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Book Reviews

Figures of Capable Imagination by Harold Bloom. New York: Seabury Press, 1976. Pp. xii + 273. \$11.95. *The Mark to Turn: A Reading of William Stafford's Poetry* by Jonathan Holden. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976. Pp. ix + 91. \$8.50 cloth; \$3.25 paper. *The Echoing Wood of Theodore Roethke* by Jenijoy La Belle. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. Pp. x + 174. \$11.50. *I Am: A Study of E. E. Cummings' Poems* by Gary Lane. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976. Pp. ix + 134. \$9.50 cloth; \$4.00 paper. *Four Poets and the Emotive Imagination* by George Lensing and Ronald Moran. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976. Pp. xv + 223. \$10.95.

Harold Bloom is a brilliant man. The essays in this collection on particular poets, on Strand, Ashbery, Ammons, and Hollander are for the most part superb recoveries of distinctive and complex imaginative projects. But Harold Bloom also has ambitions to theory and even to prophecy which produce the demonic Other of purely literary brilliance—an incredible sloppiness and arrogance towards logic and discursive reasoning which makes me wonder how literary criticism maintains even the minimum level of respectability it has among intellectual disciplines. If Bloom is one of our best and most influential critical fathers, one can only despair about the ephebes who respectfully accord him authority.

The themes and method of argument of this work are established by Bloom's initial definition of literary meaning:

The meaning of a strong poem is another strong poem, a precursor's poem which is being misinterpreted, revised, corrected, evaded, twisted askew, made to suffer an inclination or bias which is the property of the later and not the earlier poet. Poetic influence, in this sense, is actually a poetic misprision, a poet's taking or doing amiss of a parent-poem that keeps finding him... (p. 9).

This definition almost forces the critic to make arbitrary parallels between poems, to work a good deal of the time on levels of abstract generality which enable him to posit resemblances while ignoring distinctive qualities (since meaning is not a property of particulars), to argue for the importance of traditions defining chains of influence—here primarily an American Romantic Orphic Tradition deriving from Emerson—and to treat poetic creation in essentially psychological terms as a version of the Sartrean desire to posit one's own origins and become a god since the poet is deprived of any concrete existential concerns. Moreover this definition exemplifies Bloom's characteristic forms of argument. There is no recognition that his is on the face of it an

odd definition of meaning with no philosophical support and indeed no concern for the issues discussed in contemporary disputes on the subject. Bloom does not even deign to discuss those who share his insistence that meaning is primarily a function of relationships between texts. And for good reason, since Lévi-Strauss and Derrida are far more respectable—the former arguing that meaning is not just another work but the informing structural logic unfolded by various versions of a myth and the latter showing how there is a necessary oscillation among texts so that it is impossible to define any fixed relationship between individual poems.

The ultimate irony in Bloom's casually dismissing any careful consideration of the question of meaning is that his definition does not even logically support his own purposes. If one refuses to treat meaning first as a property of a specific utterance, he has no way of knowing what poems are its precursors, because he neither knows what he is seeking a precursor for nor what the precursor might mean without knowing its precursor, *ad infinitum*. Indeed if there are to be strong poets at all, the critic must be able to understand the precursor in order to gage the strength of the misinterpretation. If there are no coherent particular meanings, there is no meaning to the concept of misinterpretation. And finally it is a travesty of Nietzsche's and Yeats's theories of antithetical expression to treat strength as misinterpretation. Strength for them depends on understanding the other, be it a person or a tragic condition, and then on creating a counter-expression that fully engages the other's strength. Misinterpretation, then, is a sign of weakness, not of strength, because it implies that the writer could not face his antagonist directly.

The reviewer of Bloom must make a choice. He can overlook the sloppy arguments and stress the often superb practical criticism or he can take Bloom as a model of less than capable criticism, at least to those who dream that criticism can be a respectable and debatable form of public discourse. I choose the latter course because it is the road less taken and because this book provides so powerful a guide for "strong criticism." We might see it, in fact, as exemplifying six revisionary ratios which show us how the critic "can convert his inheritance into what will aid him without inhibiting him by the anxiety of a failure in priority, a failure to have begotten himself" (10).

1) *Clinamen*. In criticism this term refers normally to a creative swerve away from what a quotation seems to say. It also includes really ambitious revisionary swerves from all standards of common sense and qualified argument into sweeping generalizations. The latter are the most strikingly audacious figures: on influence, "Poets, who congenitally lie about so many matters, *never* tell the truth about poetic influence" (173); on Emerson's stating that the blank in nature is in our own eye, "This is the more than Coleridgean formula. . . which made possible the Romantic poem in America, down to this present day" (48); and on Stevens' Americanness, "Stevens fulfilled the unique enterprise of a specifically American poetry by exposing the essential solipsism of our Native Strain. No American feels free when he is not alone, and every American's passion for Yes affirms a hidden belief that his soul's substance is no part of the creation" (110).

After these, mere misreading of given passages seems downright meek, so I will cite only one example (for others, cf pp. 42, 73, 79, 84, 85, 87, 88). The

subject of discussion is Emerson's passage on the transparent eyeball which ends, "I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty" (49). Now Bloom, after citing the journal entry from which Emerson took this passage and which lacks the reference to seeing: "Though Emerson centers on his eyes, he *sees* nothing, but inherits beauty and power. . . Beauty is not in things seen, not even by seeing into the life of things, but is the recognition of self, and power is one with self" (50). Here the strong critic makes two moves we would not expect in one who accepts established critical procedures. First he makes assertion do the work of argument. Misreading the passage saves one the labor of showing that there indeed may be parallels between solipsism, faith in an impersonal absolute mind, and oceanic self-abnegation by which vision leads to a sense of divine immanence. Having taken this step (which also enables one to ignore the priority of Quentin Anderson on these themes), he is prepared to conflate the apparently different treatments of self in Whitman, Stevens, Ashbery and Ammons and to make sloppy use of the *Tractatus* in order to equate Romantic sublimity with what Bloom calls "solipsistic realism." And second, Bloom's rage for generality ignores the most interesting differences between Emerson's journal entry and the passage in "Nature." The journal entry is dead sentimental public rhetoric which becomes transformed well after the experience into a dynamic and dramatic moment of personal vision. Bloom in effect misprizes Emerson into a thinker and ignores the qualities of his art—mistaking what he says leads to neglecting what he does.

2) *Tessera*. In criticism this device allows more *bravura* performances than *clinamen* because it entails taking a whole poem, retaining its terms, but meaning them in an opposite sense from the author's. Again there are two basic uses of this ratio. First the strong critic simply asserts the true source or meaning of a metaphor or an allusion. Hence the spirits Coleridge invokes in "Religious Musings" are "Miltonic Angels" (8); when Coleridge blesses his son at the end of "Frost at Midnight" "he is in some sense poetically 'misinterpreting' the beautiful declaration of Adam to Eve, 'With thee conversing I forget all time'" (12); Stevens' Interior Paramour is "his version of Whitman's Fancy," (106) and his "Poem with Rhythms" "has a hidden origin in Whitman's 'The Sleepers'" (116); and, to conclude what could be an endless list once the strong critic has mastered the use of phrases like "in some sense" and "hidden origins," when Emily Dickinson tells us "Paradise is an 'uncertain certainty' . . . we know she means the Paradise of Poets, which is Orphic" (84). (This last phrase creates a rare double *tessera*).

The second type of *Tessera* reverses the meaning of a whole poem. For example, Yeats's "Cuchulain Comforted" is read essentially as a paradoxical equation of Cuchulain and the cowards becoming birds and as a version of English concerns for the sanction of a community with respect to death (96-99). Here strength consists in ignoring both Yeats's repeated insistences on death as the moment of solitary triumph over circumstances and his structural contrast between Cuchulain's integrity and the cowards' metamorphoses because they renounced heroic identity. Or take a more concrete

example where the text is quoted and then perverted. I give the concluding lines from Stevens, filled with first person plural terms:

The right within us and about us
 Joined, the triumphant vigor, felt,
 The inner direction on which we depend,
 That which keeps us the little that we are
 The aid of greatness to be and the force

Now Bloom, still refusing to distinguish an impersonal version of self and mind from Emersonian self-reliance: "There is nothing communal here" (109).

3) *Kenosis*. This is a Bloomian speciality. It involves making momentary concessions only to empty out the law of contradiction and free the theoretical critic from stubborn data (or from those trappings of naturalism that have always offended the Blake in Bloom). Here is a pure example of *kenosis*: "The root meaning of 'desultory' is 'vaulting,' and though Coleridge consciously meant that his poem skipped about and wavered, his imagination meant vaulting, for 'Religious Musings' is a wildly ambitious poem. 'This is the time,' it begins in direct recall of Milton's 'Nativity Hymn,' yet it follows not the Hymn..." (7). But this ratio is most effective when combined with *tessera*, as in this comment after quoting the "Dionysiac" (51) Emerson telling us that sublime vision comes only "to a pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body": "This may sound merely conventional, or even tiresomely sensible, but like Whitman's almost pathological emphasis on purity and cleanliness and Dickinson's obsession with her White Election, it is a sublime passage of Orphic enthusiasm..." (79; for similar, wilder logic, see 100-101).

Kenosis is particularly useful when one is confronted by contradictions that might make a weaker critic qualify his generalizations. Suppose for example one must deal with the various models of the self I have mentioned while also reconciling the scepticism and sense of limits of later poets with the prime precursor, Emerson of "Nature" and "Self-Reliance". First you quote Ashbery on the blindness of the ego, then Emerson on the self joining God, and you link them by "The closest (though dialectically opposed) analogue [to Ashbery]" (136-137). Then you can string their differences together as parallels. And for the more difficult problem of making Emerson's optimism the source of a modern sense of poverty, the critic need only invoke the later Emerson (conveniently forgetting that he had earlier condemned this Emerson for inauthentically submitting to the reality principle, p. 63) and try a daring double *kenosis* on the same page:

This is the faith of Emersonian Self-Reliance, yet severely mitigated by the consciousness of late-coming.... The later Ammons writes out of a vision "Transcendental only by its bottomless entropy," yet still Emersonian, though this is the later Emerson of the *Conduct of Life*, precursor of Stevens... (142).

4. *Daemonization*. The first three ratios are essential to supporting strong arguments—the later three to developing full scale theories. Of the last group daemonization is Bloom's forté. It consists in discovering a power or a principle in poems which lies just beyond the author's knowledge; hence the

critic can in effect invent and impose his own version of latent content in these works. This principle then is absolutely necessary for Bloom's central project, at least if my own weak daemonizing of his work is correct. For behind Bloom's speculations on influence lies an important and serious problem—how do we explain originality and change in literature. If one takes this problem as resolvable in terms of a single theory (and only a mind immune to the cautionary work in recent philosophy would so expect a single general explanation for such diverse materials), he must posit two constants. He needs a view of what is being changed—hence Bloom's insistence on precursors and traditions—and a psychology of why change occurs—hence Bloom's principle of anxiety and of the poets' desire to become God by appropriating his predecessors and positing his own origins. Now given the multiplicity of the data such a theory must account for, daemonization is crucial. Bloom's project requires myth-making as completely as does the enterprise of metaphysically defining first principles or the shape of history, and daemonization allows one to posit a level of reality not contradicted by the particulars such myths claim to explain. By so abstracting the nature of influence, Bloom can ignore (after utilizing *kenosis* to mention) the facts that Pater hardly ever mentioned his precursor Ruskin, that Dickinson only once mentions Orpheus, or that Stevens seems to have been far more interested in Coleridge and French poetry than in American Romanticism. All Bloom needs is the chance to draw parallels from roughly common themes; daemonization provides the principles for justifying them, whatever a given poet says or thinks.

In this book, Bloom's daemonizing project is to adapt his theory of influence to the specific task of establishing Emerson's Orphism as the basic precursor defining the "native strain" and true tradition of American poetry. His argument is suggestive, if difficult to summarize. Orphism is a true American religion, opposed to most theology because it worships "the real mysteries of life, of potencies (daimons) rather than personal gods (theoi); it is the worship of life itself in its supreme mysteries of ecstasy and love." (80). Then, given this base (which is general enough to make Dante and Shakespeare Orphic poets, as indeed Elizabeth Sewall, another of Bloom's unacknowledged precursors, has claimed), Bloom defines the Orphic poet by three basic features. He resists all influence in his rage for immediacy and divination in all its forms (a feature often contradicted in the book); he worships the divinities Eros, Dionysius, and Ananke; and he engages in a pursuit of total vision always threatening "a loss of divinity" (69).

Each claim in his argument, however, soon runs into trouble and requires rescue by daemonization and the three specific ratios. The basic assertion that there is one tradition or native strain in American poetry (75, 147) will not bear much analysis because it involves ignoring or trivializing poets like Eliot, Williams, and Lowell and must turn simple differences into opposition to Emerson in order to preserve his centrality (123-24). Moreover all sorts of distinctions, like that between different modes of presenting the self, must be collapsed to preserve coherence in the tradition. Thus only rhetoric manages to get the Orphic Trinity in as a constant: if Stevens seems to wander from the fold, in a given poem, Bloom confides that the Emersonian echoes are

admittedly faint but at least Stevens' recognition of limits and praise of poverty can be seen as invoking Ananke (85, perhaps Pope too then is Orphic) and again, on Dickinson, "Life is solipsistic transport extended to the Bacchic communal through her poems" (83). Then, when the going gets rougher, Bloom can only assert contradictory truths and hope for weak readers who will not be taken aback by claims that Ashbery and Ammons participate in the same tradition and yet "have no common qualities" (129). In a similar vein, Orphics seek priority, but also worship time (81), they seek to overcome death but also invoke Ananke (83, 90, 93); and they court authentic loss but they also work at persuading "necessity to remit her oracles that prescribe our wanderings" (69, 79). These contradictions, in turn, are bolstered by four daemonizing strategies: Bloom claims that poets not faithful to his vision deceive themselves (144), are unwilling Orphics despite their explicit intentions (85, 86, 131, 138), present spent versions of an Orphic faith rather than new explorations of a different faith (87, 142), or are failures because they do not have the content of the transcendental Orphic tradition (e. g. 128-29 where this charge mistakes Merwin's very deliberate attempts to explore the space of Biblical vision when no traditional mythic contents are available to consciousness).

5. *Askesis*. This is the turn towards solitude that marks the critic strong enough to present a fully original theory no longer even interested in accounting for or directing particular reading experiences. Since it pervades all Bloom's work, we need only note one aspect of its effects. Bloom could make sense of all the contradictions created by his arguments about a distinctive American tradition if he would follow others who treat a myth precisely as a structure capable of preserving a field of contradictions. But then he would be only a latecomer and would have to renounce his more dramatic psychological theories of the agon of influence and accept a less exalted place for his strong poets, perhaps for the solipsistic ego itself.

6. *Apophrades*. This ratio manifests itself as holding open one's work to what had previously determined it—now others can enter because the poet is strong enough to be generous, strong enough in fact to make it appear he has written his precursor's work. In critical practice, however, *apophrades* creates a system so loose that it triumphs over logic and competing critical views, all of which become versions of it. Here Bloom even triumphs over both common sense and his own theory. Consider his case on Emerson. Emerson is praised for being so strong an American poet that he overcomes the anxiety of influence and simply asserts his originality (69, 133). Yet Bloom's whole theory insists that "strong poets become strong by meeting the anxiety of influence, not be [sic] evading it (141)." Perhaps once one reaches *apophrades* he just leaves his work open to the most radically opposed claims, like a non-Orphic god finally triumphant over Manicheanism. (The same trap occurs in Bloom's explanation of the relative lack of strength in American Jewish poetry as caused by the lack of a strong precursor. But if strength requires a precursor, we logically have an infinite regress and no possible original strong poet).

If we dwell exclusively on the logical contradictions overcome here by *apophrades*, however, we miss Bloom's ultimately audacity. His hero free

from influence is Emerson—the man normally seen as the most eclectically dependent of major American literary figures, the man, in fact, whose triumph depended on his inability to understand fully those influences he could not dream of surpassing. Even the concept of power Bloom so admires in Emerson is bastardized Wordsworth, just as his transcendentalism is watered down and Americanized from Carlyle's simplifications of German Idealism. Emerson has more charm than strength, and in order to understand the strength he does have, we must turn to Lawrence not to Bloom. For Emerson's triumph was in partially adapting Carlyle to the American struggle for escape from Mastery, Kingship, and fatherhood.

Bloom's book is a chastening experience to one who believes there can be both capable imaginations and responsible criticism of them. Bloom stands, rightly, for speculative and philosophical criticism rather than mindless gathering of facts or proliferating of interpretations. But his defense of the mind is really its defeat, because he relies on wild generalizations and does not fully trust his own considerable power in expressing its noblest traits—a capacity to register subtle qualities and to adapt generalizations by careful qualifications and reasoned, debatable distinctions. *Das Mystische* or “the actual divinity already present in the creative spirit” (94) cannot in our age lie in bold mythmaking or paradoxical assertions praising poets' refusals to accept death (90). Instead it consists in those moments when minds discipline themselves sufficiently to define new and publicly shareable apprehensions of distinct particulars and relationships. Bloom has raised interesting questions which might lead to such revelations—especially in his description of ironies attendant upon the poet's paradoxical task of at once disclosing meanings and sharing the divine property of creating them and in his articulation of strategies by which thinkers must come to terms with the past and adjust it to the present. But our ambiguous relationship to the past does not warrant a single theory of influence and self-creation. The past exists in ideas, intuitions, and principles of authority, as well as in precursor poets, and it provides terms poets and thinkers can adjust to present realities in a wide variety of ways. And strength consists not so much in pure self-creation as in adapting one's performance of his ego to common problems and purposes. As Stevens put it (in his desire to escape, not to affirm, solipsism), “The measure of the poet is the measure of his sense of the world and of the extent to which it involves the sense of other people.”

In this context, it is tempting to describe Bloom's book as a tragic failure. Its errances stem from a brilliance unwilling to accept the standards and limits of the social traditions defining his discipline. But using terms like “tragic” for literary criticism smacks of influence by the pomposities of a critic who “prophesies” that Ammons will be the major poet of our age. Vico's influence is more acceptable and needs no revisionary misinterpretation: “These must be the bounds of human reason. And let him who would transgress them beware lest he transgress all humanity.”

II

The other books under review help us understand, if not condone, Bloom's excess. If they are typical, they show that our profession does not provide the

competition that might hold Bloom to canons of logic and reasonable evidence. Those who are careful and logical tend, as even the best of these books indicates, to be dull and uninterested in complex ideas or the imaginative vitality of poems and poets. Then, in reaction, anything complex and speculative seems preferable—especially when traditional ideals of criticism as humble mediation of poems threaten to make us all latecomers without recourse to fathering ourselves and when we resist methods of close reading that at least provide concrete fields for testing the performance of critical intelligence.

The first three of the following books make this reviewer despair—not so much because they are bad as because they seem so simply ordinary and unnecessary. They express no pleasure in the operations of critical intelligence and thus offer no testimony of the way poems dramatize the complexity and depth of the imagination. They are content simply to describe poems and themes, with little careful analysis, sustained argument, or concern for contexts of any kind. One wonders if the authors have thought at all about what functions these books might serve or what audience they are addressing. They write Baedekers of imaginary worlds, Baedekers one suspects, intended for those who never leave home. Those already interested in the poets will know virtually everything the books say, and those the books might be useful for will probably have neither cause nor desire to read them.

Lensing and Moran's book on the "emotive imagination" in Bly, Wright, Simpson and Stafford could have been much more than the dull piece of work it is. Their topic is a distinctive mode of post-modern poetry first described by Donald Hall (1962), in which concrete subjects of lyric simplicity are suddenly transformed, by the shift to surreal, a-logical images, "into a personal and subjective instant of emotion" (p. 11). We are all familiar with the mode. We want to know the poetic ends it might serve, the aesthetic and ontological values sustaining it, the problems the mode creates and the complexity of the solutions posed, and the relations it has—in conceptual and finally in evaluative terms, to other modern modes. Instead we get little more than a tedious and imprecise working out of what Hall said in just a few pages. We are told that the simplicity of this mode makes poetry available to a large audience, that it frees us from the limits of rationality (if only critics could approach these limits) so that mythic and emotive dimensions are implicated in ordinary experience, and that the poems rely on features not emphasized by the New Criticism like personification and "timing" in order to capture an "imaginative interplay between subject and attitude, world and levels of the unconscious" (p. 11).

After this the book becomes less interesting. The second chapter explores the relationship of this mode primarily to imagist techniques and to the modified surrealist poetry translated by Bly and Wright. But while the authors recognize the oversimplification of Bly's manifestos, they for the most part accept his evaluations. Thus they ignore the link between Pound's definition of the image as recording "the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (quoted, p. 30) and Bly's description of the image as a sudden leap inward. And by accepting Bly's critique of imagist poetry as lacking "the subjective," they do not

consider crucial problems about how a poem can be meaningfully inward without being vague and mushy or how the modernist aesthetic of rendering and presentation provides a context for at once interpreting and measuring this new mode. Then on the translations, they simply describe obvious features, leaving themselves in an interesting dilemma. The surface features they describe are present in much Romantic verse, especially Impressionist poetry of the 1890's, so what is new about their four poets? But to show what is new would involve analyzing beliefs and rhetorical strategies, thus calling into question their simplistic concepts of subjectivity and "beyond rationality." Subjectivity rendered in poetry is artificial and objective, and poetry (most good poetry, at least) uses very rational means to reach ends not available to scientific rationality. More important, their level of analysis precludes their considering the limits of the genre, or at least the kind of problems the poets must solve. Poems that proceed primarily by descriptive images and then shift to non-logical imagistic connections are likely to sustain simple, even banal, conceptual oppositions—say between unconscious and reason, Bly's live world and dead world, subjective and objective, the infinity of surfaces, or the authenticity of poetic souls and the narrowness of all bourgeois and technological thought. Moreover such poems, working without ideas and on sharply opposed levels, leave no room for refinements of thinking or for dialectical working out of problems—there is only the vague infinite to save us from surfaces and bourgeois values. Bly wants emotional shock, unaware that shock rarely creates deeper awareness or enduring feelings; shock in fact is the staple of Gothic art—now with the unconscious as our Castle of Otranto.

Still, there is room for poems dramatically creating the sense of imaginative expansiveness these poets seek, and indeed some of their work is quite good. But one will not find out why in the individual chapters devoted to each poet. Lensing and Moran tell us that this poetry, opposed to academic New Criticism, requires a new mode of criticism. Unfortunately their opposition leads them to ignore any method that concentrates on what poems do as unique structures. Their critiques usually read like bad dissertations: themes are mentioned, briefly described and then exemplified as indeed present in a number of poems ("Other poems in the New Poems section recall some of Wright's earlier topics," p. 122). The Stafford chapter, for example, states his general aim as the use of images, frequently and profoundly "mythic" (another undefined problematic term) searching for an "earlier age identifiable by certain spiritual values associated with the wilderness," values which can sustain the poet and our technological age (p. 178). Then the catalogue—examples of Stafford's nostalgic memories of childhood, his idealizing of his father, his extension of his father into the exemplary figure of the Indian at home in the wilderness, his use of wilderness ideals as a critique of contemporary society, and finally his use of emotive imagination to keep alive a boyhood world and to sustain, through a series of horizontal metaphors (like the "journey"), a set of vertical hierarchies contrasting an outer world of surfaces and shadows to an underground world the poet tries to reveal.

Jonathan Holden's book on Stafford is no more complex and no less patronizing in its pedagogic relationship to the reader. But Holden has charm

because he moves as slowly and cautiously and precisely as Stafford. And, in the course of developing his catalogue of themes and examples, he at least tries to relate his themes in a dialectical fashion and he places the emotive imagination clearly in a context of beliefs and desires. Holden treats imagination as Stafford's central theme, arguing that Stafford envisions it as nurtured by a sense of distance which elects fascination with the hidden, the dark, and the invisible—all properties which render vision inadequate and require supplementing by the imagination. Each metaphor eliciting imagination is then tediously traced through Stafford. Subsequent chapters develop related themes especially the relationship between nature and a sense of place (without considering how common this concern is among Romantic and contemporary poets or the problems it creates), the use of these relationships for social criticism, and the sense of self as continually discovered in what the poet can make visible: "The marks which the walker leaves behind are his best and only clue to his ultimate identity" (p. 61). Holden is interesting on the relationship between self and imagination, but he works in a historical and philosophical vacuum, a vacuum especially evident if we recall Bloom's far more complex and expansive treatment of similar themes in his discussion of Ashbery, Ammons, and Strand. If Bloom errs by excess, Holden errs by being too careful. He never allows himself to elaborate the life in Stafford's metaphors or to treat poems as complex structures expanding levels of awareness.

Gary Lane's short book on Cummings comes from the same, not very promising series by the University of Kansas press. And he too takes on the character of his subject—a brash Romantic energy, individualism, and conceptual superficiality that can be embarrassing without Cummings' wit and charm. Lane's book is not a book—it has no conceptual structure but offers five chapters (with a short introduction and conclusion) each giving brief close-readings of five poems on the topics of seduction, heroic individualism, death, satire, and "Love's Function." In choosing to celebrate Cummings through generally accurate (though often strained) close readings, Lane has made a bad strategic choice. Most of Cummings' good poetry relies on sharp, witty expressions of clichéd and uncomplicated values, so his poetic effects stem usually from surprise rather than depth. Thus, even though he is perhaps excessively conscious of the limits of criticism, Lane's analyses either trivialize Cummings or themselves. The latecomer offering a third critical book on Cummings has very little to do, a problem Lane confronts in two ways. First he tries to make up in enthusiasm and energy of style what he lacks in subtlety. The result is that he seems likeable, though often a possible object of satire in his own right—"these words of a dead man . . . can modify the guts of the living" (p. 4), and "Cummings tried to board his readers at a station deeper than intellect" (p. 5). Second he tries to defend Cummings' ideas and his greatness as a poet—a task requiring a critic with more faith in the powers of intellect. His praise of Cummings is often vitiated by bad taste: for example, Lane tries to convince us that the image "the keen primeval silence of your hair" has its "own precisions, indelible, alive, highly specific" (p. 26), and he chooses as his climactic subject Cummings' "all worlds have half-sight, seeing either with," a poem with lines like "he's free into the beauty of truth;/and strolls the axis of

the universe/love." For Lane this poem is the "fitting summation of a life's work of celebrative ecstasy" (p. 108). Two passages where Lane defends Cummings' values should provide a similar fitting summation of this critic's celebrative ecstasy:

Prufrock, in short, has lacked the selfhood and the courage to "[squeeze] the universe into a ball/To roll it towards some overwhelming question." You-i has dared that question—and gaily watched the ball of the earth fall away (p. 38).

Death may be apprehended not as rigid finality but as sea change, not as end but as new beginning, and so seen, it "shall have no dominion" (p. 57).

If Lane in his most egregious moments seems the ephebe of Bloom's prophetic pomposity and his literary superficiality in dealing with philosophical themes, JeniJoy La Belle is a more careful and less ambitious image of the scholarly Bloom. Her book on Roethke is an accurate, intelligent study of his uses of past writers. She has no general theories warping her performance of an important function in not only reminding us of how bookish a poet Roethke was, but also in explaining the various ways he made use of the past as a means for expanding his imaginative identity. Her main thesis is that Roethke's dance involves history as well as nature. Roethke seeks union both with his natural body and with that larger imaginative body which Blake imaged as Albion and Roethke, like Frye, found figured in poetic tradition. She supports her thesis with a remarkable breadth of learning. No book on influence can be convincing in all its particulars because of the varying degrees of similarity we must expect. Yet Professor La Joy's hard work and judicious use of Roethke's prose and notebooks make a convincing general case.

Her treatment of Roethke's changing uses of allusion is worth summarizing (she does so in an appendix). Roethke's early poetry finds itself trapped in resenting the very models (often minor modern poets) it feeds on. Conventionality and originality are at war. But when Roethke turns to reflect on his own origins in *The Lost Son*, he finds his quest at once directed and deepened by employing archetypal structures of growth and development articulated by the Romantic tradition. These themes, and Roethke's growth concern to reconcile interior and exterior forces, lead him in his middle period primarily to Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Excursion*. Then, as Roethke turns to more formal and meditative poetic forms, his field of allusions reaches further back to metaphysical poetry and he begins to use echoes in a variety of ways—for contrast as well as complement, and for formal as well as thematic effects, until his last work blends in complex orchestration a wide range of influences which at once particularize and place his vision.

Although La Joy frequently offers sharp explanations of the effects achieved by allusions, she often lets her pursuit of parallels blind her to the distinctive tones and energies of Roethke's poems. Moreover she might have learned from critics like Bloom how to give more vitality and tension to the problems involved in relating past and present or in so blurring one's individuality in pursuit of a larger identity (for Roethke's madness took the form of oceanic identification with his surroundings). And she might have been more careful

in making distinctions: she need not make claims like "once the special context is discovered... we realize the poem's true subject" (p. 15, as if the poet wrote only for source hunters), nor need she so readily equate explicit and unconscious allusions or allusions with similarities stemming from shared thematic concerns and repeated conventions.

In this desert, even a pretty good book on Roethke becomes an oasis. Usually we simply scan or ignore mediocre critical books, but being forced to read them carefully for a review raises some disturbing thoughts about the profession (perhaps only because even these thoughts become relief from tedium and, in Bloom's case, exasperation). There are sufficient signs in all these books that the authors are more intelligent and humane than their books. The books, then, must take their form in large part because of the profession's lack of any sense of the functions of literary criticism and its failure to train people either to think analytically or to pose contexts and questions which might lead to meaningful inquiries. Such training might make it possible to read criticism as an exercise in imaginary dialogue rather than as an excuse for invidiously comparing oneself with the authors. Maybe we can motivate people to begin changing the profession if we make them all write omnibus reviews.

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Jules Michelet: Nature, History, and Language by Linda Orr. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976. Pp. xvi + 215. \$12.50.

Ms. Orr has done much to revive interest in a writer long neglected by American and English scholars. Until recently, Jules Michelet was esteemed primarily as a kind of national monument in France (Charles De Gaulle liked him *and* Joan of Arc) and as a kind of failed historian elsewhere (too lyrical, not objective enough, self-indulgent as a stylist, got his facts wrong, etc.). Combining the techniques of traditional (New) criticism with aspects of contemporary French semiotic theory and a dash of psychoanalytical lore, Ms. Orr has at once pushed forward a line of inquiry opened up by Roland Barthes in his remarkable *Michelet par lui même* (1954), imaginatively utilized the archival researches into Michelet's life carried out by Paul Viallaneix, and made an original contribution in her own right to our appreciation of Michelet's complex literary endowment. Like Barthes, she has delved deeply into the obscure reaches of Michelet's "obsessions," but she has redeemed Michelet's late nature studies as something more than aberrations in the life of the historical scholar. She has shown the continuity between Michelet's conception of history, on the one side, and his obsessive search for the "secret" of nature and its processes, on the other. More importantly, however, she has, in her analysis of the rhetoric of Michelet's prose, disclosed the logic of his thought processes in both historical and natural studies. At the same time, she forbears to claim for her author an authority in either domain greater than he can legitimately claim.

Disillusioned by the failure of the Revolution of 1848 and dismissed from his professorship at the Collège de France for his "liberal" views, Michelet took a new young wife and headed south for his health. There he took a new interest in nature, previously a blind spot or at least an unexamined mystery in his earlier speculations on history, culture, and civilization. Under the influence of his wife and the salubrious effects of the mudbaths, that "nature," which he had formerly ranged against "humanity" and treated as the "villain" of man's quest for salvation, was now transformed into the protagonist and hero of a cosmic drama, of which "history" was now conceived to be only a secondary manifestation. Between 1856 and 1868, the reformed anti-naturalist published four "natural histories," as shocking to his former admirers as they were offensive to scientists everywhere. These were *The Bird*, *The Insect*, *The Ocean*, and *The Mountain*. Formerly treated as unfortunate lapses in the career of a great (or at least popular) historian, they are now treated as principal documents for comprehending the literary stylistic patterns of a great rhetorician. By pursuing the historian's strange inquiries into a subject about which, to say the least, he had virtually no scientific knowledge, Ms. Orr has succeeded in laying bare the literary dimensions of the historian's works.

Michelet's "method" was the same in both kinds of endeavor: empathetic. Still the unrepentant Romanticist (though he rejected the label), Michelet sought to penetrate to the interior of his objects of study and to experience the processes operating in earth, sea, and sky. In his study of birds, insects, etc., he would, he tells us, "avoid human analogy as much as possible." But this did not lead to the elimination of what Ms. Orr (somewhat ambiguously) calls "dialectics" from his view of nature. In his study of nature, as in his study of history, a sense of the painful clash of opposites remains present as an organizing perception: "life/death, subject/object, individual/humanity, past/present, reality/illusion, inside/outside, up/down, fate/freedom, unity/multiplicity, grace/justice, nature/man." His purpose, it seems, was to demonstrate that these oppositions were not to be construed in the manner of warring Manichean principles, but understood rather as "organizations of movement and change, ambiguous poles of value in the context of mutually dependent couples."

How were they mediated? Or rather, how was it possible to imagine their mediation in such a way as to account for those "monsters" that appeared at the point of their conjunction? Ms. Orr correctly points out that this interest in (and fear of) "monsters" in nature was characteristic of the age; it appears in Darwin as well as in Michelet. But the poet differed from the scientist in the domain to which he had recourse for a model by which to explicate the process of interchange. In language itself, Ms. Orr suggests, Michelet found at least one process in which unity in change could be comprehended. By exploiting the possibilities of conversion provided by poetry and rhetoric, Michelet purported to show how that which appeared horrible and evil—the spider, for example—could be successively recharacterized, so as to become transformed into something beautiful and good.

Yet, this verbally created image of harmony, order, and health was always threatened by that which underlay it or transcended it, that which lay "beyond"

it, whether in the blinding light of the heavens which obscured all difference or in the viscous seabed where all was a formless one. Moreover, there appeared to be gaps in the continuum that not even *poesis* could deal with, as his study of insects revealed. The undifferentiated, the vacuous, and the illicitly mixed continued to haunt Michelet, a function, Ms. Orr (following many other critics) argues, of his ambiguous, potentially incestuous relation to his mother and a resultant sexual ambivalence. Whatever its cause, the horror of these gaps in the continuum of nature became bearable only within the context of a consciously cultivated irony that was both "rhetorical and philosophical." In the end, Michelet professed the wisdom of the "comedian" who goes his way with the knowledge that there is "one fixed thing in the world: change." But he was never to extend this irony to the consideration of his first passion: history. That remained the basis for a deathless hope for redemption, remnant of an irrepressible fantasy of return to the womb—sublimated perhaps into a utopian vision of a future in which humanity would be both free and unified.

Ms. Orr's book is written with wit, learning, and insight and is a treasure of Michelet's fascinating *bizarrerries*, but it is never frivolous and always returns us to the complex humanity of the individual who is its subject. It is, as they now say in France, eminently *lisible*. And while utilizing the insights of contemporary French criticism, it is given to none of the latter's oracularousness and ponderous philosophizing. It is to be hoped that this book will contribute to that process, now underway, to do for Michelet what modern English critics have done for Gibbon, that is to say, teach us the value of his "literature" when we have dismissed his "science."

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Cultural Thematics: The Formation of the Faustian Ethos by T. K. Seung.

New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976. Pp. xviii + 283.

\$16.50.

Some books are particularly embarrassing to review because they deal with important questions in silly ways. In this book T. K. Seung, a philosopher by trade, goes slumming in the world of literary history and theory, apparently without realizing that literary studies need not combine overbearing pretension with scant regard either to texts or to the development of a coherent argument. The ambitious thesis and innovative methodology he announces in his opening pages are never demonstrated in the chapters on Dante, medieval theology, Petrarch, and Boccaccio that follow. For the record, his prefatory argument is that the transformation of the "medieval ethos" into the "modern ethos" can usefully be seen in terms of a series of attempts, dating from the twelfth century, to resolve a conflict between sacred and secular interests implicit in the originally totalizing notion of universal hierarchy. This conflict, Seung says, originates for the medieval world in the work of the fifth-century

Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius, whose radical monism endowed the physical universe with new ontological significance. As Seung would have it, when the influence of Augustine's linguistically oriented Neoplatonism began to wane in the twelfth century, the "Dionysian conflict" assumed center stage, acted out first in a cycle constituted by Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, and again, more fatefully, by Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

Though the dramatic metaphor is only casually invoked, near the end of the book, it suggests an alternative to materialist and mechanistic models of cultural change. The study of "cultural thematics" Seung advocates can be justified as an investigation of the extent to which the creative play and the shaping power of symbolic systems themselves govern the course of cultural change. Seung does not, however, push this metaphor very far. He never actually shows the dialogue going on between one text and another. Similarly, though he suggests that the process he wishes to describe might have a musical structure, he never says which musical structure and, in fact, misses seeing Petrarch's brilliant retrograde inversions of Dante. In other words, the suggestion is there for anyone who wishes to pursue it, but Seung himself neither justifies the metaphors with examples, nor exploits them in support of the conceptual and procedural preoccupations he mentions at the beginning of the book. Instead he simply leaves it that the "constant interplay of existential themes or motifs" in a cultural tradition constitutes a new object of inquiry.

A second suggestion is that such an inquiry allows the literary artifacts of an historically remote period to be understood in a way relatively free of modern biases. One of his chief concerns in devising his method, he says, is to hold the interpreter's own cultural context in abeyance: for instance, the theocentrism of medieval writing and the medieval way of being in the world is to be taken more seriously than he feels modern interpretative methods have allowed. (Why he insists upon reading works of Petrarch and Boccaccio, which he himself regards as transitional, in terms of a rigid conception of the medieval Christian world view remains a mystery, to which I will have to return.) Riding the issue of modern parochialism very hard, he says that he intends to use the analytical tools bequeathed by Heidegger and Wittgenstein, but in a way that corrects for the "ahistorical limitation" of phenomenology and the "errors of...contextual naivete" to which linguistic analysis has been prone. In spite of these claims, however, he does not consider the possibility that the kind of transition he wishes to investigate might involve changes in the very processes of signification, that an incipient shift in cultural perspective might be registered more immediately in formal structures than in thematic content. He never, in fact, questions his own assumptions about the locus of meaning, assuming throughout the book that every writer's relationship to, or use of, language is pretty much the same. The appeal to Heidegger and Wittgenstein is misleading. No further reference, implicit or explicit, is made to them in the body of the book.

In practice Seung is hardly more engaged with the literary and theological texts on whose behalf he purports to be writing than he is with the theoretical issues he raises so portentously. Breaking his own rules, he relies exclusively on English translations, many of them far from literal and all of them open to

the charge of embodying the very biases against which he has warned. Surprisingly he does not even include references to definitive original language editions (only an occasional dual-language text) in the notes or bibliography. This omission is illogical on all counts. It belies Seung's interest in this particular material. It creates unnecessary difficulties for the researcher interested in pursuing the inquiry. It suggests that Seung has not in fact given much thought, as someone concerned with cultural differences presumably would, to what happens in the course of translating, not only from one time to another, but from one language to another.

Seung's commentary on the texts he sets out to reexamine is heavily indebted to twentieth-century literary criticism and histories of philosophy, again despite his supposed mistrust of modern interpretative habits. His excesses in marshalling other critics to corroborate the most elementary observations make tedious reading. Worse, he is capable of clumsy misalignments between text and commentary. On one occasion, for example, Seung argues:

Petrarch's oscillation between the heavenly and the earthly poles of his existence appears to be reflected in the perpetual fluctuation of his moods. Robert M. Durling has called our attention to this fluctuation in his fine study of Petrarch's *Rime*.²⁸ He regards the *Rime* as a cumulative record of Petrarch's shifting moods. He is fascinated with the continuous mutation of Petrarch's mood from moment to moment and says, "His state varies abruptly from the extreme of hopelessness to manic joy."²⁹ Here are two sonnets that illustrate this abrupt change.... As Petrarch anticipates, his mood changes in a short while from despondency to ecstasy. (pp. 132-33)

The final tercet of the "despondent" poem goes as follows:

Go, you are safe, because Love comes with us;
And wicked fortune may decline and pass,
If the signs of my sun predict the air.

The "ecstatic" sonnet begins:

I saw on earth angelic manners show;
Heavenly beauties, in the world, alone,
So that recalling them is joy and woe,
For it seems shadow, smoke or dream that shone.

The first is, in fact, the more hopeful, forward-looking poem; the second is ambivalent and nostalgic. Furthermore, these two sonnets, 153 and 156, do not represent an abrupt transition, although there are others that do, but belong to a series of lyric moments in which the emotional shifts (marking a movement from the present situation into imagination and memory) are gradual and clearly motivated. Even the unsatisfactory translations by Anna Maria Armi that Seung uses here are reliable in showing this much. Nevertheless, Seung's discussion of the *Rime* is all the more inadequate because the subtlety and significance of Petrarch's poetry lie as much in its technical features—rhyme, syntax, paratactic structures, contrapuntal designs—as in any translatable narrative content. Seung offers no account of where Armi's translations fall

short of the originals. The remainder of his superficial treatment of the *Rime* passes from a brief discussion of paradox to a polemic against New Critical readings of Dante!

Larger, more drastic errors abound as do more trivial ones. The discussion of Augustine is a travesty, typified by such remarks as, "The ultimate guideline Augustine offers for the reading of the Holy Scripture in *De doctrina christiana* can be summed up in one sentence: 'the true spirit of the Bible is in its literal sense.'" Whatever the advisability of "summing up" one of the richest texts in the history of interpretation theory, D. W. Robertson's translation of the *De doctrina*, cited by Seung, unequivocally contradicts this assertion:

Nor can anything more appropriately be called the death of the soul than that condition in which the thing which distinguishes us from beasts, which is the understanding, is subjected to the flesh in pursuit of the letter. . . . There is a miserable servitude of the spirit in this habit of taking signs for things, so that one is not able to raise the eye of the mind above things that are corporal and created to drink in eternal light (*On Christian Doctrine*, bk. 2, chap. 5).

I think Seung has confused Augustine's focus on language with literal-mindedness in setting up his own opposition between linguistically and materially oriented theology, but this is making the case more clearly than it is made in the book. Compounding such primordial confusions, Seung also deals carelessly with his secondary sources. Some of his inadequate and misleading attributions mask from himself as well as from the reader certain questions which are much to the point. In characterizing the figure of Laura in the *Trionfi*, for instance, he refers to a description in Thomas Bergin's *Petrarch*, where, however, Bergin is not speaking of the *Trionfi* but rather of the *Rime*. Bergin does not suggest that the two Lauras are interchangeable. In fact, their differences are indicative of the vastly different poetic strategies by which the two works are governed. Other slips merely call into question the general attentiveness of Seung's reporting. In a discussion of the *Africa* Seung cites Aldo Bernardo's *Petrarch, Scipio, and the Africa* at a point where Bernardo's subject happens to be the *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. In a third instance Bergin is not cited as the source of a position with which Seung disagrees. Instead, again frustrating the interested researcher, this position (like many others throughout the book) is attributed to certain unidentified "others."

There are many other mistakes and misconstructions which mar his argument, but this catalogue is already discouraging. One would not expect Seung to succeed by these means in locating the shift in perspective he is looking for, and, indeed, he does not. Instead he vacillates eccentrically between censuring "the Petrarchan sickness" or "the Boccaccian man" for bringing on the ills of modernity, and insisting, on the contrary, that these writers had no part in the affair, that the only difference between them and their theological forbears "lies in their historical context." Ironically, the structure of a substantive change Seung might have disclosed has been successfully investigated by one of the scholars whom he treats offhandedly. In an unpublished Yale Ph.D. dissertation and in an article, "Ser Ciappelletta: A Reader's Guide to

the *Decameron*" (*Humanities Association Review/La revue de l'association des humanités*, Winter 1975), Millicent Marcus offers a detailed analysis of Boccaccio's departure from the norms of traditional didactic narrative which, I think, serves Seung's purposes much better than his own attempt to assimilate Boccaccio to the mainstream of medieval didacticism. He seems not to have grasped the significance of her work. Taking her analysis as the straw man in his own discussion of the tale of Ser Ciappelletto, he metamorphoses her into yet another group of "some" critics—"Some have claimed...", "Some might fear...", "Some may be disturbed...", etc.—and inaccurately identifies this reading as the "usual way of responding to the story." Apparently he is not very familiar with Boccaccio studies, and, on top of that, he cannot recognize his own concerns clothed in someone else's idiom.

Seung's own idiom, finally, calls for some comment. Stylistically it resembles that of Charles Atkinson's Englished Spengler, and the resemblance is no accident. Seung has tacitly taken Spengler as his model cultural historian. *The Decline of the West* is, of course, a fascinating artifact, but Spengler's mode of discourse—his tendency to reify his perceptions in abstract nouns and to discuss these abstractions as if they were themselves historical forces—is his weakest point. He is read for his informing imagination, not for his positivistic conceptual system. Seung, however, seems to have taken Spengler's enabling apparatus for the structure of truth itself. He has, at any rate, coerced his material into a peculiarly Spenglerian mold which is inimical to open-ended investigation. The moral of the story Seung tells becomes simply and solely that "the Boccaccian man seems to fulfill all the essential conditions for being what Spengler... has called the Faustian man." Without questioning the usefulness of such terms or the ontology of the pattern Spengler thought he saw, Seung concludes, "The emergence of the Faustian tradition is the transformation of the Dionysian into the Boccaccian ethos" (emphasis mine). This conclusion is just not interesting enough to warrant so much bypassing of rich and complex texts. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio demand a great deal of the twentieth-century reader because, as Seung intimates, they have much to offer. His misguided emulation of Spengler and his unconscionably sloppy scholarship combine to deprive what should have been an important study of any appreciable theoretical or philological value.

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Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre by Elizabeth W. Bruss. Pp. 184. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. \$10.00.

Elizabeth Bruss seeks to show "how autobiography can be at once one and many, different and the same (p. 7)"; she describes, as the subtitle to *Autobiographical Acts* puts it, "the changing situation of a literary genre." Her means for doing so is in large part convincing. A genre, she affirms, is an

"illocutionary act," "an association between a piece of language and certain contexts, conditions, and intentions (p. 5)." Given this initial equation, she can reconcile the one and the many. We understand—or begin to—how the various intentions and assumptions of autobiographers develop within a delimiting context of "self-evaluation (p 13)."

Bruss's approach to autobiography is carefully, promisingly set out in the introduction. Only on the last page of the introduction does a confusion of potential significance seem to threaten her argument. She is to consider in detail four autobiographies, four distinct illocutionary acts. She is also—it is abruptly announced—to consider four contrasting works. *Grace Abounding* will be set against *Pilgrim's Progress*, Boswell's *London Journal* against the *Life of Johnson*, and so on. The argument, therefore, spreads in two directions simultaneously. We learn, from chapter to chapter, about the historical development of autobiography—about the range of variation possible in this particular illocutionary context. At the same time, we are presented with a group of case studies, showing how a writer can navigate his way between genres. These lines of development are closely related; nonetheless, they should not be treated as the same argument. To do so, as Bruss usually does, is to open the way to some annoying confusions.

Considered as independent units, the four central chapters (on Bunyan, Boswell, DeQuincey, and Nabokov) are satisfying. Here, the emphasis is heavily on distinctions *between* genres. A passage from De Quincey's *Autobiographical Sketches*, for example, is juxtaposed with an excerpt from *Suspiria de Profundis* which is identical almost to the word. Bruss then shows that the apparently similar passages perform different functions. The differences, signalled by unobtrusive changes in wording, are finally generic. DeQuincey's particular concept of autobiography can be defined in contrast to his concept of prose poetry. The account of *Suspiria* is orthodox (cf. J. Hillis Miller's *The Disappearance of God*); the distinctions between this work and the *Sketches* are convincing and original. Similarly with other chapters: the strategy of contrast and comparison works to fine advantage.

This is not to say that the explications are flawless. The Bunyan chapter pays little or no attention to allegory, that indispensable method of representing mental facts. One need not be a scholar of the seventeenth century, only a reader of *The Allegory of Love*, to see that Bruss has missed the boat here—that she has said true things much more complexly than was necessary. In the Nabokov chapter, a different sort of problem arises. Bruss emphasizes the place of both historical situation and authorial intention in the development of autobiography. How surprising, then, that she neglects to place Humbert Humbert in a landscape, to show his self-deceptions and self-assertions as created partly from his confrontation with the United States: widows, highways, tennis courts, motels, and all. This "parody" of autobiography, as she calls it, is based largely on the situation of the man in an alien culture. Nabokov's manipulation of our feelings about Humbert and his fantasies are tied up closely with the juxtaposition of sensibility and place. This autobiographical act has its own peculiar logic—not merely the logic of a decayed romanticism (DeQuincey gone to seed) but the logic of such a romanticism grappling with post-World War II America.

The basic problem, though, is not inaccurate explication. With most of Bruss's energy in these chapters going to the contrast of autobiography with other genres, we tend to lose sight of the continuity—or lack of it—between one autobiography and another. At the beginning of chapters three, four, and five there are paragraphs which show how *Grace Abounding* compares with the *London Journal*, and so on; at the end of the book, Bruss makes a brief attempt to elaborate on these paragraphs, to show, in a kind of overview, how autobiography has changed while remaining the same. Much can be learned from these passages; however, by the standard Bruss sets in her introduction, they do not provide a satisfactory account of "the changing situation of a literary genre." What they do provide are some potted comments on the *zeitgeist*, which we may or may not be willing to accept. Is it true, for instance, that in the Romantic period "the newly-glimpsed profundity of spontaneous subjective life trivializes autobiography as a genre (p. 96)"? It would be instructive to correlate this comment with Karl Weintraub's claim that "Autobiography assumes a significant cultural function around A. D. 1800," when there arose "that particular modern form of historical mindedness we call historicism or historicism (*Critical Inquiry*, June 1975, 821)." The point is not that either Bruss or Weintraub must be wrong; they may both, in fact, turn out to be correct, if we understand the terms and context of each discussion properly. Unfortunately, Bruss does not give us sufficient data to grasp the meaning of her statement. Is it, on the most elementary level, a statement about DeQuincey in particular or Romanticism in general?

Bruss's account of autobiography's "changing situation" is as much a matter of implication—of those mysterious spaces between the chapters—as of explicit statement. She suggests some fascinating themes: the life-span of literary conventions (when and how do they wear out?), the tendency of related genres to borrow from each other, the interaction of individual intention and cultural situation. Never, though, do we get a coherent synthesis. Bruss has trouble building toward general statements to the very end; in the last pages, she maintains that autobiography, by its nature, discourages sequential narrative. This observation seems to be as unnecessarily prescriptive as some she condemns. Many autobiographers use discontinuous structure powerfully, but a number of important writers (I would suggest Gosse and Newman) narrate an orderly set of events precisely as a means of "self-evaluation." Bruss would have been well-advised to return, in her conclusion, to the illocutionary rules she sets up in the introduction (pp. 10-11).

I will make a last criticism, concerning the linguistic concepts which inform the book. Bruss says that a genre is, or is like, an illocutionary act. Chapter two ("From Act to Text") catalogues "some linguistic markers sensitive to context (p. 31)"; it shows, that is, how choice of mood, tense and case give us clues to the nature of a literary work. Apparently, then, an illocutionary act (autobiography) can contain thousands of miniature illocutionary acts (questions, reminiscences, exclamations). It would have been good to hear more on this subject. How does one jump from a momentary linguistic gesture to a cohesive autobiographical statement: is the critic supposed to categorize individual sentences and then come to a conclusion about the work as a whole;

does he start with an intuition about general form and then look for small clues; is there something that makes one sentence more significant as a clue than another? Given the aspirations of *Autobiographical Acts*, these methodological questions need answers urgently. Without such answers, we are likely to be confused about proper units of analysis. Not only do the work as a whole and its syntactic building-blocks seem to exist on the same level of perception (both are illocutionary acts) but the relationship between them is obscure.

Autobiographical Acts is a good book which cannot quite live up to the standards it sets itself. Its openness and vigor make it one of the few sensible studies of autobiography; more than solving problems, however, it clears the way for future solutions. Bruss asks us to think coherently about the pitfalls and rewards of genre criticism; her application of linguistic philosophy to this exacting activity often works in practice, even where she has failed to control the development of her own argument. The achievement is considerable; it is also to be treated with caution.

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Wordsworth's "Natural Methodism" by Richard E. Brantley. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975. Pp. xvi + 205. \$10.95.

Among his many self-portraits in the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth characterizes himself in the guise of Bunyan's Christian as "a Pilgrim gone/In quest of highest truth." The image reinforces the generally accepted idea of a direct line of poetic descent between Milton and other Christian writers of the seventeenth century and the first generation of British Romantic poets. But there is less consensus as to the precise significance of this connection and the kind of "highest truth" sought. Concerning Wordsworth in particular it is admitted that his poetry is suffused with religious language and attests to a Christian framework dating back to Augustine's *Confessions*. However, a question which still vexes debate is whether Wordsworth is primarily a poet of Christian myth and value or the precursor of a more secular orientation and religious skepticism.

Most critics today tend to support the second of these positions. As presented by Ernest Tuveson, M. H. Abrams, and Geoffrey Hartman, this argument holds that Wordsworth recognized the threat posed by Locke's demythologized universe and sought to counter that outlook by reaffirming an intimate marriage between nature and the mind of man. But this emendation of Milton's "Paradise within" was to be, in Wordsworth's words, "a simple product of the common day" realized through the imagination as a form of unmediated "grace." As Abrams has made clear, the sphere of reference thus shifts from the supernatural to the natural, or to what Carlyle termed "natural supernaturalism." In seeking to "arouse the sensual from their sleep/Of death," Wordsworth was reconstituting traditional concepts of theology and redefining eschatology as a process of the poetic imagination. As seen by these commentators, then,

Wordsworth is essentially a poet who prefigures the inquiring spirit and revisionist tendency of a later age.

Richard Brantley adopts quite a different approach and emphasis. Preferring a theological and historical method of criticism to a philosophic one, he realizes that he "swim[s] against a strong current of fashion" (p. 1) by proposing that Wordsworth is not simply a Christian poet but in fact an exponent of Evangelical Anglicanism and Evangelical Nonconformism. If we accept this dissenting view, our reading of Wordsworth and our estimate of his achievement alter considerably. Yet such revaluation, claims Brantley, is warranted: "We cannot fully enter into the spirit of his poems without realizing that he endeavored to *remythologize* his Christian heritage and that he thus participated, as did the Evangelicals, in the revival and not the secularization or rejection of Christian myth and morality (for which he never found and seldom sought a substitute)" (p. 2).

This thesis would be less exceptional if Brantley were referring only to the Wordsworth who, from approximately 1810 until his death in 1850, embraced an increasingly conservative ecclesiology and gave his endorsement to the Oxford Movement. However, Brantley takes a broader and less sanctioned view. He is concerned to demonstrate the integrity of the poet's career and refute the usual charge made against Wordsworth of "an unfortunate conversion from a praiseworthy epistemological skepticism to a pious and complacent orthodoxy" (p. 77). Toward this end he suggests that the young Wordsworth was deeply affected by the evangelism of the reformers John Wesley, William Wilberforce, and Francis Wrangham. Their ideals of spiritual self-examination, experiential faith, practical charity, individual covenant-making, and "sincerity" appealed to the poet whose later work *The Excursion*—the main sanctuary of Wordsworth's "gothic church" in verse—Charles Lamb praised for its "natural methodism."

The impact of the Great Awakening, Brantley conjectures, might well have reached Wordsworth while he was yet a boy at Cockermouth in the Lake District, where Wesley and other itinerant preachers are known to have toured frequently. But it was during his undergraduate years at Cambridge, long a citadel of religious toleration and then a center for the Evangelical revival, that Wordsworth in 1788 is said to have experienced a "call" to the kind of fervent faith advocated by such ministers as Charles Simeon, John Berridge, and Rowland Hill. Wordsworth's subsequent sojourn in France from November of 1791 to December of 1792, when his republican sympathies were checked by the September massacres in Paris and Jacobin extremism, is treated as a symbolic crisis in Wordsworth's spiritual biography. Brantley, however, does not discuss a passage in *The Prelude* in which Wordsworth admits that at this time he "lost/All feeling of conviction" and "wearied out with contrarities,/Yielded up moral questions in despair." Presumably, Wordsworth's despair over "all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds" amounted to only a temporary apostasy, giving way by 1795 to the restorative influence of Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge. For this we have the poet's own testimony, though some have suspected that he never completely overcame his fear of skepticism and solipsism.

Brantley is at his best when examining the structural and thematic affinities between Methodist and Puritan autobiographies and Wordsworth's personal

epic on the "Growth of a Poet's Mind," as *The Prelude* is subtitled. Although forced to infer Wordsworth's familiarity with such narratives, Brantley reveals how the pattern of youthful error followed by repentance and conversion leading to spiritual maturity and the quest for perfection is replicated in the organization of Wordsworth's poem around epiphanic "spots of time." These analogues persuade him that Wordsworth recognized "the apotheosized and apotheosizing vision" (p. 93). Stressing the continuity of Wordsworth's worldview, he also offers brief but interesting interpretations of some of the shorter poems, as well as of *The Excursion* which he compares to Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. Perhaps the least instructive section of Brantley's book, however, is that wherein he attempts to relate Wordsworth's conception of the sublimity of the animate universe to the Evangelicals' figurative reading of the "Book of Nature." What the poet portrays as "all this mighty sum/Of things for ever speaking" is reduced to "a system of pictorialized morality" (p. 154) and "naturalized emblemology" (p. 166). Few would deny that Wordsworth's vision encompassed the typology of Evangelical thought, but they might not agree that the artist's eye, along with the element of pantheism in his work, can be subordinated so strictly to a natural theology.

The final issue implicitly raised by Brantley's study concerns the nature of Wordsworth's commitment as a poet. We are told that poetry for him involved a "clear moral purpose" (p. 14) and that his poetic identity "derives from a religious ideal of service" (p. 36). But does this way of regarding the artist in relation to his work help to explain why the Wordsworth who in 1791, declined ordination in the Church of England and whose religious outlook Coleridge described as "semi-atheism" chose to become a poet? Brantley does show very effectively that Wordsworth was indebted to a tradition of radical Protestantism, that he affiliated both with Evangelicalism and with Anglicanism, and that, like Wesley, he was syncretistic. This last point is made when the author remarks that Wordsworth "poetically achieved a coalescing or interpenetration of subject and object," drawing on both epistemology and theology "to show how language leads outside the self and affirms a reality beyond" (p. 55). But does this "reality beyond" necessarily coincide with that conception of the noumenal postulated in the Christian schema? Moreover, Wordsworth often seems to discover in language itself, or *poesis*, an autonomous and redemptive act of the imagination: "visionary power," he says in Book V of *The Prelude*, "attends the motions of the viewless winds,/Embodied in the mystery of words." If poetry serves to exalt and transfigure the world of experience, Wordsworth must continue to be seen from a larger perspective than Brantley provides.

Nowhere, though, does Brantley argue that Wordsworth is merely an apologist for Christian doctrine. Emphasizing as he does the consistent spiritual idiom and symmetry of Wordsworth's poetry in a "neopapstolic" age, he has done much to correct T. E. Hulme's simplistic notion of Romanticism as being, "spilt religion" and opened a fresh avenue of inquiry to one of its major figures. Whether he has given us "the basis for a synoptic criticism" (p. xi) of Wordsworth, however, remains to be seen.

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The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy by G. W. Sherman. Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976. Pp. 518. \$22.50.

G. W. Sherman's study of *The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy* indeed stimulates interest in a specific but very important aspect of Hardy's work. It seems that Sherman immediately faced a problem as he was getting his project under way: whether he should study the "pessimism" of Hardy in all his works, or in a representative sampling of each kind of his writing (novels, the short stories, the lyric poetry, *The Dynasts*), or in an unrepresentative sampling of his works to try to prove either optimism or pessimism (pp. 404-5). Sherman concluded correctly, albeit ambitiously, that a "fair-minded appraisal should be based on all his work" (p. 405).

Sherman is thought provoking because he measures Hardy with marxist criticism—Marx's proletarian principles of economics and politics. To my knowledge, this has not been done in a full-length study. Whether the measurement really discovers what Sherman claims and seeks to demonstrate is the key point on which the success of the book rests. The scheme of his study is certainly comprehensive of Hardy's works. In the first chapter, "A Critic of Critics," Sherman asserts that he will be both a critic of Hardy's writings and "a critic of his critics" (p. 23), the total undertaking of which is truly ambitious. The second and third chapters are effective in their depiction of cultural and biographical background in "Wessex" country and in London respectively. Sherman then treats the Wessex novels, the "London Novels," constancy and change in a chapter by that name, the lyric poetry, and *The Dynasts*, in that order.

On the second page of his study, Sherman states his thesis: "The cause of his [Hardy's] pessimism was not his loss of faith in God from having read Darwin's *Origin of Species* as a young man, but his loss of faith in the leaders of society, both Whig and Tory alike, after 1867" (p. 24). In another instance, he asserts that Hardy realized "that the ruling classes had learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the lessons of the Napoleonic Wars in their conquest for control of the world market" (p. 34). In yet another instance, he alludes to the "agricultural malaise, which was the source of Hardy's pessimism and his concern in the Wessex novels" (p. 43). The first really perplexing matter for the reader is the author's lack of clear definition of pessimism. He alludes to Darwin's theory of evolution, which has an antecedent in Classical Epicureanism, a philosophy which has joy and optimism associated with the popular version of it; pessimism is a philosophy in which reality is looked on as essentially evil and which is associated with Schopenhauer more than with Darwin; frustration and gloom from observing social and economic injustice (which appear to be what Sherman means by pessimism) could hardly be construed as a philosophical stance. If Sherman means philosophical pessimism, the tradition of criticism is against him. One critic after another sees a Schopenhauerian stance only in such novels as *Tess* and *Jude*. And Sherman's correlations of social and economic positions of Hardy with marxist positions are often times very far-fetched.

Sherman's absolutist position regarding Hardy and pessimism should not be taken without consideration of other critics' judgments. Sherman declares:

"There is no question in anyone's mind but what [sic] Hardy was a pessimist. . ." (p. 23). W. P. Trent in *The Sewanee Review* (November, 1892) says that Hardy in drawing Tess "kept his eye fixed upon...nobleness" and thereby, submerged "his realism in idealism, his pessimism in optimism." D. F. Hannigan in *The Westminster Review* (January, 1896) writes of Hardy's "apparent pessimism" in contrast to vulgar-minded optimists who proceed by the method of hook or crook. An anonymous reviewer of *The Dynasts* for *The Edinburgh Review* (April, 1908) sees Hardy's "pessimism" as essentially Carlyle's Natural Supernaturalism and concludes that in action the poet-novelist "preaches against his own pessimistic theories." F. Manning in *The Spectator* (September, 1912) observes that the poet's pessimism "is only a habit of thought, a weariness with life that comes upon all of us sometimes," and that it "springs from his sympathy with mankind." Commenting on *Jude*, Charles Whibley in *Blackwood's Magazine* (June, 1913) asserts that a "man is not a pessimist because he perceives the obvious truth that all is not cakes and ale in the world." (The above positions may be found in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox). Very recently, Paul Zietlow in *Victorian Studies* (March, 1971) declares that it is "not only the act of artistic resurrection which redeems Tess, but her saving human qualities as well." And it is well known that Hardy himself disavowed the tag of pessimism along with other systems of philosophy that were sometimes wrongly ascribed to him.

Sherman's problem with philosophy in Hardy's writings, however, does not nullify the value of the book. Sherman obviously has studied Hardy's novels thoroughly and devotedly, beginning with the lost or destroyed *The Poor Man and the Lady* and including the masterpieces: *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*. His chapter on the lyric poetry strikes me as his most sustained criticism; he approaches the huge body of lyrics mostly from the vantage point of themes—love, Nature, society or social intercourse, occasions, philosophy, to name some—and allows his overall proletarian thesis to intervene relatively little; he mars somewhat this good chapter on lyric poetry by declaring in one instance that Hardy "valued people more than Nature" (p. 272) and in another that the poet felt that "Nature is better than Society" (p. 286). Sherman evaluates *The Dynasts* extensively but he may be self-defeating in one instance at least regarding his proletarian thesis; he says that the poem must be judged not so much as a traditional epic, but as poetry which is consonant with the age—the age of Darwin, Marx, Wundt, Einstein, Krupp's cannon, Enfield rifles, Nobel's dynamite, Roentgen's x-rays, and aerial photography (p. 299); in cultural purport, more of these are bourgeois than proletarian—a point that Sherman does not explain. In fact, Donald Davie in *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (1972) sees the middle class Victorian drive for success as a major characteristic of Hardy's lyric poetry; Davie's book would indeed have been instructive reading for Sherman.

Sherman's style is vigorous, but there are some typographical slips: Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* (p. 149), the "Rosettis" (p. 318), and a paragraph ended with a comma (p. 413). A clear distinction should be made between Hardy's first wife and his second (pp. 286, 289, 292, 295, 296 contain examples); the

index is inadequate here. The index is also inadequate in its fifty-seven page entries under Marx; I found twenty-nine allusions to him in a single chapter, "London."

In terms of the thesis of pessimism in Hardy set forth as caused by a loss of faith in economic and political leaders of his day, a proletarian stance, Sherman's study is not very impressive or successful. His measuring rods—developed out of Marx and Engel's economic and political principles—many times overshadow the objects measured.

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Victorian Heretic: Mrs. Humphry Ward's "Robert Elsmere" by William S. Peterson. Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1976. Pp. x + 259. £3.50 (New York: Humanities Press, \$8.00.)

Speaking metaphorically, we may call Professor Peterson's book a non-fiction *bildungsroman* of one sprawling novel (the story of a priest who loses his Anglican faith, resigns his living, goes into London's East End, and helps establish a new Theistic religion). Peterson studies how the fledgling novel was shaped in the earlier life of the earnest, scholarly granddaughter of Dr. Thomas Arnold, how it laboriously acquired its never-quite-finished form during three years of authorial groping, overextending, and desperate pruning, how it quickly and controversially attained vast circulation, how it made its author, in her middle thirties, famous and wealthy, and then how it irreversibly altered her life, in some respects for the worse. Peterson explains that his book is not a biography: he deliberately brackets "large periods and major interests," and presents only "those aspects of her intellectual and spiritual history which bear directly on Robert Elsmere" (p. 15).

At appropriate places Peterson proves to be a discerning critic, but the greater part of his book is historical, based upon extensive research in previously neglected documents. His bibliography lists more than a hundred titles of Mrs. Ward's non-fiction publications. He cites numerous letters, diaries, and other manuscripts scattered in various libraries, British and American. The writing is clear and the development is economical.

Peterson lets novel and novelist, while retaining their particularity, exemplify a "bittersweet quality of Victorian religious nostalgia... a moving, vivid human account of what it meant to go out into the wilderness of unbelief in the last century" (pp. 12, 13). For Mrs. Ward the road to that wilderness had run through briery historical research. A youthful disciple of the erudite skeptic Mark Pattison (model for Squire Wendover, who exacerbated Elsmere's doubts), she had become an authority on early Spanish literature. Assigned the Spanish articles for Henry Wace's *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, she struggled to translate "the witness of those centuries... into the historical language of our own day... closer to the realities of things" (quoted p. 92).

In the novel, Elsmere does research in medieval French, not Spanish, history. Trying to extricate truth from myth and legend leads Elsmere, as it had previously led his creator, to disbelieve New Testament miracles, particularly the Resurrection.

Elsmere's unbelief grieves his orthodox wife. Mrs. Ward had feared her heterodoxy would distress her deeply loved father, Thomas Arnold, whose two troubled conversions to Rome had cost him his Oxford career and ultimately his family. Peterson's most poignant pages are those treating the daughter-father relationship. He attributes Mary's liberal theology to her grandfather and her Uncle Matthew, but credits her father with her "essentially religious temperament... a constant factor in her personality" (p. 41). Her "feelings of guilt and anxiety" about him lay behind "her life-long effort... to persuade us that all who feel a hunger for God, whatever their creed, worship the same Deity" (p. 42).

Still, the novel makes it seem uncannily simple for new disbelievers to find a spiritually satisfying substitute. Apparently Mrs. Ward herself never owned to any essential loss of faith, but claimed only a broadening into what Peterson aptly terms "her reverent, quasi-Christian Theism" (p. 84). Quickly and comparatively cheerfully, Elsmere begins preaching the human Christ and "a Theism which cannot be discredited by historical research" (p. 149). Throughout a dramatically presented chapter he courageously lectures to a potentially unruly audience of East End anti-religionists on "The Claim of Jesus upon Modern Life." Mrs. Ward thought her best work was in the third volume, which sets forth Elsmere's reconstructed Christianity. Peterson disagrees: "Elsmere, never a strong personality, is flattened into an instrument of propaganda" (p. 152). But these final episodes, artistically deficient, seem partially redeemed by essayistic eloquence.

Ironically, neither of the men to whom the Ward-Elsmere Theism owed most, T. H. Green and Matthew Arnold, would have applauded Elsmere's leaving the Church. Peterson's vignette of Green, admitted prototype of Mr. Grey in *Robert Elsmere*, tantalizes us to know him better—a metaphysician whose "catholicity (or perhaps confusion of outlook)" (p. 78) "enabled Evangelicals, Anglo-Catholics, and Theists alike to claim him as their own" (p. 77). Although there are some close resemblances between Green's lay sermons and Arnold's *St. Paul and Protestantism*, the spiritual fervor Mrs. Ward imparted upon Elsmere probably owed more to Green than to the more detached Arnold. Mrs. Ward recognized that Arnold, who died before he could finish her book, would not have liked the outcome, although in "Literature and Dogma" he threw out in detail much of the argument suggested in "Robert Elsmere" (quoted pp. 32, 33). Peterson recalls Arnold's scornful comparison in "The Function of Criticism" between the meretricious "British College of Health" and synthesized "religions of the future." The more "Hebraic" niece "really absorbed only those ideas from him which were congenial to her own temperament." In her works Matt's ideas became "conventionalized, attenuated, and at times distorted" (p. 34).

Dr. Thomas Arnold's religious writings were much more complicated than his son's—if only because he positively believed so much that his son would

reject. His ideas were often ambiguous, as Peterson justly complains. The rigorous scholarship he encouraged, confident that it would confirm the revered essentials of Christianity, including the Incarnation and the Resurrection, led some of his followers into heterodoxy. But Peterson possibly makes too much—and clarifies too little—of the Doctor's elevating "the authority of moral conscience" or "inward witness" over Scriptural authority. Were conscience, or private judgment, so much more pervasive in his theology than in Protestantism generally? The then Anglo-Catholic W. G. Ward (he later converted to Rome) actually accused him of undervaluing moral conscience, particularly in its sin-convincing role. At least the point concerning "inward witness" requires more documenting from Dr. Arnold's sermons than one especially ambiguous statement that "the evidence of Christ's Spirit" is the most powerful proof of the Resurrection. How distinct is "Christ's Spirit," as Dr. Arnold used it here, from the Third Person of the Holy Trinity—the "Comforter" that Jesus promised would come after he himself went away? Elsewhere the Doctor's sermons are sufficiently evangelical on the Holy Spirit's role in speaking through the conscience. Certainly no mere dependence upon "inward witness" inhibited the Doctor from ceaselessly searching and preaching the Scriptures. We may find somewhat relevant Eugene L. Williamson, Jr.'s explanation of Dr. Arnold's theological application of Coleridge's famous distinction between *understanding* and *reason*: mere *understanding* confirms the historicity of the Gospels, but only the higher *reason*, uniquely God-given, can directly intuit God and bestow a faith with which understanding must not presume to meddle.

Mrs. Ward admitted that *Robert Elsmere* was rather anachronistic. Robert's dismayed reaction to historical evidences belonged more to the 1840's than to the 1880's, when, she explained, "the pressure is distributed from so many sides, & the alternatives...so much more attractive and inspiring than they were" (quoted p. 132). And yet the book reflected her own experiences of the latter 1870's, and brought fresh news to thousands of intelligent contemporaries. It was broadly true to individual dilemmas that would recur for decades to come. More damaging to her book's integrity is manuscript evidence that she first included and then slashed (only partially to appease her publisher's demand for cutting) "frequent and cogent objections" by Elsmere to Wendover's skeptical arguments, leaving Robert with "only the most pitiful sort of resistance." The result was "not only a deliberate weakening of the case for Christianity, as Gladstone and other reviewers complained, but also a weakening of Elsmere's character" (p. 124). *Robert Elsmere*, with all its excellencies—and it is better written than generally supposed—is finally less a work of art than of propaganda. A true artist will not deny fictional characters the freedom to say what creative imagination dictates they would have said.

JOHN O. WALLER

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American Literature: A Study and Research Guide by Lewis Leary. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976. Pp. xiv + 185. \$10.95 Cloth, \$3.95 Paper.

Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Literature of the U.S.A. by Clarence Gohdes. Fourth edition, revised and enlarged. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976. Pp. xii + 173. \$8.50.

A Field Guide to the Study of American Literature by Harold H. Kolb, Jr. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976. \$9.75 Cloth, \$4.50 Paper.

Bibliographies of American literature, whether of primary or secondary material, covering individual writers, genres, specific historical periods, or the field as a whole, have been appearing with increasing frequency. The main purpose of these works is, of course, to impose order upon and make accessible to students and researchers the scholarship which is also proliferating at a bewildering rate. Lewis Leary, Harold Kolb, and Clarence Gohdes all include comments in the introductions to their bibliographical guides concerning this proliferation. Kolb even declares that "Some of the publication, especially in the bibliographical field, is duplicative and unnecessary, even irresponsible.... The quality of scholarly criticism is also a topic of increasing concern" (p. x). Consequently, "The items contained in this bibliography are drastically, if not desperately and at last even defiantly, selective" (p. xii). Such selectivity is an important and often underestimated function of the general bibliographical guide. It makes the bibliographer more than a mere compiler; he performs, through his selectivity and in his annotations, an important critical service. One may ask, however, given this "duplicative and unnecessary" publication of bibliographies, whether the appearance of two new guides to American literature is justified, since Gohdes' *Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Literature of the U.S.A.*, now updated in a fourth edition, has served the same function so well since its first appearance in 1959. In addition to the question of duplication of effort, inaccuracies in Leary's guide and organizational weaknesses in Kolb's make the justification for their publication even more doubtful.

Leary has designed his *American Literature: A Study and Research Guide* for the undergraduate majoring in literature. In fact, the final 38 pages offer helpful advice on "The Research Paper," and Chapter One, "History of the Study and Teaching of American Literature" (pp. 3-10), presents a succinct survey of the rise to respectability of American literary studies. In the bibliography itself chapters are included on topics such as "Literary Histories," "Studies in Genre," and "Types and Schools of Criticism," the last introduced by an elementary and clear discussion of various critical schools. Chapter Ten (pp. 70-134) includes individual sections on 23 writers and poets. All of this is organized into paragraphs of related material. Leary asserts his critical prerogative in his annotations, for, as he asserts in the "Preface," his guide "lists books and essays that have been of most value to the compiler; another person might suggest other sources of instruction or have other things to say about the materials that are here recommended" (p. vii).

However, the basic inaccuracies in this guide negate its usefulness to a great extent. Of thirty article entries that I checked, fourteen contained errors,

including wrong page numbers, dates, volume numbers, titles, and in one case the wrong author. I found six errors on page 112 alone. I had previously found similar errors when using Leary's *Articles in American Literature 1900-1950* and *Articles in American Literature, 1950-1967*. One must ask how a bibliography, no matter how well organized and annotated, can serve the undergraduate adequately as a guide when it contains such basic mistakes. After all, the bibliography is basically an aid to help the researcher locate his material conveniently and quickly. Few things are as frustrating to him, or as time-consuming, as an undependable bibliographical tool.

Harold Kolb's *A Field Guide to the Study of American Literature* is directed to a somewhat different audience, primarily the "advanced undergraduate and graduate students." He states that sections IV and V, which list "Editions and Series" and "Anthologies," "have been designed with an eye to the graduate student who will soon be choosing texts for his own courses in American literature and recommending volumes for purchase by his school or college library" (p. xi). Appropriately, when Kolb lists *PMLA* in Section VI, "Journals," he includes a detailed annotation describing the organization of the Modern Language Association and its American Literature Section. He also includes sections on "Bibliographies," "Literary History and Criticism," and "Reference Works." Lengthy annotations follow most entries, and an "Author, Subject, and Genre Index" concludes the study.

Unfortunately, these annotations, and Kolb's organization, are the guide's major weaknesses. He states in his "Introduction" that "When possible and appropriate, the annotation attempts to capture the essential ideas of the work under discussion and the flavor of their presentation" (p. xi). In attempting to do this he frequently quotes extensively from the book being cited. The purpose often seems to be more to capture the "flavor" than to express the "essential ideas," which could often be given more clearly and economically in paraphrase. At times the purpose is even less clear. When citing Frank Luther Mott's five-volume *A History of American Magazines*, Kolb provides the following passage from the *History* as its annotation: "'The author was at work on Volume V of his projected six-volume work when he died in 1964. . . . Mott's daughter, Mildred Mott Wedel, has prepared this [fifth] volume for publication and provided notes on changes since her father's death.' Volume V contains a cumulative index to the five volumes" (p. 61). This annotation says nothing about Mott's methods or the scope of his study, and since the work is listed under "Literary History and Criticism," a misleading categorization, an informative annotation is especially needed here. In addition, comparative judgments should be given when two books are listed that cover the same field, especially since this guide purports to be defiantly selective. Kolb lists Alan S. Downer's *Fifty Years of American Drama, 1900-1950* on page 40, and Joseph Wood Krutch's *The American Drama since 1918: An Informal History* on page 52. The annotations consist of quotations from the books themselves concerning method and intent, and the researcher can discern differences between them by carefully reading these passages. However, a direct comparison by Kolb, with a much-needed cross-reference, would have been more useful and convenient. Kolb also includes in the "Literary History

and Criticism" section (pp. 25-87) such various and questionable entries as Herbert W. Schneider's *A History of American Philosophy*, Wilbur J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*, *The Growth of the American Republic* by Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenberg, and *American Studies: Essays on Theory and Method*, edited by Robert Merideth. The "Bibliographies" section (pp. 1-24) includes such disparate works as Charles Evans' *American Bibliography*, Gohdes' *Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Literature of the U.S.A.*, and Merle Johnson's *American First Editions*, the last "intended largely as a guide for the rare book collector." Thomas F. Marshall's *An Analytical Index to American Literature (Volumes I-XXX, March 1929-January 1959)* is included, but the more important bibliography of articles published in *American Literature* itself is unmentioned here. It is mentioned in the "Journals" section (pp. 113-120) in a description of *American Literature*, but the user of the *Field Guide* could not find this out in the index, or in any way other than accident. In addition, all entries are listed in alphabetical order, so that similar works are not grouped together. On the whole, the structure of this guide does little to further its intent, which, as Kolb states, is "to assist the student who, faced with more miles to cover, is being asked to run them faster" (p. xi).

The organization of Gohdes' guide, on the other hand, and its shorter, more critical annotations, allow quicker and more convenient access to its 1,000-plus entries. For example, non-literary but related fields are covered in separate chapters, such as "American studies or American civilization," "Book trade and publishing," and "American history: general tools." Entries within each chapter are not listed alphabetically, but according to importance and similarity. For example, Section Five, "Preparation of manuscripts for publication" (pp. 18-19), lists fifteen items, including first the style manuals, then books on copyright, and finally guides to literary markets. Thus the researcher can find similar items conveniently grouped together. The annotation to Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* shows the concision found throughout the guide: "The conflict of industrial and pastoral motifs; frequently illustrated in literary works." Throughout the guide Gohdes notes when an index is unreliable, or when a work is out of date. This critical approach reaches an extreme in the following annotation to Edwin H. Cady's *The Light of the Common Day*: "Ten essays on realism in American fiction which are topped off by a much needed corrective to the nonsense on the novel perpetrated by Richard Chase and Leslie Fiedler" (p. 100). Gohdes refuses to list in his guide, or even mention, Chase's *The American Novel and Its Traditions* and Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, both prominent studies in the field. Both Leary and Kolb list them, with thorough annotations, even though their guides contain fewer entries than Gohdes'. In this instance Gohdes carries the critical function too far. The user of his guide should be informed of the existence of these important studies, even if in the annotations Gohdes presents his arguments against them.

Although one may question Gohdes' judgment in this case, the most basic aspects of his book, its accuracy and its organization, make it a reliable, convenient, and informative work. The same cannot be said of Leary's and Kolb's books. Consequently, one must question whether they truly make the

additional contributions they are purported to make to the field of bibliography, especially since Gohdes' work already does, and has been doing, the job so well.

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Eliot's Early Years by Lyndall Gordon. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. xiv + 174. 16 illustrations. \$10.00.

This is the first full-length biography of T. S. Eliot to be worth serious scholarly attention. A carefully researched history of the poet's traversal from his St. Louis Unitarian boyhood to his reception into the Church of England in 1927, it is centered around a reading of the *Waste Land* manuscripts as the autobiographical document of that passage. The manuscripts, as Gordon reconstructs their order of composition, assemble themselves into a coherently shaped artifact of mind which originates with Eliot's near-conversion in 1914 and takes on its final distinctive form in reaction to his disastrous marriage in 1915. A different methodological starting point on Gordon's part might, of course, have led to different conclusions. James E. Miller, Jr., for example, in his recently published *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land*, reads *The Waste Land* in the biographical terms of Eliot's friendship with Jean Verdenal, the dedicatee of *Prufrock*. But Gordon's reading has preeminently the Ockhamite virtue of comprehensiveness. It takes more into account than anyone else's. Gordon has read Eliot's father's unpublished autobiography, Eliot's mother's religious poems, Eliot's woman-hating undergraduate verses, his wife's short stories *à clef* and diaries. She has read an enormous amount about the poet, and integrated it all into a reading of the poet's poem. In one of the photographs that accompany her text, Eliot in the summer of 1921, when he was on the verge of *The Waste Land*, glares into the camera with the face of one of Géricault's madmen. It is a powerful argument in favor of the biographical study of literary texts.

These favorable things said, it has to be added that the coherences which Gordon reads into Eliot's biography impose their own limitations on the reader. It is illuminating to devote three pages to Vivienne Eliot's personality, for example, but a certain amount of distortion enters the record when Irving Babbitt, by contrast, receives only one paragraph. In general, we see Eliot the man and Eliot the poet clearly in *Eliot's Early Years*, but Eliot the thinker drops into virtual invisibility once he has left Harvard. *Eliot's Early Years*, in short, is incomplete in a crucial area, and it needs to be supplemented with such a book as John Margolis' *T. S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, 1922-1939*. But Gordon's book, incomplete as it stands, fills the lacunae of all the purely literary studies of the poet. On its own terms, it is indispensable. The definitive Eliot study will not be written, presumably, until after Eliot's letters at Princeton are de-sequestered in 2020, but while we are waiting for that event, *Eliot's Early Years* will do very well indeed.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Poetics of Enchantment by Edgar A. Dryden. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977. Pp. 182. \$10.00.

Reversing Melville's dictum that Hawthorne's moments of "sunlight" are but "bright gildings" playing about the "edges of thunder-clouds," a generation of moral critics has viewed these clouds as veils, disguising and disclosing a "light beyond." Edgar A. Dryden's new book, a phenomenological reading of Hawthorne's texts, is in many respects no different. There is the ideal world of enchantment which inevitably solidifies and threatens the subjectivity of the self with its materiality. Since we have lost our commitment to a "hierarchical, essentialist metaphysic"—presence replaced by an absence—we have fallen into a world of process, divorced from origins, nature, God, each other. A writer can only approach that ideal world in the process of fiction. The isolated self, seeking to commune with others from a "privileged" position, generates "enchantments" which transcend the limits of the material world; yet that process—born of desire and not of love—sows the seeds of its own "disenchantment."

Such a view of Hawthorne's work proceeds from the "home satisfaction" of *The House of the Seven Gables*, rather than the "hell-fired" quality of *The Scarlet Letter*. If the conclusion of the former seems brittle or forced, Dryden argues, it is a sign of our distance from an ideal world: love is a sacred relationship in a secular world. But in *The Scarlet Letter*—which receives little attention here—Hawthorne wondered whether "hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom." And in his notebooks he suggested that "Selfishness is one of the qualities apt to inspire love." Where Dryden distinguishes between desire's acquisitiveness and love's surrender, Hawthorne seemed to yoke the two as aspects of one ambivalent relationship. Perhaps his *Love Letters* are themselves fictions and their disenchantment is only revealed in the "last sad years of his life" (p. 162). But to suggest that would be to place the texts as objects in a larger context, and Dryden is hesitant to disturb "the spell cast over us by the fictive world" (p. 13).

Because Dryden reconstructs an "inside narrative" of Hawthorne's texts, in which Hawthorne figures as a "thematic self," sentimental longings for home and love are not analyzed but generalized and celebrated. This raises problems in reading *The Marble Faun*, for instance, and Dryden can only acknowledge a "gentle nostalgia" and "mild irony." When viewed from inside the text, Hawthorne's "society" appears as the generalized reification of fictions created by man in the process of extending his frontiers and humanizing nature; in *The Blithedale Romance* particularly, however, it is "nature" which is inside "society"—"man" and "nature" are abstractions whose meanings are grounded in Coverdale's imperfect consciousness of his particular social relations. Similarly, the history of Salem or Rome, when viewed from inside the text (which they are themselves inside) takes on an objective reality which Dryden is loath to confer upon Hawthorne or his texts. From the inside, Hawthorne's nostalgia becomes man's quest for origins, his wish for self-annihilation becomes "love" or the "peaceful luxury" of home, his alienation becomes the burden of man's "lost plenitude," and his artistic decline becomes "a writer's... coming

to awareness" of "hidden truths" (p. 11). Thus, Dryden's criticism, since it will not "disenchant," seems to compound mystifications.

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Richard Lanham. *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976. Pp. 234. \$12.50.

Distinguishing "serious" and "rhetorical" kinds of literature embodying, respectively, the "central self" and the "social self," Richard Lanham argues that such works as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, should be seen from ludic and (Burkean) rhetorical points of view. He claims that "The central wisdom of Western literature lies in its basic structural pattern, its rich and contentious mixture of serious and rhetorical reality. It is this mixture which everywhere ought to be cherished" (p. 219). He, therefore, emphasizes the rhetorically playful elements of such serious works as Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the ultimately profound implications of works, like Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, that pose as non-serious, rhetorical performances. As in his earlier studies of Sidney's *Old Arcadia* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Lanham is a strong apologist for style as significant content, the matter in the manner. Here, his approach works best on Castiglione's book, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, and Rabelais' masterpiece, texts that involve a comic perspective on reality. Though he has little new to say about Chaucer's works or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, his analyses of the creatively disturbing effect of Bembo's speech in the last book of *Il Cortegiano* and of the inevitability of critical allegorization of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* illustrate the strengths of his method. His sensitivity to "style/subject discontinuities" (p. 113) is everywhere acute: critics of Renaissance literature ought, for example, to heed his suggestion that it is necessary to attend to the clashes between the political theories and political realities implied by particular works.

There are problems, however, with Lanham's book, and with his whole critical project. First, all texts treated by him begin to sound alike. One of the reasons for this is that, though he declares social context to be of crucial significance, he does not choose to give careful historical definitions of the environments of individual works. Next, though (citing Michel Beaujour) he mentions the possible social effects of mixing or assaulting traditional literary genres, he does not develop the relevance of this rich topic to his general discussion. Also, though he assumes that "a theory of rhetorical style will always invoke a theory of motive, a theory of identity, and a theory of knowledge" (p. 210), he himself employs only simple, commonsensical psychological and epistemological (to say nothing of cultural-historical) notions. This is unfortunate since, for example, his repeated uses of the words "narcissism" and "narcissistic" to describe different forms of behavior in different social frames would seem to require more complex cultural and psychological matrices.

Finally, his Burkean, "dramatistic" approach to both life and art leads him, despite his emphasis upon the *mixing* of playful and serious in literature, to a damaging nominalistic rejection of substantive status for the external world as well as to an argumentatively slippery scepticism about the human self and identity. Ignoring the psychological, sociological, and metaphysical implications of the play-frame in play experience, he expands play and game to include all human and cultural realities, thus jeopardizing both his general thesis and the distinctive meaning of the ludic.

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