity into election, and retold the history of their errand as the History of the Work of Redemption. In response to adversity and the apparent failure of the errand, the Puritan mind fashioned the symbol of America, a symbol designed to absorb the contradictions of American experience, and in that process, to proclaim anew the glorious destiny of the country.<sup>2</sup>

Cotton Mather, of course, was the foremost spokesman of the American Puritan Way. Yet like Hawthorne and Melville, he was deeply troubled with the seeming declension of his America; he, too, bemoaned the betrayal of the Founders' dream. Mather's monumental defense of the Puritan Way, the *Magnalia* (1702), contained among its collection of hagiographies a "Life of William Phips," a biography often described as the Puritan analogue to Franklin's *Autobiography*. In this respect, Mather's "Phips" suggests (contrary to Gilmore's argument) that the polarities between Mather and Franklin's ideologies might not appear to be that extreme. Indeed, all our major writers embraced (to some extent) the myth of American exceptionalism even as they labored against it. It is this relentless love/hate relationship with the meaning of America that Gilmore's notion of the middle way obscures. Hawthorne was undoubtedly uneasy with the reality of America, as Gilmore proves very clearly, noting that Hester's millennial vision looks forward to the somber description of Jacksonian America which opens the novel. Yet his later novels—*Gables* and especially *The Marble Faun*—seem to embrace the myth of American progress. And perhaps it was Melville's *inability* to rest comfortably in the "middle way" which issued in *Pierre*, his most savage critique of the legacy of the American myth (and its transmission) to his own time.

The question of ideological and cultural continuities, then, is much more complicated than Gilmore's study would indicate. The Puritan legacy enraged and inspired our great romancers; it was the inner propulsion that drove and tormented their imaginations. *The Middle Way* portrays that torment, but

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of the Puritan habit of mind and its legacy to nineteenth-century American literature may be found in Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, 1975).

does not adequately describe the process of cultural assimilation from Mather's Puritanism to Hawthorne's romanticism. Its failure, it seems to me, lies in the concept of the middle way itself—a term which simplifies both the Puritan experience and that of nineteenth-century America. Our romancers could never embrace a middle way. Their stance was too ironic, too obsessive, for any resolution or mediation of the problem of America.

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*Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* by Richard Poirier. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. xvii + 322. \$11.95.

Although disparaged by some as a nineteenth-century holdover in a twentieth-century literary revolution, and censured by others as a political conservative in an era of social change, Robert Frost was in one sense lucky. Critics never ignored him. For every negative evaluation to appear in print, two positive appraisals could be counted. Frost stepped into the literary spotlight immediately upon the publication of his first two books in London in 1913 and 1914, and for the next half century of his life, the light never dimmed.

Today the bulb has not even flickered. If he were still alive, fifteen years after his death in 1963 at age 89, he would be pleased to note that the Frost story goes on. In the last five years alone, for example, thirteen books on the poet have been published.<sup>1</sup> Most of these studies are good indeed, and Richard Poirier's *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* is a distinguished addition to the list.

Poirier takes Frost's comment (January 1, 1917) to Louis Untermeyer as a starting point: "I should like to be so subtle at this game as to seem to a casual person altogether obvious." Convinced that Frost is a poet of genius because his subtleties are inextricable from his apparent accessibility, Poirer stresses again the well-known argument that those who insist on Yeats's or Eliot's difficulty and yet dismiss Frost's complexity do so only by ignoring the latter's best work. Some of Poirier's general statements are not at all new, but he reiterates them as frames for the developing interpretations: Frost is most evasive when his idioms are most ordinary; his surface accessibility lures the reader to relax;

<sup>1</sup>Elaine Barry, *Robert Frost on Writing*; Reginald Cook, *Robert Frost: A Living Voice*; Joan Crane, *Robert Frost Books and Manuscripts in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library*; Donald J. Greiner, *Robert Frost: The Poet and His Critics*; Frank Lentricchia, *Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscapes of Self*; Frank and Melissa Lentricchia, *Robert Frost: A Bibliography, 1913-1974*; Kathleen Morrison, *Robert Frost: A Pictorial Chronicle*; William Sutton (ed.), *Newdick's Season of Frost*; Jac Tharpe (ed.), *Frost: Centennial Essays, I, II*; Lawrence Thompson and R. H. Winnick, *Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963*; Peter Van Egmond, *The Critical Reception of Robert Frost*; and Linda Wagner, *Robert Frost: The Critical Reception*.

his allusions are often off-hand; his metrical patterns hide implications. But when, in the introduction, Poirier suggests the sexual reverberations of "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things," we know that this book proposes a new look at a major poet.

Poirier argues persuasively that Frost engages our keenest reading skills because the poet's "ultimate subject is the interpretive process itself" (xi). Playing with the possibilities for interpretations, Frost shows that particular objects, the obvious signs of life, suggest implications that baffle and elude us. Clearly Poirier's Frost (and mine) is not Yvor Winters' "spiritual drifter." The poet's evasiveness, unfortunately made famous in a disparaging way by Winters' well-known essay, is purposeful, part of his understanding of poetry as a "form of life." To counter Winters' drifter, Poirier proposes Frost as "negotiator between terms of possibility set up with daring, risk, and a truly marvelous poise" (xvi).

Yet this book is much more than a rebuttal of Frost's negative critics. Aware of the misguided tendency to separate Frost from his more orthodox modern peers, Poirier implies that a governing principle of his study is a discussion of modernism and of the difficulty of defining Frost's relationship to it. He begins with Lionel Trilling's unwitting initiation of a cultural episode, Trilling's speech at Frost's eighty-fifth birthday dinner in 1959. He grants Trilling's insistence on the terror in Frost's canon, but he disagrees with Trilling when he argues, correctly I think, that the poet does not challenge old verities but reaffirms them in startling new ways. Thus Poirier asks, what *is* new about Frost's poetry and what needs to be said about it?

This book answers those questions: Frost's poems communicate terror without himself being terrified; reading them, our lives may be more complicated but no more unmanageable; the poems suggest that our capacity to make sense of life parallels the writing of poetry because both acts are heroic. Poirier urges us not to interpret all of the situations in the poems as dramatic (despite Frost's claim to the contrary), nor to exempt the poet from the perplexities of his own poems by substituting "speaker" for Frost: "His greatness depends, I think in large part on his actually seeking out opportunities for being in untenable positions" (15). I am especially impressed by Poirier's skill at analyzing how grammar and diction support or modify theme, for clearly Frost's brilliant rendering of sound and tone is one reason why he, unlike his contemporaries, could communicate a human voice reacting to a specific dilemma. The argument for Frost's modernity entices the reader because of the unexpected terms of the discussion. Poirier compares, for example, not only Frost and Joyce generally but also *A Boy's Will* and *Portrait* specifically. He knows, of course, that Joyce's ironies are often cultural or historical whereas Frost's are personal but his suggestions are aimed at those die-hards who persistently define modernism solely according to Joyce's or Eliot's pronouncements. Poirier's perspective on modernism is alone worth an hour with this book because he argues that the dislocations characteristic of much modernist poetry "are not inevitably the result of cultural and historical conditions." Surely we now agree that rather than link Joyce or Eliot with, and exclude Frost from, mythologizing the twentieth century, each writer exhibits different mythologies about the "function of literature *in* the century."

Although these comments suggest that biography is not Poirier's concern, he does take exception to Lawrance Thompson's "harsh" verbal portrait. Perhaps Thompson does go too far, but I wonder if pointed reactions to Frost's biographer do equal damage to our struggle to cope with this contradictory poet. To say that Thompson misses the point entirely about Frost's tendency to manipulate is to cause the reader to think about attempts to ignore the unpleasant qualities in a complex man. Thus I feel more comfortable when Poirier sidesteps his disagreement with Thompson and encourages me to re-examine a remarkable canon in the light of his own sensitive readings. What emerges is a discussion of Frost as a highly conscious artist, a poet who knew exactly what he was doing, a writer who was "never innocent of what his poems imply" (54). The general implications of this opinion are acceptable, but I question their applicability in specific instances. Was Frost, for example, *that* aware of the potential problems if he placed "The Subverted Flower," in *A Boy's Will*? Poirier's reading of the relationship between "The Subverted Flower," written in time to be included in *A Boy's Will* (1913) but withheld from publication until 1942, and the sexually oriented lyrics in the book is excellent, but I doubt if Frost declined publication for all of the reasons Poirier offers as examples of the poet's conscious artistry. His analysis of the threat to the poetic imagination by the "disasters of love" nevertheless remains a highpoint of his study.

Many other highlights are equally impressive: the discussion of how Frost proposes visions by "elaborate forms of denial"; the suggestion that the poems of home and marriage are about poetic form and the nature of metaphor; the comparison of Frost and Stevens which sends us back to the poems to note how for Frost truth must come from finite experience while for Stevens imagination may create truth; the disagreements with Edward Connery Lathem's emendations in the 1969 collected poems; and the extensive analysis of *A Further Range* (1936).

Some nagging reservations remain. Does "The Subverted Flower" have primarily four beats or three to the line? And what about the husband's warning ("Home Burial") that someone is "coming down the road"? I also wonder if Professor Poirier underestimates both general fans and scholars when he asserts that most readers usually miss the speaker's urging to rebuild the wall in "Mending Wall," or that the "it" in "The Most of It" is normally misread. These complexities have been explicated for some time now. Finally, I note a tendency to overpraise Frost. Although I agree that consistent admiration of the anthologized favorites detracts from appreciation of the even better, lesser-known poems, I question if the impasse is eased by implying that Frost is "poetically daring" in "Good Hours" and "stunningly casual" in "Happiness Makes Up in Height for What It Lacks in Length." Do these relatively minor lyrics deserve such rhetoric?

Yet in the context of the entire book these reservations do not finally matter. Professor Poirier is always challenging and consistently clear (though his style is often wordy). He urges a new perspective on modernism, and thus he emphasizes the absolute importance of Frost's poetry to twentieth-century art. If the old poet himself had lived to read this study, he would have bragged

that the spotlight still shines. He would have been happy. But I am even more pleased that Richard Poirier wrote this book.

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*The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism* edited by Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards. Amherst, Mass.: University of Mass. Press, 1976. Pp. xiv + 304. \$15.00.

*The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism* demonstrates with a considerable "authority" of its own that feminist criticism has an original and scholarly contribution to make to the understanding of literature and the methods of criticism. The editors have included three articles on the theory of feminist criticism and thirteen additional essays that address the following authors: Chaucer, Shakespeare, DeFoe, Richardson, Fielding, Melville, C. Brontë, Chopin, Woolf, Hemingway, Lessing, and Porter. Contrary to the frequent stereotype that feminist criticism deals only with women characters and writers, this distinguished volume illustrates forcefully that feminist criticism is a critical perspective that works with the whole fabric of literature: its context, its text, its author, its aesthetic, its critics, its readers.

The opening three theoretical articles present a solid, if not pathbreaking, grounding in the critical perspective that characterizes the remaining thirteen essays of practical criticism. In "Female Criticism: A Prologue," Annette Barnes successfully places the fundamental tenet of feminist criticism—that no criticism is "value-free" or "objective"—in its appropriate epistemological context. Like any form of "knowing," criticism does not exist in a "vacuum of Truth," and the critic "cannot come to the task as an ideal spectator devoid of culture, history, political perspective." Since all perception is "filtered through some 'classificatory schema,'" the critical ideal of objectivity typified by Matthew Arnold's aesthetic theory is impossible and deceptive. Although Barnes could have done more to articulate other aspects of the feminist critical framework, she is to be commended for gently dissolving the epistemologically unsound, yet widely held belief that "mainstream" criticism is "objective" and feminist criticism is "ideological."

Lynn Sukenick's "On Women and Fiction" examines the "classificatory schema" for the nature of women in the dominant critical and intellectual traditions from the eighteenth century to the present. It is an excellent, richly researched and comprehensive exploration of the ways in which culture and politics have shaped literary criticism of women artists. The real usefulness of her essay, however, is not the general broadside against the hidden bias of "phallic criticism," to use Mary Ellmann's term for androcentric critical assumptions. She delineates the specific ideologies about innate sex differences that have greatly influenced both literary critics and women writers: masculine and feminine have been equated with sense and sentiment, reason and feeling in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and, consciousness and being,

rational and irrational in the twentieth century. The assumption hidden within these cultural dualisms has been the superiority of the masculine and the inferiority of the feminine. These beliefs have been so culturally pervasive, she argues, that the critic must explore their influence on women fiction writers. I would only add that understanding of any literature, whether by male or female authors, is greatly enhanced when the critic examines the relationship of the artist's world view to cultural ideologies on the nature of women and men.

Operating on the critical assumptions explained in the Barnes and Sukenick essays, Marcia Landy's "The Silent Women: Towards a Feminist Critique" does a good job of explaining how feminist critics have taken the tools of other schools of literary criticism—formalist, archetypal, psychoanalytic, semiotic, etc.—and applied them to the critical framework of feminist criticism. Although I found some of her specific discussions thoughtful (e. g. usefulness of Burke), I do think that others have categorized and described the wide range of feminist critical methodologies more clearly.<sup>1</sup> Her article could have made a greater contribution if she had addressed the theoretical issues implicit in the fact that feminist criticism, unlike many other schools, is not limited to a single methodology.

In general, the thirteen essays of practical criticism use the feminist issues of gender identity and role to deal with the established canon of literary tradition. The editors have presumably left to other anthologists the equally important task of resurrecting little known women writers and exploring the question of whether there is a distinct female tradition, style and imagery. Based mainly on textual and contextual analysis, these essays successfully demonstrate that full comprehension of these much studied authors is incomplete without some examination of how the artist handles the issue of gender.

The essays on Shakespeare, Richardson, Woolf and Hemingway rely heavily on formalist and thematic analysis to produce stimulating, new readings that challenge many prevailing critical views. Coppelia Kahn's "*The Taming of the Shrew: Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage*" argues that Shakespeare is satirizing the machismo of a masculine mystique instead of celebrating the taming of a "shrew." Her creative approach can potentially bear fruit in future investigations of Shakespeare's androgynous tendencies. Katherine Roger's "Richardson's Empathy with Women" uses the author's sensitivity to the sexual and social repression of women as the critical scale on which to reverse the frequent preference of Fielding over Richardson. While her contention that Richardson is a "radical feminist" is not substantiated, she does convincingly show that Fielding reinforces the cultural norms which separate women into "good" and "bad" according to their acceptance of male control. Reexamined in the light of feminist categories, Richardson does recognize the repression of women and sympathetically portray women heroes who attempt

<sup>1</sup> See for example Annis Pratt's "The New Feminist Criticisms: Exploring the History of the New Space" in *Beyond Intellectual Sexism: A New Woman, A New Reality*, ed. by Joan Roberts (New York: David McKay, 1976) and Cheri Register's "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction" in *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory*, ed. by Josephine Donovan (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1975).



to circumvent their condition. Lee Edward's "War and Roses: The Politics of *Mrs. Dalloway*" is an excellent rereading which challenges the frequently expressed charge that Woolf's celebration of Mrs. Dalloway's parties reflects the upper-middle class elitism and political naiveté of Bloomsbury. She argues that Woolf is simultaneously revaluing the feminine world usually deemed trivial and attacking the destructiveness of the masculine world of war and power which drives the sensitive Septimus to suicide. This approach would be equally fruitful in *To the Lighthouse*.

A second cluster of excellent essays on Chaucer (Diamond essay), Charlotte Brontë and Porter fuse careful readings of the text with analysis of the cultural and historical contexts. Arlyn Diamond's essay on Chaucer provides both a fine introduction to Chaucer's women for the non-Chaucerian scholar (translations would have been helpful, however) and a creative analysis of his work that should provide new research directions for Chaucerians. She examines the "marriage group" in *The Canterbury Tales* and argues that they demonstrate Chaucer's simultaneous reflection of and rebellion against the beliefs about women in his time. In "*Jane Eyre: Woman's Estate*," Maurianne Adams shows how greatly the historical context can illuminate the psychological dynamic of quest explored in the text. *Jane Eyre*, she demonstrates, abounds with Brontë's explicit references to role expectations for women, the economics of female dependence and the limited options open to women which characterized nineteenth-century England. These forces determine the boundaries and condition the dimensions of Jane's moral dilemmas. Adams's analysis of Jane's conflict between the needs for autonomy and love is excellent, and her discussion of Jane's dreams and fantasies is a particularly important contribution to the study of this novel.

In a category by itself, Dawn Lander's "Eve among the Indians" examines the psychological and political dimensions of the image of the frontier woman and contains the most brilliant and stimulating analysis in the book. In the mode of Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, she out-Fiedler's Fiedler as she shows his ideas to be part of the cultural mythologies he exposes. She argues that the dual myth of the pure white virginal wife/mother and the sexual dark-skinned minority woman served to divide light and dark women and to rationalize white male dominance in American history and culture. This article is one of the finest demonstrations I have seen of how racism and sexism are two sides of the same coin of oppression. Lander's biographical account of the genesis of her research is also illuminating as an explanation of the editor's title choice and the relation of "experience" to feminist criticism. Lander relates her own sense of freedom and love of wilderness that characterized her childhood on the desert. Her experience, she explains, went directly counter to the image of frontier white women in popular culture and led her to question whether women had really destroyed the wilderness with the values of "civilization." It is not her childhood feelings that ultimately convince, however. Rather, the "authority" of her own experience suggested new categories of analysis that shaped the direction of her extensive research. Feminist criticism in this volume does not argue that the authority of one individual's experience assures "objective" truth or even that the feminist

critic must be a woman. Instead, it implicitly demonstrates that experience as women has led to new "classificatory schema" that potentially illuminate formerly unfocused aspects of literature.

Like any anthology, the quality of the essays is not uniformly high. Maureen Fries's "'Slydyng of Corage': Chaucer's Criseyde as Feminist and Victim," Mary Cohen's "'Out of the chaos, a new kind of strength': Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*," and Priscilla Allen's "Old Critics and New: The Treatment of Chopin's *The Awakening*" are all surely competent, but they do not show the rich insight, creative rereadings, and suggestiveness of the other articles. The final essays stand out as problematical adaptations of feminist critical methodology. Patricia Barber's "What If Bartleby Were a Woman?" applies the "turn-around test" so often useful in the classroom to Melville's Bartleby. A hypothetical switch of the sex of characters can bring into sharp relief an author's hidden assumptions about sex roles and gender identity. But in this article, no new light is shed on our understanding of Bartleby by imagining the male clerk to be a female secretary. Miriam Lerenbaum's essay on Moll Flanders illustrates the dangers of using contextual material without subtlety. While her thesis that Moll is not a male hero in disguise is surely defensible, her use of historical and biological data ignores DeFoe as creator and awkwardly treats Moll as if she were an historical figure. For example, she argues that Moll's irritability in mid-life is due to the symptoms of menopause, an explanation somewhat reminiscent of the cruder forms of psychoanalytic criticism. Her suggestion that Moll's disinterest in her children is characteristic of the 18th century poor's indifference to the frequent deaths of their children has overtones which I am sure were unintended: racism and classism have frequently included the belief that darker and/or poorer peoples do not suffer as much with the high mortality rates brought on by poverty, poor nutrition and inadequate health care.

The occasionally weak essays in the volume in no way overshadow the unusually high quality of the rest. Diamond and Edwards have done an excellent job of producing a stimulating volume that not only serves as an introduction to feminist criticism, but also makes a contribution to the field itself. They are to be commended especially for providing so many fine essays on figures prior to the nineteenth century. The only thing that puzzles me is the tentativeness with which they and some of their contributors face the question of whether feminist criticism is a "school" or just an "approach." This volume affirms a consistent feminist critical perspective with categories of analysis distinct from other schools; the book operates with a variety of recognizable methodologies, derivative from other schools, but also distinct because of the analytic framework; and all essays tacitly express that this research does not exist in a vacuum, but emerges out of personal experience, a widespread political movement, the expanding phenomenon of Women's Studies, and the context of hundreds of other feminist critics. Feminist Criticism's visibility as a "school" is greatly enhanced by this volume, and future such publications will contribute greatly to the understanding of literature.

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*A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* by Elaine Showalter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Pp. viii + 378. \$17.50.

*The City and the Veld: The Fiction of Doris Lessing* by Mary Ann Singleton Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1977. Pp. 243. \$12.00.

Only recently have critics become fully aware that knowledge about women writers and therefore literary history itself is fragmentary and biased. Innumerable articles and some books from a feminist perspective have reinterpreted the achievements of well known women writers, reassessed the work of neglected ones, exposed the shortcomings of "phallic" criticism, and developed concepts useful for the theory and practice of feminist criticism. Meanwhile extensive and diverse new research about women in other disciplines has contributed to the need for intelligent synthesis of information about the work and experience of women writers.

Professor Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* provides such a synthesis and more. Unlike Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (Doubleday, 1976), the earlier widely discussed study which took the implications of the gender of writers seriously, Showalter's book is an orderly, balanced, and highly readable account unmarred by awkward coinage (e. g., Moers's "Heroinism"), impressionistic organization, contradictions, and inadequate distinctions. Showalter's book can thus serve as a model for critics examining the work of women in other genres and historical periods. In addition, *A Literature of Their Own* is informative enough to be useful as a reference work, yet imaginative enough to invite continued reexamination and considerable controversy.

Professor Showalter rejects the notion of "a sense of collective identity of women writers" which might have produced a literary movement; she also dismisses the concept of a specifically female sensibility or imagination. Instead, she chooses "to describe a female literary tradition in the English novel and to show how the development of this tradition is similar to the development of any literary subculture."

Showalter identifies three distinct stages in "the female literary tradition [which] comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society." Imitation and internalization of the dominant male traditions produced the Feminine stage (1840-80); protest and advocacy of women's rights resulted in the Feminist phase (1880-1920); the search for and discovery of self is evident in the Female phase (1920-present).

One of the major strengths of this study is the order Showalter brings to a vast and complex body of material without oversimplification or contradiction. She provides informative discussion of innumerable writers besides Brontë, Eliot, Woolf, and Lessing. She makes further distinctions within the three major stages, so that neither common elements nor differences between writers and generations are slighted. She shows that the easy generalizations (e. g., women writers suffered from sexism; women writers opposing the

suffrage were unsympathetic to women) can be considerably refined by research and analysis to yield more complex yet more vividly convincing conclusions. Thus, for example, the chapters on "The Feminine Novelists and the Will to Write" and "The Double Critical Standard and the Feminine Novel" indirectly create sympathy and respect for those women who wrote for publication in spite of the critical standards used by both male and female reviewers, by both attackers and defenders. Even trends seemingly contrary to prevailing literary and social conventions are acknowledged and explicated as in the chapter on "Subverting the Feminine Novel: Sensationalism and Feminine Protest." In addition, Showalter often notes revealing continuities in the fiction of women: her striking comments on the function of the forcibly confined mad wife in *Jane Eyre* versus that of the mad wife who helps the protagonist gain essential knowledge in *The Four-Gated City* are just one example. The perceptive and tactful use Showalter makes of research from other disciplines to explicate the fiction and lives of writers constitutes another major strength.

Although *A Literature of Their Own* is clearly the best of recent studies dealing with several women writers, it is by no means the last word. Novels published in the first half of the roughly one-hundred and thirty years encompassed by the study receive proportionately fuller and more sympathetic treatment. Twentieth century novelists are dealt with in less than a hundred pages; of these about one-fifth are devoted to the writing from the suffrage movement which Showalter accurately evaluates as being historically interesting but aesthetically undistinguished. Many contemporary novelists whose achievements deserve more detailed examination (e. g., Rhys, Spark, O'Brien, Murdock) are passed over in a sentence or omitted altogether. Lessing and Drabble are rightfully treated at greater length, though even here one does not have the comfortable sense that Professor Showalter is as thoroughly familiar with the canon of modern women writers or as perceptive about their relationships to each other, to modern critical standards, or to current concepts of femininity as she is with the literature and society of nineteenth century.

The chapter "Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny" is likely to be the most controversial. It is undeniably appropriate to reexamine stringently the work and influence of a writer elevated to near-sainthood by feminists and feminist critics. Harriet Rosenstein similarly questioned the irrational admiration accorded to Plath, another suicide, by exposing the shortcomings of *The Bell Jar* and reaffirming the achievements of the poetry ("Reconsidering Sylvia Plath," *Ms.* 1, September, 1972, pp. 44-51). Her essay did much to begin more balanced discussion by feminists of Plath's work. Showalter's refusal to see Woolf's "suicide as a beautiful act of faith, or a philosophical gesture toward androgyny" is a healthy corrective. Less convincing, however, is the ascription of Woolf's major breakdowns to "crises in female identity": menstruation, frigidity, childlessness, and menopause. While Professor Showalter says she has "no wish to substitute one magical explanation of her [Woolf's] anguish for another," she nevertheless does so implicitly by the full discussion of these crises and the reliance on Helen Deutsch's highly questionable analysis of female psychology.

While it is refreshing to see *Orlando* characterized by a particularly apt phrase ("tedious high camp"), it is more difficult to accept Showalter's argument that Woolf's "vision of womanhood is as dead as it is disembodied." This is especially true since *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* rather than the fiction are used as evidence more extensively. Even in these Showalter finds an unacceptable suppression of anger and withdrawal from life—"the ultimate room of one's own is the grave"—rather than a vision of the privacy and economic freedom essential to the woman writer. Woolf's work is thus too quickly once again dismissed as politically uninvolved, a label feminist critics have only recently begun to remove.

Even the suicidal, destructive, deadly influence Professor Showalter isolates needs further discussion. For example, the suicidal young man is by no means restricted to *Mrs. Dalloway*. As a contrast to the female protagonist he appears in other major modern novels: e. g., Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Drabble's *The Realms of Gold*. It can be argued that these novels echo an entirely different positive pattern evident in Woolf's work: an affirmation of life and triumphant survival by women rather than the attractiveness of death.

*A Literature of Their Own* is an impressive work that fully engages the attention of the reader. Any disagreements or reservations attest to its vitality and importance.

Far less can be said for Mary Ann Singleton's *The City and the Veld: The Fiction of Doris Lessing*. Devoted to a major contemporary writer, concerned with ideas and patterns, this study deals with an important subject. Professor Singleton sees Lessing's work as explicable by reference to three symbols or motifs: the veld, "the unconscious, physical world of nature"; the city, which "is half-evolved consciousness, the destructive fragmentation of partial awareness"; and the "ideal City...a hope for the future: the unified individual in a harmonious society."

Unfortunately this scene—often arbitrarily imposed—does not contribute much to a richer understanding of Lessing's work. Although some of the most obvious themes are discussed, Professor Singleton often ignores tone and context, misreads stories, or uses literary terms imprecisely. The study contains several contradictions and reveals a naiveté about distinctions between influences and parallels, fact and fiction, plot summary and analysis. The writing is too often careless and unclear. That Professor Singleton is unfamiliar with feminist criticism is perhaps forgivable. More serious is her neglect of previous critics whose work has particular relevance to her undertaking: Selma Burkom, Lynn Sukenick, Mark Spilka. It is undeniable, however, that she has located three dominant motifs in Lessing's fiction.

Hopefully the continued interest in women writers will encourage additional analyses of Lessing's art and thought. Singleton and Showalter are absolutely right in seeing Lessing as a major contemporary writer.

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AGATE NESAULE KROUSE

*Young Man Thoreau* by Richard Lebeaux. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977. Pp. 256. \$12.50.

Relying heavily upon Eriksonian methodology, Richard Lebeaux presents a fresh, at times a quite personal interpretation of Thoreau in his pre-Walden years. Lebeaux argues that America's failure to supply suitable father figures as role models prompted Thoreau and his generation to be rebellious, to seek the new and to scorn the recent past, an act which engendered intense guilt feelings over the rejection of the father. In compensation, many young people of Thoreau's day strongly felt the impulse towards "generativity," towards supplying models of conduct to guide the next generation. Thirdly, the discovery of new, fitting models must be preceded by a long period of self-searching and introspection—Erikson's "moratorium"—which can in itself become a tempting model for the conduct of life. This last point may be the most fruitful because Lebeaux explicates the connection between this psychological concept and Thoreau's craft, particularly his hibernation imagery which sometimes metaphorically represents the poetic experience. Occasionally this book risks the danger of its methodology, and some statements verge on the tautological (p. 13), the simplistic (p. 9), or the hyperbolic (pp. 212-213), but on balance *Young Man Thoreau* ably demonstrates the benefits of applying the Eriksonian approach to literature.

HENRY GOLEMBIA

*Edward Bulwer-Lytton* by Allan Conrad Christensen. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1977. Pp. xvii + 268. \$12.00.

Professor Christensen's declared aim is to establish a view of Bulwer as "dedicated artist rather than facile opportunist," but he achieves far more than that, for he has, in effect, redeemed Bulwer as a subject worthy of the most careful literary attention. After presenting a lucid and concise picture of Bulwer's personal and artistic assumptions, Christensen follows his career chronologically. He shows how Bulwer emphasizes first one side and then the other of the persistent opposition between the claims of personal identity and those of the common life. The highly self-conscious youthful novels are followed by the more objective novels of crime and society, the historical novels, and the middle-class Caxton stories; but Bulwer returns to a fascination with identity and self in his late novels. Between the early and late novels are his various experiments in balancing the duality he perceived in man's nature. "Roughly suggestive of the dialectic pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis," Christensen says "the debate involves first the recognition and rejection of both the external and internal worlds and then the discovery of a realm that fuses aspects of the two."

By describing Bulwer's underlying beliefs in a guiding Deity, in a soul that longs for an ideal realm beyond materialism, and in the importance of bringing individual identity and common life into proportion, Christensen reveals an intellectual consistency and a hitherto unacknowledged artistic integrity in Bulwer's work. Bulwer emerges as an author fully conscious of his art, if not

always capable of fulfilling his expectations. Christensen further reveals how thoughtfully Bulwer dealt with such monumental themes as "the historical problem of evil" in what are often taken to be mere sensational novels, thereby suggesting that without some knowledge of Bulwer's aims and achievements, which were recognized and rewarded in his day, it is not possible to appreciate fully the works of other writers of the time, including Dickens, a theme that Christensen examines briefly in an "Afterword" entitled "The Influence of Bulwer-Lytton in His Own Times."

This gracefully written study is surely one of the finest examinations of Bulwer's literary achievement and it deserves attention from any scholar interested in the art of the novel and in nineteenth-century English literature.

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*Confinement and Flight: An Essay on English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* by W. B. Carnochan. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977. Pp. xi + 212. \$10.95.

Writers of eighteenth-century England were obsessed with enclosure and escape. Carnochan's study is valuable not only because it reminds us of the ubiquity of these concerns, but because it does so by revealing their often surprising permutations and effects: how they worked changes on the traditions of the pastoral and the quest motif; how they informed prospect poetry and the Gothic novel; how totally, in fact, they were part of the thematic and rhetorical fabric of the literature of the age.

The enclosure haunting the writers, of course, was the enclosure of the self, a condition of being, suggests Carnochan, brought on when conceptions of an infinite universe replaced those of a closed world. Infinitude bred ambivalent feelings: on the one hand, writers cherished their imprisonment as a secure, fixed place in the frightening immensity of space; on the other, they hated their confinement and yearned to soar. When confinement did engender desires for flight, these too were experienced ambivalently, with joy at the sense of release but, more often, with fear and bitterness, for in the eighteenth century flight usually turned back to its starting point in the prison of the self and thus became an ironic reminder of limitation. Not only did the writers project their anxiety of confinement and fantasies of flight into their characters, into generic experiments, thematic material and plot structures, but, as they came to assess more fully the enclosures of mind, world and body, they radically redefined themselves as artists. Increasingly, the artists became more self-conscious, viewed their functions as diminished, sensed themselves as powerless and guilty watchers whose promise of release and coherence must be more modest; they began to toy with silence.

If this picture of the eighteenth-century artist seems similar to his tormented, obsessed and guilt-ridden counterpart of the twentieth century, the resemblance is intended by Carnochan, for whom most eighteenth-century works "seem like previsionary comments on our own fantastical lives." Indeed, the purpose

of the book is to make the eighteenth century our own, to demonstrate the "proposition . . . that writers throughout the English eighteenth century knew in their bones, if not always in their minds, that they lived in a new world." And so Carnochan uses the sensibilities of the new world to understand those of the old. Now, to sketch the past with the template of the present has certain advantages. For one, it allows us to get a purchase on what otherwise might have gone unnoticed, to see in nascent form patterns of ideas and feelings whose meanings and dynamics are fully clear only at a later stage in their development. And Carnochan puts modernity to good use in his discussions of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tristram Shandy* and, especially, in his fine analysis of Samuel Johnson's mentality. But this use of modernity can lead—and often does in this book—to a serious danger: meanings may be seen which simply are not there. There are too many of these moments, and Carnochan abandons analysis for impressionistic argument, special pleading and tortuous over-reading, all of which put considerable strain on the texts. (In "A Satire Against Reason and Mankind," Rochester dismisses high-flying intellectual pursuits with the metaphor, "So charming ointments make an old witch fly/And bear a crippled carcass through the sky." Carnochan gives Rochester's rather straightforward contempt a decidedly twentieth-century significance: "It is as if [Rochester] had peered into the future and discovered the immense abyss of Berkeleyan space turning into the scene of obscure rites and strange secret horrors that Kepler never dreamed of, or Pascal's little cell turning into a Gothic torture chamber.") At his worse, as in his discussion of *The Beggar's Opera*, he becomes merely histrionic, making comments which are meant to be suggestive but which are so damnably elusive that any precise meaning wiggles out of our grasp.

But ultimately this is a frustrating book for another, though related, reason. In claiming the eighteenth century for the twentieth, Carnochan should have been more careful to keep in mind contexts, not so much to preserve the integrity of the age as to understand the evolving pressures which forced the present out of the past. To work it the other way around—to see the past exclusively in terms of the present—is hopelessly to muddle both. In spite of a solid thesis and a number of insights, *Confinement and Flight* is frustrating because it is so curiously groundless, at best cavalier toward historical contexts and particulars. For instance, although he shrewdly points out that isolation, an obsession with things and a growing passion for wordlessness are somehow related, he never says how and why they are, for he never goes into the roots of their relationship in the complicated context of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate over the nature of language, the growth of scientific ideology, and the trends of empiricism. And yet these are among the specific issues which affected Defoe and Swift and which, in their later historical development, bear upon Beckett and Joyce. In the end, one gets the impression that Carnochan sees history as a hothouse where the human sensibilities luxuriantly exfoliate themselves unaffected by the outside world. Such disregard for the historical environments of the present and the past seriously impoverishes the significance of both.

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