Criticism

Volume 17 | Issue 4 Article 6

1975

Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

Book Reviews

The Medieval Theatre by Glynne Wickham. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974. Pp. xiv + 246. $14.95.

Glynne Wickham's work on the early drama has distinguished itself by insisting on the aesthetic achievement of the plays. This insistence has led away from conventional studies of the plays as literary texts and toward an assessment of them as theater. In three volumes of *Early English Stages 1300 to 1660* (1959-72), Wickham examined the changing aspects of medieval and Renaissance stagecraft. *The Medieval Theatre* returns to these concerns in summary form to trace the development of European dramatic art between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. The study concentrates on three facets of the medieval drama—religion, recreation, and commerce. The religious theater revives drama in the West with the aims of praise and thanksgiving. Its formal conventions are adopted by a theater of social recreation that originates in primitive agricultural feasts. As both the religious and recreational theaters evolve through Romanesque and Gothic styles, they rely increasingly on outside revenues and commercial structure to support their elaborate productions.

Wickham's principal assertion is that an emphasis on play and game lies behind the religious and secular theaters. He describes this element of *ludus* as "an underlying sense of energy released in action" and "an imperative quality of something done, of doing, of activity." The energy develops not so much from individual motives as from larger social needs. These require "a formal externalization, by recourse to the playing of games, of moments of abnormal significance in the recurrent patterns of daily life." In this emphasis, Wickham acknowledges his debts to works like E. K. Chambers' *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903) and Johan Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924) and *Homo Ludens* (1949). Yet the reliance on their anthropological insights forces him to accept as well their tendency to mistake origin for essence. The mimetic instinct may remain constant, but it does have an aesthetic and formal history. The Western liturgy differs from earlier ritual structures, just as the sophisticated court entertainments differ from archaic ceremonies.

The prominence of the *ludus* has further implications for the book's overview of the medieval drama. If the source of the drama is a social need, then one cannot look for theoretical concerns to shape the plays. Rather, a process of trial and error occurs, and the history of the early drama is a history of experimentation. Perhaps the most important experiment is to adapt liturgical forms to drama. Wickham's treatment of the liturgical plays seeks to revise the opinion of Karl Young's *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933) that they grew out of monastic observances of the daily offices. On the basis of musical evidence, Wickham tends more toward Marius Sepet's position that the drama originates in the Mass. "The truth, as I see it, lies somewhere between Sepet's view and Young's in that mysterious realm of the human imagination when the emotional

response to the Introit of certain celebrants and witnesses was strong enough to equate singers and dialogue on the one hand with the angel and the Maries of the Gospels on the other." Allegorical interpretations of the Mass could have supported the idea that it was a drama, but such an equation ignores vital distinctions between the two forms. The intentions of the liturgy are different from those of the drama. Theorists of the liturgy claim a transcendence for it, but the drama remains social. The Mass is understood not only as a commemoration but also as a re-creation of mystery, whereas drama never loses its sense of artifice.

Wickham finds a transition between the liturgical plays and the mystery cycles in the relative freedom allowed for the celebration of Corpus Christi and in the sudden changes of religious, political, and social philosophy. He maintains, "From the outset the drama associated with Corpus Christi was directed towards the frivolous rich and the covetous tradesmen in an effort to rededicate society to Christ and Christ's service in the remembrance that Christ had died to save mankind." The epic drama that appears in response to these demands diverges from the liturgical *officium* or *ordo*. The liturgical plays had concerned themselves with representing historical mystery and anagogic truth. By contrast, the Corpus Christi plays express thanksgiving for man's salvation and stress the importance of repentance. Their form reflects "a *doctrinal pattern* of Fall, Redemption, and Judgement."

A somewhat different focus appears in the interludes and moralities that exist alongside the mystery cycles and eventually succeed them. These plays deal with ethics rather than doctrine and history, and "the game upon which they were structured was that of war." The *Pas d'Armes*, in particular, suggests the model for a battle between personified virtues and vices over mankind's soul. Such war games "encouraged the growth of spectacular ceremonial in a strictly secular context and helped to formulate a code of identification devices within the conventions of heraldry that rivalled those of the Church in Christian iconography." As didactic forms based on the games, the interludes and moralities combine philosophical learning with monastic preaching. In this connection, however, Wickham does not consider a prior source for the didactic emphasis. The experiments of Prudentius and Dracontius in the fourth and fifth centuries had earlier established the centrality of moral choice in Christian narrative "tragedy," and their frequent paradigm for the contest between good and evil was the trial and not a ceremonial combat.

These forms enjoyed several advantages over the mystery cycles. They could be repeated, moved from one locale to another, and adapted to the repertoire of a semi-professional company. In the course of their refinement, the works reverse the outward movement of the religious theater. Their natural environment becomes the hall, chamber, and courtyard. With the change in environment, there is also a change in the basis of the drama. "Indeed," Wickham says, "I would myself go so far as to assert that as the nucleus of drama within Christian worship was song, so in the secular environment of social recreation the nucleus of dramatic entertainment was dance." These recreations undergo successive transformations: mumming leads to disguising and then to the masque, the tournament adorns itself in ceremony, and civic pageantry aims to recreate the ancient Roman triumph. With such elaboration, the events require greater financial support, and both private recreations and civic pageants align themselves with the powerful and wealthy.

The connection between commerce and the theater is a major historical determinant for the book. Wickham treats it in two aspects. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, production costs put limitations on the plays. As Wickham observes, "the economics of play-production on so lavish and extended a scale had become too unwieldy for performances to continue without strong management at the centre." Committees take over the leadership from actors and producers and so bring a political dimension to staging public dramas in the sixteenth century. But just as the reliance on power and wealth destroys the social experience of the popular theater, so it provides a replacement in the professional actor. Wickham proposes, "the idea of professionalism in acting, and in costumes and settings, grew up at Court and worked its way outwards into society through the lords spiritual and temporal who sought to provide their own tenants and dependents with fashionable replicas of Court models." These professionals in time acquire a wider experience of audiences, an ability to mold expectations, and a competence in reducing production costs.

The Medieval Theatre offers a perspective on the early drama that one rarely finds in the histories or aesthetic studies of the plays. Wickham skillfully combines the insights of the producer, critic, and social historian. The book is most persuasive when he explores the ties between production and social values. Its arguments are less compelling when the book tries to collapse the historical differences between dramatic forms. In the case of the liturgical drama, it fails to distinguish the plays of the Easter season from those depicting the Passion or Last Judgment. One might object also to the schematized view that often separates the religious and secular theaters. Still, Wickham has written a successful coda to a body of work that establishes the drama as a vital, public experience.

ROBERT EDWARDS

State University of New York at Buffalo

The Left Hand of God: A Critical Interpretation of the Plays of Christopher Marlowe. By John P. Cutts. Haddonfield, New Jersey: Haddonfield House, 1973. Pp. x + 254. $10.00.

The title indicates the author's sense of Marlowe's placing of his protagonists. While each comes before us as the advocate of some mind-stretching dream, and with a rhetoric for mesmerizing, there is underneath this glamorous facade a *sinister* hollowness and frustration which the hero is masking by his bravado. Marlowe's dramatic technique both elaborates and undercuts this world of "false heroics, false magnificence, false learning, false accumulation of wealth, falsified religion and politics."

Athough this interpretation differs radically from that of romantic critics of a generation ago who chose to see in Marlowe's heroes a projection of his supposedly personal yearnings, it accords with today's widespread recognition of the objectivity of Marlowe's art and the orthodoxy of his understanding. Through attention to the patterned design of his plays—especially their use of parody devices, ironic allusion, and hyperboles of fantasy to signalize delusory ambition—readers have been reappraising the poet's intentions. Cutts in adopting and sup-

porting this approach broadens it with some new and stimulating perceptions of his own, often by reading the text with a psychoanalyst's eye.

He helps us to see, for instance, how Marlowe has altered the Aeneas of Vergil to depict in this hero a preoccupation with self-image. The Marlovian Aeneas is dubiously pious and manly: when recounting his past he sensationalizes his woes to cover up an actual absence of effort to aid his kinfolk or rescue Creusa, just as later he uses heroic pretensions to excuse his desertion of Dido. Although Cutts may be unduly modern in postulating a "guilt complex," this Aeneas's recourse to a supposed godlike duty to mask his shoddy practices is not unlike Faustus's use of glamorous fustian to cover up the sophomoric inadequacies of his university career.

In Tamburlaine's career more surprisingly, Cutts discerns a psychological compensation for an underlying effeminacy of nature. This hero's dismay over effeminate traits in his sons, Cutts argues, is Marlovian irony if we but recall the description of Tamburlaine in Part I as having amber hair wrapped in curls and arms "long and snowy" (not "sinewy," as editors have emended), or if we but note that nowhere does the play stage or directly describe feats of battlefield swordsmanship by Tamburlaine himself (whose followers do the actual conquering). When denouncing his heir, Calyphas, as "sprong from some coward's loins," Tamburlaine is faced with an uncomfortable image of his own effeminacy. Warlike "show" by this hero, Cutts infers, "is actually a huge coverup for basic deficiencies, and no one knows it better than Tamburlaine." I would doubt, however, that Tamburlaine *knows* this; it seems to me more like a truth available to modern psychoanalysis because Marlowe had the wit to hide it in the subconsciousness of a self-ignorant protagonist.

The reading Cutts gives of Isabella's dissembling in *Edward II* needs perhaps to be similarly qualified. He finds in her "a very scheming Machiavellian" from the very outset of her relationship with Mortimer, so that even her socalled reconciliation with Edward has the political purpose of giving a public impression of genuine love while ensuring further "saintly" injuries to clear the way for her taking refuge with Mortimer. While I can agree that Isabella's actions have this political *effect*, I incline to think Marlowe more concerned with the ironies of a woman's dissembling with herself, to deceive herself, than with ascribing to Isabella an intentional Machiavellianism.

Professor Cutts does not attempt to summarize scholarship on each play but engages us rather with his well informed probings of the text. He is particularly good at noting the ironic use to which Marlowe puts classical allusions, as for instance when Faustus in praising Helen makes allusions which unwittingly give Helen a male role and himself that of a Semele or an Arethusa. He is alert also (and apparently without help from James H. Sims) to Marlowe's knack for characterizing false religion by letting it parody or invert some familiar Bible paradigm. The book's main concern, however, is to demonstrate Marlowe's consistent use of "double-image" heroes, and to explain the doubleness not as a simple juxtaposition of admirable and unadmirable traits, but, more accurately, as a combination of facade with inner deficiency, a hollow hero using coverup. If we may translate Cutts as saying that Marlovian tragedy dramatizes in its heroes the doubleness of a self-induced hypocrisy, such a thesis sounds sensible enough.

ROY BATTENHOUSE

Indiana University

Oliver Goldsmith: His Life and Works by A. Lytton Sells. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974. Pp. 423. $23.50.

Of the two halves of *Oliver Goldsmith,* readers will find the first, the "life," the more useful reflection of Mr. Lytton Sells' long experience thinking and writing about literature. A pleasant change from popular burblers about Young (or Poor) Noll, he looks upon Goldsmith as a complex adult who might well have been depressed by the London slum in which he settled in 1756 and who might well have had complicated responses to his family and friends, including women. True, we learn no more than we knew about Goldsmith's actual residence or his relations with his mother or with Mary Horneck, but we are at least asked to consider them. Regrettably, however, we are only tantalized, for instead of trying to weigh and relate elements in Goldsmith's life, Lytton Sells passes chronologically through a series of discrete events and subjects, offering us an unfeeling, irresponsible young subject at one stage and later, for no discernible reason, his diligent, generous, widely beloved older self. Similarly, "England in 1756" is summarized in nine fast pages and dropped, never to return; Johnson appears and disappears as a violent, arrogant, arbitrary man rescued from obscurity by a great biographer, who inexplicably tyrannized over London literary life and inexplicably helped Goldsmith, who inexplicably found him warm-hearted. Perhaps life is like that, but if a biographer thinks so he should say so instead of letting us languish in vain expectation of wholeness.

Although Lytton Sells seems to have undertaken no new research, he does make minor contributions to our understanding Goldsmith and the time, largely because of his special expertise in French culture (among other works, he published the admirable *Les Sources françaises de Goldsmith,* Paris, 1924). He can plausibly say, discussing Goldsmith's insomnia, "Lying in bed when his candle was still alight, he would sometimes aim a slipper at it to extinguish it: a risky habit, though less spectacular than that of a French nobleman of the previous century who extinguished the candles with bolts from his arquebus." (p. 145) And he can suggest likely sources (Irish priests and the specific French schools where they studied) for Goldsmith's considerable early knowledge of French. Rightly cautioning us that what is coming is conjecture, he can guess persuasively how and where Goldsmith might have traveled on the continent. In general, although he is above documenting many old Goldsmith anecdotes (most, as he says, are from Prior), he usually distinguishes between what is certain and what has merely been repeated.

Except for its discussions of French influence, the second half of the book—criticism of the work by genre—may mislead unsophisticated readers and will annoy knowledgeable ones. Since his only consistent critical position is a faith that the eighteenth century was an age of prose in which a few faint gleams of interest in nature were lighting the pre-Romantic way, Professor Lytton Sells makes his judgments arbitrarily. He likes some essays (e.g., "The Adventures of a Strolling Player," "Of the English Clergy, and Popular Preachers") and dislikes others (e.g., "Reverie at the Boar's Head Tavern"), and if we don't choose to agree on respective livelinees or dulness we can solace ourselves with knowing that *The Deserted Village* is good because it is sincere while *The Traveller* has no natural scenery. Even when he relies on literary history, as on the plays,

his guide to public attitudes and literary issues is Allardyce Nicoll—as of 1927. However low one's view of literary scholarship (particularly American literary scholarship), can one really disregard *The London Stage* when discussing the popularity of eighteenth century plays?

Professor Lytton Sells' most ambitious critical discussion is of *The Vicar*, which he sees as an attack on the narrator's character and an all-out satire on sentimentalism. To support this argument, he presents "The History of Miss Stanton" (an adumbration of *The Vicar* ascribed to Goldsmith by Prior) as deliberately burlesquing sentimentalism, exaggeration being the only key to burlesque intentions—a risky argument, in view of the abundance of grossly sentimental stories in the magazines of the 1760's. Why should Goldsmith indulge in hermetically sealed anonymous ironies? On no discernible evidence, Lytton Sells declares the plot of the *Citizen of the World* also a burlesque of sentimentalism, overlooking the letters in that work that affirm simple virtue, sincerity, generosity, sympathy, and the rest of the sentimental creed; and he finds *The Deserted Village*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and *Animated Nature* affirmative and sincere, even when their feelings seem to him trite, because Goldsmith's successes had reconciled him to the world.

Now, *The Vicar* obviously often pokes fun at its narrator, as its first readers saw (for the *Critical Review*, the Vicar had "some vanity and more credulity" mixed with his great virtues), but why should it therefore largely subvert him and his values? Is it not characteristic both of Goldsmith and of his time to see the representative man—let alone the unworldly good man, like Parson Adams—with a combination of derision and love? Lytton Sells perceptively guesses that Goldsmith wrote his novel to compete with Sterne's; why not go further and note the similarity of tone that combines sentimentalism (affirmation of pleasant psychological and social delusions) and worldly wisdom (in hints to the audience exposing those delusions)? Why not, for that matter, mention the contemporary *Candide* and *Rasselas*, whose heroes are both mocked and approved? And why distrust Goldsmith's sober "Advertisement" and neglect the wealth of discussion—touched on briefly in *Quintana's* study, pp. 201-202, as of 1967, and still growing—by others seeking to understand and judge the book?

In general, *Oliver Goldsmith: His Life and Works* can be recommended for its usually reliable biographical details and for literacy, intelligence, and knowledge; but these are significanty limited by major deficiencies. It adds no new data; it shows no interest in the literary criticism, the literary historiography, or even the Goldsmith criticism of the past three or four decades; and—a fault that helps explain the other two—it attempts no unifying perspective, no comprehension of the whole subject that can show the mutual relations of its parts, and therefore has no principle by which anything is developed or omitted.

MORRIS GOLDEN

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

The Arts Compared: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics by James S. Malek. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974. Pp. 175. $10.95.

Starting with Dryden's "Parellel," Mr. Malek paraphrases and evaluates the chief neoclassical attempts to compare poetry, painting, and (later) music as mimetic arts. Viewed from the easy vantage point of subsequent speculation, these initial explorations seem crude, many of them hobbled from the outset by inappropriate terminology (*mimesis* itself, as in William Jones, often reduced to hardly more than mimicry), and by formulations of the issue seemingly so perverse as to assure arrival at some theoretical dead end. Yet, as Mr. Malek clearly shows, all was not darkness and confusion. If during this period there is a debilitating tendency to confuse art and life, to embrace the simplistic expressionism of Jones and James Beattie for example, obscuring the vital distinction between common and aesthetic emotions, there is also theoretical advance. Before mid-century James Harris is arguing the radical dependence upon their several media of the mimetic limits and objects of the three arts, thus anticipating by two decades G. E. Lessing's subtler and deservedly more celebrated thesis to the same purpose. The kinetic terms of Daniel Webb's analogy between verse and music (both are "movements" operating on the nervous system) are now a barren intellectual curiosity, but the Aristotelian Thomas Twining's discrimination of the various meanings attachable to the word *imitation* remains part of a modern investigator's preliminary equipment.

Mr. Malek's descriptions of the various theories is painstaking, perceptive, and balanced, his awarding of praise and censure objective and restrained. The chief weakness of his book is, I think, its organization, a chronological critic-by-critic paraphrase which obscures the defining contours of its subject. What Mr. Malek does he does well enough, providing minimal theoretical clarity by now and then reminding his reader how a concept in so-and-so compares or contrasts with one noted in an earlier chapter. But some other arrangement—topical perhaps—might have allowed him to set his materials in sharper evaluative perspective and thus more readily separate wheat from chaff—for instance so rich a kernel as Adam Smith's concept of "disparity" between an imitation and its object, the importance of which is best signalized by its later functioning in Coleridge's aesthetically crucial distinction between *imitation* and *copy*. Mr. Malek stands so close to his immediate subject that his angle of vision is virtually restricted to the period surveyed.

Nor is he easy on his readers. We have to follow closely as, nose to the ground, he pursues his quarry thoughout all its twists and turnings and doublings back. Rarely do we pause to look up at the surrounding landscape, in order to take stock of where we are and estimate what parts of the chase were positive gains and what were wasted steps. The author's first three chapters do attempt some broad categorization, under the terms "rhetorical theories," "pluralism," and "causal theories," which however function better as tags of his Chicago training than as descriptions of the leisurely eclecticism of most neoclassical aesthetics. The final chapter, a fair occasion for the needed over-all synthesis, is instead chiefly given over to repetition of points already made, often nearly

verbatim (cf., e. g., pp. 88 and 152). The general result is a dullness made heavier by an abstract and verbose style which too often drops a veil between subject and reader.

Nonetheless, Mr. Malek's book is worth the effort because he is on the whole a trustworthy reporter who has done his homework. One can learn a great deal from it about neoclassical comparisons of the arts—except that the subject is engaging and intellectually delightful.

There are the inevitable oversights. Richard Blackmore was *not* "perhaps the first British writer to draw parallels between pictorial and poetic species primarily based on subject matter" (p. 112); John Dennis had done so a decade earlier, in 1702. Charles Batteux's views are misrepresented. The French critic recognized in the sound and harmony of words "une autre sorte d'expression qui ajoute encore à la signification naturelle des mots," whereas his anonymous English "translator," whom Mr. Malek represents as conveying Batteux's ideas "except where noted" (p. 42), does not. The misprints are blessedly few: Batteux becomes *Batteaux* in the Notes, and *Dicitur* is rendered *Cicitur* in the quotation from Dufresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* on p. 16. Otherwise *The Arts Compared* is a good example of the carefully printed and attractively designed book for which the Wayne State Press is known.

EMERSON R. MARKS

The University of Massachusetts—Harbor Campus

The Poetry of John Clare: A Critical Introduction by Mark Storey. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974. Pp. xii + 228. $15.95.

Until recently, John Clare's life has been better known than his poetry. He was mythologized by his first biographer, Frederick Martin, in 1865, the year after his death, and in most subsequent biographies and biographical sketches he has been presented as the epitome both of the Romantic poet and of the exploited peasant. As he passed from the biographies into critical works, he became the pure and naive descriptive poet of Middleton Murray's essays or the Wordsworthian Romantic of Harold Bloom's. It is perhaps because of this tendency to limit Clare by simplistic labelling that Mark Storey, in his critical study of Clare, has chosen to write a chronological introduction rather than present a thesis. In his Preface, he states clearly his limited aims: "I have tried to show, firstly, both in general and in particular, the special interest and appeal and variety of Clare's poetry; secondly, some of the ways in which his poetry seems to work; thirdly, the development of his poetry, the coherence of his work as a whole, from the early efforts to the achievements of maturity." Mr. Storey on the whole succeeds in his first two aims, but the limitations he imposes on himself prevent his success in the third.

The emphases in Mr. Storey's work are valid, if not new. He stresses that part of Clare's unique quality derives from his rooting of his vision in the actual, so that his countryside is not a general countryside but the environment of Helpstone, Clare's native town. He frequently points out how Clare's personal loss, of village society, of childhood, and of perception, is elevated and universalised

into the loss of all people. He follows most critics of the past few years in praising the pre-asylum poems, which, in the earlier part of this century, were seen as mere preludes to the great asylum lyrics, such as "I Am," "Invite to Eternity," and "A Vision." Mark Storey sees Clare as a descriptive poet, and he compares him with the minor countryside poets of the eighteenth century rather than with Wordsworth and Blake, but he does not attempt to provide Clare with a coherent tradition. Enclosure is discussed, but it is not a central concern, as it is in two recent works on Clare: John Barrell's *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* and my own *In Adam's Garden: A Study of John Clare's Pre-Asylum Poetry*.

Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield, the editors of Clare, have said that Clare is the most accessible of poets. This, together with the fascination of his life, would immediately suggest a chronological organization for an introduction to Clare. Mark Storey's work pays the price for following this suggestion. Although appearing immediately accessible, Clare is ultimately a complex poet whose sustaining myths require understanding before the complexity of his poetry can be appreciated. A chronological account of Clare, moving from collection to collection, fails to bring out the mythological pattern that does not move with publication dates. To suggest something of the pattern of Clare's poetry, Mr. Storey occasionally slips forward in time so that he can point out the ultimate result of a particular philosophical tendency. On these occasions, he seems to be giving Clare foreknowledge of later events. Another problem concerns the necessity of mentioning the descriptive poets writing in a similar manner to Clare. Since even Thomson is not widely read to-day, the critic has to exemplify or introduce some of the more or less unknown writers in his shadow. Mark Storey is informative on Clare's literary predecessors, and he is especially interesting in his discussions of previous writers of "calendars" similar to Clare's *Shepherd's Calendar*, but, with the book's chronological organization, these sections appear digressive.

Mr. Storey's book is a combination of New and historical criticism. He is generally successful when he establishes contexts for the poetry and he is frequently perceptive in his comments on individual poems, although too often the two critical modes jostle uneasily. He is most successful in his discussion of Clare's sonnets. Half of the first two collections of Clare's poetry were sonnets, and Clare persistently used the sonnet form throughout his life. As Mark Storey points out: "Whereas the sonnets of even Coleridge, Shelley and Byron could not be considered their best or most characteristic work, those of Clare constitute a considerable part of his achievement." Mr. Storey shows well how Clare in his sonnets presents a symbolic approach to action which was in itself extraordinarily simple. The sonnets of Clare merit the attention Mr. Storey gives them.

The least satisfactory part of the book is the discussion of the asylum poems. The dates of most of these is unknown, but Mr. Storey does try to treat the major ones in their most probable order of composition. Clare wrote an immense number of poems in the Northampton Asylum, where he was confined for twenty-two years up to his death in 1864. Mr. Storey follows previous critics in his selection of the most philosophical poems for discussion, but he refuses to

come to terms with the philosophy. His refusal confirms Harold Bloom's lonely position as the only critic of Clare who has given the asylum poems the philosophical attention they deserve. This is unfortunate since, with his understanding of Clare's descriptive strength and his appreciation of Clare's pre-asylum feeling for nature, Mr. Storey was in a position to correct Harold Bloom's Blakean interpretation of Clarke's asylum poetry.

The Poetry of John Clare does provide some critical help with Clare and does suggest the special interest, variety, and techniques of his poetry. Unfortunately, Clare's position is not yet assured; he is still unknown to many, still used as a peripheral comment on major writers, and still termed minor but of interest. More pressingly than adequate introductions, then, we need at this time coherent and critical analyses of his work to establish the necessity as well as the appeal of reading Clare.

JANET M. TODD

Douglass College–Rutgers University

In Radical Pursuit, Critical Essays and Lectures, by W. D. Snodgrass. New York: Harper and Row, 1975. Pp. 364. $10.00.

Hardly had I opened this book to the author's preface than mutters of suspicion and distrust raised their voices within me. Mr. Snodgrass's opening statement seemed to raise no problems: "Whatever unity the book achieves must come from the fact that all its parts are products of one mind." After all, much the same might be said of some of the most distinguished critical writing of our time. One thinks of Virginia Woolf, of Harold Nicolson, of J. Middleton Murry, and many others. No: we do not demand unity of conception or the conscious application of a body of well-worked-out critical principles. We are thoroughly accustomed to the individualistic and impressionistic nature of much modern criticism of literature.

But with the second paragraph, the alarm bells rang. "In general, writing prose is so difficult for me that I never attempt it until I feel fairly sure I have something new to say about a subject. Most often this has led me into areas beneath the consciousness of the author himself . . . I feel that the unconscious areas of thought and emotion are of far greater importance than conscious belief or intention."

Despite the qualifications of this statement which follow, it is one calculated to raise the hackles of those who, like me, remain unreconstructed Aristotelians; whose rock is The Text; whose constant endeavor as teachers is to prevent students from gazing into their own entrails in search of insight. So I settled down to Mr. Snodgrass's first essay, "Tact and The Poet's Force," prepared for stormy weather.

It took only that essay to demonstrate to me how groundless my fears had been. By the time I had finished it I was fully prepared to grant that Mr. Snodgrass's modest hope—"I hope my own essays lean toward a broader humanism (than that of the New Critics)—one less concerned with being right, and more concerned with enrichment"—had indeed been fulfilled. His personal involve-

ment, his personal style, his conviction that "the world, and we ourselves, are far too complex to be accounted for in any political doctrine, philosophical doctrine, conscious ideation," his sense "that every important act in our lives is both propelled and guided by the darker, less visible areas of emotion and personality"—all stood triumphantly vindicated by the light he managed to shed on the processes of creation of literature and on the product of those processes, literature itself.

The "Four Personal Lectures" which make up the first section of this book are studies in how poetry achieves its effects. They deal with its nature, its material, and its aim; with its manipulation of words, of rhythms, of images to communicate the imaginative truth of experience with the greatest precision and power. Much of Mr. Snodgrass's material here comes from his own poems and the personal experiences which gave rise to them and which they reflect. With candor and sensitivity he discusses his own deepest feelings. With absolute integrity he uses these, not to exhibit himself or to comment on his own life, but to illuminate his subject; to show us how poetry is made, where it comes from, what it does and how. It is to make manifest this life of poetry that Mr. Snodgrass is concerned. His own life is merely a means to that end.

"Poems About Paintings," the last essay in this section, seems to me an extraordinary achievement. I know of nothing quite like it. There have been, to be sure, poems about paintings, about music, before. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts," on Breughel's "Icarus," is perhaps a better poem than any one of the five poems Mr. Snodgrass writes on five modern paintings. What is really noteworthy is the poet's eye which sees the painting, the poet's sensibility which relates what he sees to his own deep, unconscious associations and motive, the poet's mind, cultivated, humane, wide-ranging, which links the painting and his own personal world to the larger world, outside, yet reflected in both. Art, history, philosophy, religion, psychology, the physical sciences: these brief thirty pages are a microcosm of the world in which we live, the world of thought and experience which shapes our perceptions and governs our lives, the world of which art, whether painting or poetry, is the expression and the revelation.

The essays which follow, "Four Studies in the Moderns" and "Four Studies in the Classics," are closer to what we usually think of as literary criticism. They are studies of the poetry of Roethke and Ransome, of D. H. Lawrence's "A Rocking-Horse Winner" and Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment*, of "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream," *Don Quixote*, *The Inferno*, and *The Iliad*. But though the subject-matter is less personal, the point of view, the method, and above all the tone and manner remain unconquerably, and gloriously, Mr. Snodgrass's own. It is a manner that is personal without egotism, intimate yet objective, individual but obedient always to the facts, to the evidence of the text. In these studies the author draws on his own experience of psycho-analysis, on his insights into psychological truths, to illuminate levels of the work inaccessible to ordinary critical analysis. And the proof of point of view and method is that he *does* illuminate them, without distorting time-honored perspectives, without perverting plain sense and meaning.

The final essay, on *The Iliad*, mingles fresh and acute critical comment on this ancient landmark with high comedy. Any teacher is bound to laugh with Mr. Snodgrass as he laughs at himself; at his efforts to make Homer "relevant"

to his modern students. Yes, we have been there too—and we wish we had ever done half as good a job, even though our own students remain as obdurate and impenetrable as Mr. Snodgrass's lovely "Miss Freud."

This is a fascinating, moving, wise, profoundly human and humane book. It—and its author—are the best arguments I can think of in favor of the hard-pressed humanities in our shallow, cold, and cruel world.

GERTRUDE M. WHITE

Oakland University

Surfiction: Fiction Now and Tomorrow, edited by Raymond Federman. Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1975. Pp. 294. $10.00.

Let us imagine a reader for *Surfiction.* It is a collection of essays on contemporary, non-traditional fiction and it is published in English, in the United States. Consequently, our plausible reader, let us say, will be someone who has followed Barth's career with some involvement, who reads Barthelme in the *New Yorker* more or less regularly, who has tried, and probably finished, *Gravity's Rainbow,* and who reads with pleasure such non-traditional figures as Borges and Landolfi, Peter Weiss and Peter Hanke, Flann O'Brien, Kobo Abé. Willing, receptive, engaged by verbal play, fond of the collages erected by writers of non-traditional fiction upon a base of the absurd, uncommitted to the premises of classic modernism, such a reader will turn to Raymond Federman's collection and find, to his dismay, a range of rhetorics, cultural assumptions, and intellectual baggage that will frustrate the generosity which he brings to the subject.

An essay by Philippe Sollers, for example, called "The Novel and the Experience of Limits," begins in this way: "Mythology—Admittedly, the novel has become a harmless topic. Humanists play the role of humanists in this ritualistic discussion, and the modern are modern with conviction: each speaks according to defined rules of opposition and no one expects the least surprise." The function of that first word "mythology," as it stands in the essay, unattached to anything else, seems to me inexplicable, semantically or syntactically. For that matter, "admittedly" seems to me flip and irresponsible. I, for one, haven't admitted any such thing. But let it pass. The rhetoric of the beginning is clear, in its attempt to put epigrammatic cleverness at the service of a sneering dismissal of contemporary discussions of the novel. The Anglo-American reader, aware of the work of Booth, Poirier, Lodge, Kermode, Frye, Hillis Miller, Bergonzi, Bradbury, Scholes, Gass, and dozens more will be puzzled by such an opening. To us, there has never been a time when so much richness of mind has enlightened the novel. If criticism of the novel in France is narrow and predictable, then so much the worse for France.

I cannot trace Sollers' argument from that beginning because it seems to me untraceable. But I quote once more.

> Our society needs the myth of the "novel." It is not merely an economic matter, a ceremonial by which society can acknowledge literature cheaply by controlling it very closely, by carefully filtering out devi-

> ations (think of the sordid taint of "*prix litteraire*"). Also, more subtly, it is a way to ensure the influence of a permanent conditioning effect far beyond the mere sale of the book. THE NOVEL IS THE WAY THIS SOCIETY SPEAKS TO ITSELF; to be accepted in it, the individual MUST LIVE this way.

Again an American reader must rub his eyes. The notion of a consensual concept of the novel which is invoked by "society" to "filter out deviations" seems simply paranoid. Coover, Barthelme, and Steve Katz, after all, find publishers just as Updike, Malamud, and Alison Lurie do. There is good fiction, some of it perfectly conventional, which has difficulty finding both publishers and readers though hardly for the mechanistic reason Sollers proposes. But it is the idea of the novel as conditioning agent that must seem, in our world at least, even more bizarre, both as a cultural observation and as a piece of pop psychologizing. There is not even a token argument in support of the contention that novels work this way, even in France.

Is it that Sollers' essay applies exclusively to French fiction, which is so different from American that a respectful reader cannot find a connection, the two traditions being now utterly different from each other? Or is it that Sollers' essay is a bad one which cannot make up its mind whether to be analysis or polemic, literary criticism or a display of self-regarding wit? Something of both is the case, I think, which suggests the trouble with Federman's anthology. The collection is international in its scope, attempting to catch, within its conceptual frame, non-traditional fiction in French, German, and English. And it combines, both in the framing concepts of Federman and in a number of the essays, description with polemic, dismissing, rewarding, laying out the fiction of the future. I am not sure that the first of these can be done at all, with the best of will. And I am not sure the second is likely to mean very much to an American audience, that odd French compulsion for drawing up an ever changing literary politics, with ever new enemies of promise, ever new advance scouts, ever new theoreticians of the future.

The best of the essays seem to me Barth's now familiar "The Literature of Exhaustion," much of which is a warm and witty tribute to Borges, a fascinating meditation on the ritual function of the story teller by Italo Calvino, a sensible description of recent German fiction by Robert Pynsent, and an unsustained but provocative essay by Jonathan Culler called "Towards a Theory of Non-Genre Literature." What makes these the best of the collection is first the quality of their prose, which is lucid and not mandarin, humane and readable, second their openness to the fiction they discuss, their willingness to meet it on its own terms, their reluctance to "use" the fiction in the service of schematology, eschatology, or personal vendetta.

Some rather applied essays on Burroughs, Hawkes, and LeClézio are useful for a reader inclined to take them seriously anyhow although they seem to me cases of preaching to the converted, unlikely to persuade the resistant. And surveys by Jerome Klinkowitz and Richard Kostelanetz are likely to describe American works and writers that even a knowledgeable reader may not have read, and be grateful to know about. But Kostelanetz's essay raises problems of its own, different from those raised by the pretentious abstractions of Sollers, Ricardou, and Bory.

Kostelanetz, for one thing, wishes to defend the possibility of a non-linear experience of fiction, so as to allow for the legitimacy of visual, "concrete" forms, a concern voiced elsewhere in the collection. Yet he demonstrates by his rhetoric how impossible it is for him to break loose from linear habits of mind as he uses, as incantatory honorifics, words like *break-through, avant-garde, step-ahead experimental, innovative, new, advances upon their predecessors*. A progressivist rhetoric imposed upon the history of contemporary art is, itself, quaint, an inadvertent counter-evidence against the non-linear advocacy that Kostelanetz presents. It is, I think, possible to feel one's way into a kind of phenomenology of non-linear art, to give an account of what it feels like to wish to write it and what it does to one to read it, what the costs are, what the special power, and how one knows good non-linear prose from bad. But Kostelanetz doesn't do any of this. For another thing, Kostelanetz doesn't really argue, defend, or demonstrate: he points, with an odd levelling effect, at any work that seems to him different, all of which is worthy of a sentence or two and all equally valuable, whether a piece of post-Joycean word play, a diagrammatic visual-verbal arrangement, a word-photograph hybrid. "One of my novellas, *In the Beginning* (1971)" he writes, "contains just letters; another, *Accounting* (1972), only numbers." To the reader curious about how a novella can be made out of numbers, why one should wish to make such a work, and whether it has any aesthetic validity when it is made, no further comment is offered.

The critical writing on non-traditional fiction of the last twenty years is notably thin, both in bulk and intellectual substance. And so it seems gratuitously churlish to quarrel with a new collection that promises to bring a varied body of intelligence to that literature. But Federman's collection seems to me often discontinuous where one hopes for a synthesis, the contributors talking to themselves rather than to an international audience or to each other, and it seems to me too often casual and question-begging in its arguments, even to a reader eager to be persuaded.

PHILIP STEVICK

Temple University

Literaturkritik in Theorie und Praxis by H. S. Daemmrich. München: Francke Verlag, 1974. Pp. 228. DM 15,80.

This is a large effort—and accomplishment—in a deceptively small compass. Professor Daemmrich touches on a wide range of literary topics and critical problems, he incorporates both traditional and recent theories of literature, he offers a variety of perspectives on fundamental critical questions, and yet he manages to hold to a simple, logical line of argument. He does this by developing a model which represents the literary work of art as a system of structural relationships and fields of polarities in a state of tension (*Relations- und Spannungsfelder*). The conception is that of a dynamic order. As a result, *Literaturkritik in Theorie und Praxis* strikes a balance between the single-minded focus of Ingarden's *The Literary Work of Art* and *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, on the one hand, and, on the other, the more broadly conceived work of Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*. It fixes attention on the reader's response to the

aesthetic qualities of the work of art before him, but at the same time invites us to consider general topics of literary theory, Basically, however, it aligns itself with and extends the premises of "intrinsic criticism," the principle, as E. D. Hirsch, Jr. labels it, "that the proper study of the critic is literature-as-art." Within the limitations of this approach, the book develops a sophisticated conception of the literary work of art which, in part at least, is liable to put severe demands upon its intended audience, the student in an introductory course and the general reading public. I suspect that advanced students of literature and criticism will find it more useful.

Professor Daemmrich proceeds in an orderly fashion, following the normal reading process. He begins with the physiology of perception, the individual experience and expectations which the reader brings with him, and the actual confrontation with the text in several stages of cognition culminating in a creative reconstruction of the work. He takes up the topics of illusion, distancing, and mimesis, and after a short excursion into the history of aesthetics focuses more specifically on the language of poetry and, perhaps too briefly, on the function of imagery, allegory and symbol. The next section deals in a more leisurely fashion with techniques of narrative. Although these first four chapters are everywhere studded with shrewd observations and masterly summaries of controversial critical points, essentially they go over known ground as far as the experienced reader is concerned. The challenge lies in the remainder of the book.

Having dealt with the elements, the building blocks, as it were, of literary composition, Professor Daemmrich senses the need to go beyond the idea of a literary text as a static structure. If he is going to give a true account of the reading experience, he must somehow render the dynamic relations and polar tensions which are typical of the literary work of art and seem, indeed, to be a mark of its inner logic. They determine the way we perceive the text and give it its characteristic power to move, both emotionally and intellectually. The concept of a play of forces between polar opposites is central in this latter half of the book. He speaks of the rhythm discernible in these "fields of force" (to borrow an analogous scientific term), a key to the understanding as well as the evaluation of a text. There are ample illustrations to clarify the polarities by which the writer shapes his work: detail and silhouette, description and narration, the concrete and the universal. Three fields of dynamic play and counterplay are fundamental in Professor Daemmrich's view; he discusses each in a separate chapter.

Every literary work of art contains the field Energy-Harmony. He pursues this idea from such a simple instance as the structure of a sonnet, the dialectic of octave and sestet, to the possible varieties of conflict and resolution in powerful dramatic and epic situations. The character types range from the self-assertive and tragically destructive protagonist to the opposite pole of the figure who seeks his self-realization in surrender. Energy is endemic in literary texts, and it springs from technique as well as controlled thematic tensions. The second field, designated as Ambiguity-Clarity, is again a hallmark of all artistic production and an important object of aesthetic perception. The problem here is that in the exploration of these polar opposites the concept itself becomes blurred. This is due to the introduction of qualities on the side of ambiguity which are not commensurate with the primary meaning of the term. In the course of the

discussion the idea that a text is susceptible of multiple interpretation (*Vieldeutigkeit*) and yet represents something determinate is extended to include other polarities like the irrational and the rational, chaos and order; ambiguity merges into such qualities as the fantastic, the wonderful, the mysterious. By going too far afield and subsuming all the antithetical qualities under the broad categories *Unklar-Klar,* the analysis appears to dissipate the clearcut sense of the dynamic which one gets from a central symbol like the White Whale in *Moby Dick,* an example of a perfect synthesis of Clarity and Ambiguity that Professor Daemmrich himself gives at the end of the chapter.

The last dynamic opposition has to do with the "playfulness" (*Heiterkeit des Spiels*) of a text while it offers a significant representation of human existence. The playful moment, alluding to Schiller's concept, reveals "the freedom of a text and its independence from all extraliterary determinants." In fact, in its aspect of free *play* the text negates the principle of mimesis since it is in the nature of play to transcend the represented world. On the other side we have the moment of order and purpose in the text, which in his somewhat categorical way Professor Daemmrich illustrates with eight examples of significant literary themes. At this point this last field of dynamic interplay sounds almost like a post-romantic version of *aut prodesse aut delectare.* As elsewhere in this book, one need not accept the illustrations–for example, one in which *King Lear, Maria Magdalene,* and *Andorra* are selected as sharing a common theme, regardless of the differences in subtlety and depth of experience–in order to assent to the general argument in this chapter that a serious playfulness is a basic property of the literary work of art.

In his final chapter, Professor Daemmrich draws the conclusions from his analysis and calls attention to the usefulness of his theoretic model of a literary text. I think he understands the possible objections to a typology of this sort. But the overriding value he sees in it is that it accounts, though the model is abstract, for the way a text determines the direction of the reader's response and his growing consciousness during the act of cognition. Furthermore, the principle of a dynamic order shows that the literary text is an attempt on the part of the poet to capture the rhythm of life, is vital energy, the multiplicity of meaning in human experience, and the conflict of the individual with nature and society. Inevitably, a theory that undertakes to define a literary text and its function with respect to the reader, however carefully it is buttressed by examples from actual works of literature, runs the risk of becoming, if not prescriptive, at least normative. I have the impression that Professor Daemmrich, in his conclusion, embraces the opportunity of setting standards, differentiating between what is and what is not literature (there is no exact equivalent in English to the category of *Trivialliteratur*), insisting on the formative effect of good literature, and persuading us of the exhilaration, the *dynamic* experience of reading great literature.

A final word about the (unhappily) strange situation when a student of Anglo-American criticism examines a book so thoroughly steeped in German literary scholarship and criticism. The questions posed and the language of critical theory are familiar to him, but except for the major theoretical works cited the copious documentation from German sources is a lesson to him of his provinciality. Conversely, in going through the book he cannot help seeing where the argument might derive support from or challenge positions that have

been developed in Anglo-American criticism. To mention only a few places and a few representative names: I. A. Richards on the confrontation between reader and text; E. D. Hirsch, Jr. on the stages of the reading process; Coleridge on illusion; Hazlitt on "suggestiveness" which is related to the concept of detail and silhouette; James on description and narration; Wimsatt on the concrete universal; and again Coleridge on the idea of polarities and the dynamic nature of a literary text from which the New Critics derived many of their own speculations. A glance at the index confirms that Professor Daemmrich is more generous in his references to non-German literary works than to critical works. Coleridge, James, and Eliot are alluded to as writers but nowhere do they appear as critics of the first rank who have something to contribute to the concerns of this book. John M. Ellis, in *The Theory of Literary Criticism* (Berkeley, 1974), probably exaggerates the present situation when he claims that "Anglo-American theoretical analysis has been so far in advance of anything going on in other countries since about 1920 that the omission of any mention of them is natural" and when he cites Wolfgang Kayser's *Das sprachliche Kunstwerk* as the only work in German that is well informed about Anglo-American theory. My point in this brief concluding note is not to claim such priority, but to underline the need for a comparative theory of literary criticism, a genuinely cooperative enterprise. Professor Daemmrich promises another book in which he will take up other critical methods and approaches which may be the answer to my plea. Meanwhile, there is no question about the valuable and unique contribution he has made to critical theory in this book.

ALFRED SCHWARZ

Wayne State University