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Book Reviews

Imagination and Power: A Study of Poetry on Public Themes by Thomas R. Edwards. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. Pp. 232. \$7.50.

The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction by Gabriel Josipovici. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971. Pp. xviii + 318. \$10.00.

These two books are symptomatic of a fundamental unrest in recent literary criticism, an unrest which manifests itself as a concern with theoretical—or perhaps perceptual—reorientations of literary criticism. Seen in this light, it is not surprising that both books deal with large chunks of time—from Spenser to Robert Lowell in Edwards' book and from Dante to William Golding in Josipovici's book. Both books, moreover, are much less interested in the product—that is, the finished novel or poem—than in the process by which literary art is made. Edwards and Josipovici are not so much concerned with the meaning of a text—a question they view as being highly problematical—as with the apparent mode of operation the poet or novelist employs. Both books further suggest that a writer's mode of operation is largely, if not wholly, shaped by the cultural conditions of his times, and hence each book is always on the lookout for literature which marks critical, if not decisive, moments in human history. Both these books, then, are essentially constructed as "re-orientative sketches" (Josipovici's term), designed to challenge and widen the reader's habitual ways of treating literature.

Edwards' special concern is with the way poetic imagination confronts the challenge of public events. His attraction to this important subject, and his subsequent analysis of it, is largely based on the familiar distinction between the poet as contemplative man and the politician as the quintessentially active man. Edwards writes, for example, that "in contemplating public events the poetic imagination, a proud and essentially private capacity of mind, may in some way be 'socialized,' made aware of its connections with a state of awareness that is much more extensive, if less coherent and subtle, than the imaginative awareness that creates art." (p. 1) Beyond this awareness of the connection between poet and politician, Edwards additionally establishes his main criterion for determining "the successful public poem"—that criterion being that such a poem, at its best, both challenges our habitual ways of viewing public life and critically extends our awareness of our own complex relation to politics and power. The above statements characterize Edwards' analytic model, but there is also a corollary theme running throughout the book, and that theme deals with the poet's increasing estrangement from spheres of political activity.

The historical paradigm Edwards has in mind is most clearly revealed by the way he sets up his chapters. If I read this book correctly, its latent story would read as follows: there was a time when heroic action, independent of what we now call politics, was the great stimulus of public poetry. What counted in heroic literature was not political skill but the raw assertion of, and our

corresponding human attraction to, the exercise of individual energy. For literature the display of such energy necessarily required the magnitude of epic literature. The chief exemplars of such heroism in English literature were Tamburlaine, whom Edwards calls the "Absolute Hero," Coriolanus, and Satan in *Paradise Lost*. According to Edwards' paradigm, the death knell of this tradition of heroic energy was rung in Butler's *Hudibras*.

Against this backdrop of the death of the heroic figure (chapter one), Edwards, in the remaining chapters, traces the "fall" (my term) of the public poet from epic expectations and his corresponding readjustment, if not accommodation, to the relatively mundane world of politics as we now know it. The change, as Edwards notes, is essentially one of size, where the epic poet's celebration of heroism is replaced by the later public poet's approach/avoidance response to political activity. In chapter two Edwards shrewdly draws out the diminishment of heroic endeavor and the poet's ambivalent adjustment to "modern" politics by contrasting Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* with Marvell's *Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*. In each poem the poet is at once tangentially related to spheres of political activity and yet at the same time he exercises his art—his imagination—as both a method of analysis and as a counterbalance to the very activity he is ostensibly describing. The essential and illuminating distinction between these two poems, as Edwards demonstrates, is that where Spenser continues to hanker for the Court (a political goal), Marvell is content to distance himself from Cromwell, the politician, at the same time that he uses Cromwell's political energy as a model for his own magnificent exercise of imaginative energy. Both Cromwell and Marvell, in other words, are engaged in "art" of varying kinds, but it is only as these figures are conjoined that we come to a rich awareness of the dimensions of poetry and politics.

Now Edwards himself refers to his own book as one of "speculations and guesses," (p. 210) and up to this point I find myself convinced by his approach. From chapter three onwards, however, the book seems to fall off, possibly because of my own deficiencies, possibly because Edwards has so won me over that I presumptuously regard the remainder of the book as commonplace, or possibly because he does not, basically, extend my understanding of the remaining poems. Part of my dissatisfaction is summed up by his remark about Dryden's *The Medal*: "My reading of *The Medal*, in short, comes out just where one might expect it to." (p. 98) One would expect Edwards, who is the author of an excellent book on Alexander Pope, to read 18th century English poetry with considerable skill. Instead almost everything he says about Dryden and Pope is familiar—is, in short, *expected*, and his readings (largely conditioned by F. R. Leavis) of late 18th century poetry are not only expected (if you have read Leavis) but occasionally downright foolish. For instance, Edwards writes about Thomson, Gray, and Collins that "By the testimony of their verses, at least, these poets never read newspapers, went to parties, or held a steady job, and it is hard to think of an age whose literature—apart from resolute Augustan diehards like Johnson and Churchill—shows less contact with public experience." (p. 119) Two things need to be said in response to this statement: first, Edwards has converted his analytical model into a prescriptive statement—i.e., good poets *ought* to write about public themes. And, secondly, such a prescriptive outlook amounts to nothing more than a presumptuous plea for "relevance."

My problems with the last two chapters of Edwards' book derive less from his analytical model than from his selection of poems. It is Edwards' view that "For the Romantics . . . the public poem was a crucial imaginative act, a way of locating consciousness so as to associate it with the movements of revolutionary power, participating in the political drama and not just observing and recording it." (p. 140) This seems like a potentially exciting entrance into the period, but with regard to Blake, for example, Edwards finds himself sidetracked into controversies about how to read Blake generally, (pp. 150-59) and the section on Wordsworth (pp. 168-79) is devoted to two Wordsworth sonnets—"October, 1803" and "Anticipation. October, 1803"—neither of which extends Edwards' approach nor deserves detailed analysis. Indeed, his treatment of Wordsworth is symptomatic of what I find unsatisfying about the second half of the book: a certain lack of discrimination combined with a tendency, particularly in the last chapter, to reduce complicated modern poems to rather glib formulations, even though Edwards candidly admits that "I do not understand modern politics—to say nothing of modern poetry—well enough." (p. 210) Such candor is heartwarming, but one need only compare Edwards' treatment of Yeats and Auden with Malcolm Brown's recent *The Politics of Irish Literature* or Herbert Greenberg's *Quest for the Necessary: W. H. Auden and the Dilemma of Divided Consciousness* to realize how much "A little learning is a dangerous thing."

Josipovici's book, on the other hand, is full of learning and judgment. His book is not merely ambitious in intent, for its intention, by and large, is more than matched by its execution. There is, as one would expect in a book of this length, a perceptible unevenness among its twelve chapters, but this is mainly apparent because some of the chapters, for this reader at least, are simply startling. At its best Josipovici's book is truly creative, for, like all good art, it transforms the reader's consciousness in such a way that we will never quite be able to return to our customary ways of reading literature. This is especially the case in chapters one through four and chapter seven which deal, respectively, with Proust, the world as a book, Chaucer, Rabelais, and Modernism and Romanticism. This is not to imply that these chapters, among others, do not cause some consternation. It is to say that in these chapters Josipovici successfully establishes himself as a committed "modern" by his own definition; that is, "What all the moderns have in common—perhaps the only thing they have in common—is an insistence on the fact that what previous generations had taken for *the world* was only *the world seen through the spectacles of habit*." (pp. xiii-xiv)

Like Edwards, Josipovici has a story to tell, only his story is richer in detail and judgment. The key concept of the book, formed by the author's sense of literary history, may be explained by contrasting the two phrases "The World as a Book" and "The World and the Book." Dante stands as an example of the former concept, and Proust is an example of the latter. A medieval Christian poet such as Dante never, in our sense of the term, invented his own art, for there existed no fundamental separation between Dante and history, since God himself was believed to be the author of a second book, "the Book of Nature." Hence Dante was not so much a creative author—an originator as it were—as a scribe; God would act through him and he, in a sense, would copy

down the resultant vision. Proust, on the other hand, enjoys no such sense of participation with the divine. The only sense of unity Proust knows is through his consciousness of its loss; for Proust, as Josipovici aptly remarks, "the only paradise is paradise lost." (p. 5) Now this is an extreme comparison in the sense that it covers several hundred years of literary history, and yet Josipovici's subsequent development of this comparison is altogether illuminating. He writes: "Dante's allegory signifies what it does, not because *Dante* means it to, but because *God* does. There the contrast with Proust is absolute. For Dante history, if rightly apprehended, yields a pattern which points to God's work; Proust, on the other hand, has to create the historical dimension *within his own work*—the pattern he uncovers is the pattern of his life, not of the life of mankind." (pp. 37-38)

Having established the above contrast as an analytic tool, Josipovici next examines two authors—Chaucer and Rabelais—for whom the world as a book is no longer a truth but a problem. If I understand Josipovici correctly, he wishes to establish the position that Chaucer and Rabelais, unlike Dante, no longer write out of a sense of "inspiration," which is to say they are not confident that their work is validated by a truth informing their work but larger than themselves. The presence of order and authority for them is now problematical; hence the works of Chaucer and Rabelais deal less with truth than with questions of interpretation. Indeed, it is Josipovici's view that with Rabelais and Chaucer "the whole question of critical attitude and mode of interpretation is the central *theme* of [their] work." (p. 100) Art for Chaucer and Rabelais is not a book *of* Nature, but a book *about* Nature. What distinguishes Chaucer and Rabelais from Dante is a consciousness of convention. Josipovici thus observes about Chaucer's poetry, for example, that the reader is often led to contemplate the words of a poem rather than participate in the poem's events; (p. 85) similarly, he argues that in Rabelais "Language becomes a form of *action* rather than a mirror of a pre-established reality." (p. 118)

These first four chapters, then, both establish Josipovici's understanding of the uses of literary art from Dante to Rabelais and, just as importantly, they serve as a highly elaborate preface to his main interest: the nature of modern fiction. Chapter five, on the rise of the novel, thus acts as a bridge between the two halves of the book, with Shakespeare, for some reason, left conspicuously offstage. At any rate, to establish the radical nature of the modern novel Josipovici feels obliged to dispose of the 18th century novel, along with Ian Watt's influential study *The Rise of the Novel*. It is at this point that Josipovici distorts, or at least misunderstands, the kinds of novels written in the eighteenth century. He candidly admits that he distrusts most criticism of the novel written by "Anglo-Saxons," but this distrust leads him to argue, for example, that "From the start the writers of novels seem determined to pretend that their work is not *made*, but that it simply exists. . . . The effect is to divert attention from the fact that a novel, like a poem, is a made thing, a book, an object." (p. 148) This statement is simply untrue, and the examples of *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy* easily demonstrate why; for no two novels make the reader any more aware that what he thought was the world was, in fact, "*the world seen through the spectacles of habit*." Not only do these two novels represent this fact, but their respective narrators continually remind the reader of how much he is a

creature of habit. If Josipovici has read *Tom Jones* and *Tristram Shandy*—and it's difficult to imagine he hasn't—then it appears he has uttered these statements mainly to highlight, and really exaggerate, the unique properties of the modern novel. I do believe that Proust and Robbe-Grillet are unique, but the really intriguing question, at this point, is, why does Josipovici engage in so blatant a distortion? I think the answer lies less in his general devotion to modernism than in his specific admiration for modern French criticism—Roland Barthes in particular.

Chapter eleven of this book is an examination of Barthes' criticism. Josipovici's ostensible intent is to mediate the quarrel between Barthes and his traditionalist opponents over what constitutes literary structure. But while this is an extremely useful chapter, its latent message is disturbing: the implication is that Anglo-Saxon criticism is so committed to the notion of tradition and the individual talent that it blunts what is truly modern, whereas recent French criticism, even in its excesses, is genuinely responsive to what is uniquely modern. This is why Josipovici rejects the eighteenth-century novel, along with Ian Watt. But this is also why chapters eight through ten, which deal with "the structuring activity of mind" in Nabokov, Bellow, and Golding, are disappointing and maddening. It's not that these chapters are uninteresting; it's simply that, because of his bias against Anglo-Saxon criticism, Josipovici has apparently failed to notice that what he says in these chapters has been said both before and, in some cases, better by Anglo-Saxons.

I do not, however, wish to end this review on a dissonant note. I remember once reading a review that began by saying that the primary question to ask of a new book is, "Did it need to be written?" I should answer "Yes" about Edwards' book and "Yes, in thunder!" about Josipovici's.

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The Drawings of John Ruskin by Paul H. Walton. London: Oxford University Press, 1972. Pp. x + 134. \$24.00.

A cluster of little notebooks now preserved in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University reveals some sketches of the children's stories of Maria Edgeworth. They are the earliest surviving examples of John Ruskin's artistic ability and suggest that some mysterious fascination with childhood may have been a common denominator in an aesthetic development punctuated, on the one hand, by *The King of the Golden River* and, on the other, by the mature Ruskin's demand in *Unto This Last* for a combination of filial loyalty from the employee and a fatherly benevolence from the captains of industry that blinded him to the potential of labor unions. It is almost as if Ruskin could never get away from childhood, whether it be the demanding Evangelical upbringing of Herne Hill (to which he, of course, returned at the end of his life) or the arrested development of the little Rose who, in refusing Ruskin's marriage proposal, had alluded to those creatures in Matthew "who

marry not, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God, in Heaven." In *Fors Clavigera* his sweetheart merged with the figure of Carpaccio's St. Ursula as some allegorical representation of Eternal Rest—"the peace of heaven, of infancy, and of death." And on the edge of sanity Ruskin sketched the dying Rose with head tilted downward in a pose somewhere between sleep, death, and childhood. The profile drains her of all emotion and creates the same non-threatening kingdom of childhood that the Gothic occupies in Ruskin's history of art. Both Rose La Touche in the 1874 sketch and the unfinished Gothic Sala of the Doge's Palace in the Venice of 1423 are in a sense, all profile—the contour of that which has not been filled in. Its very unfinished quality gives both monuments that departure from the "perfect" that Ruskin saw as one of the demands of modern industrialization. The relationship between the Gothic and childhood is part of the history of literary genre in the nineteenth century; after all, the great wave of children's literature in the last half of the nineteenth century represented in the work of Dodgson, George MacDonald, and Kenneth Graham is but the lighter (and more distant) side of the Gothic horror tale from *The Castle of Otranto* to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which commences with the trampling of a child. Ruskin continually merged his notions of the Gothic with some obvious desire for a loss of individuation. The childhood of architecture was but a reflection of the childhood of the race, complete with its own "sacred space," Eden; its mass consciousness which made no distinction between higher and lower art forms; its emphasis upon savagery and playfulness; and its lofty protectiveness which tends to keep both worshippers and tourists in the dark.

This splendid book by Paul H. Walton enables us to identify such common features in Ruskin's career not through his aesthetic theories, but rather through his education and practice as an artist. Unlike so many expensive art books whose superior illustrations and scanty commentary insure their confinement to the tops of coffee tables in the parlors of the wealthy, Walton's book enables us to account for and to give visual recognition to those influences that shaped John Ruskin's development. All of this is to say that Ruskin himself would have enjoyed it, for *The Drawings of John Ruskin* is no ornament presenting us with the mere surface that Ruskin saw as a constant threat in the architecture of the Renaissance, but is highly functional in a way that complements such recent excursions into Ruskin's ideas as George Landow's, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*. Walton commences his study with a pictorial discussion of a conflict between two notions of art: the eighteenth century tradition of so-called "Observations" of picturesque beauties encountered by the traveller in the manner of the Rev. William Gilpin and the more radical innovations of the Water-Colour Society which, in challenging the prescriptions of the more established Royal Academy, sought to elevate topographical draughtsmanship to the form of an experimental science. The former conceived of the artist as a recorder of scenes, a sort of travelling natural historian in the style of Prout's *Sketches in Flanders and Germany* and was part of the education of the nineteenth century gentleman who espoused the Grand Tour of the continent. Ruskin's pen and ink sketches of Mount Blanc clearly fall into this category. But the anti-picturesque doctrines of the Water-Colour Society came to predominate in his craft, not only stylistically, but in terms of a sociology

of art. For Varley, Harding, and Cox came to the conviction that the art of the water-colour was based upon an aesthetic of sensation, emotions, and the association of ideas—in other words, an aesthetic of the “common man” diametrically opposed to the cult of “high-art” promulgated by the Royal Academy. Copley Fielding, who had been President of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours, became Ruskin’s drawing master in 1834. While Ruskin was pursuing his lessons, Fielding’s brother, T. H. Fielding, was publishing a book, *On the Theory of Painting*, in which he argued that, since clear thinking depended upon the kind of clear seeing enhanced and sharpened by the depiction of natural forms, and since this art fostered a morally profound stance vis-à-vis the creation of the universe, art should be the sister of religious instruction in universities.

Thus two cornerstones of Ruskin’s aesthetic would seem to have been implanted long before the publication of *Modern Painters I*: there is no high art and low art but only good art and bad art and, its corollary, only a moral man can paint a morally profound landscape. But a study of the sketches reproduced for us in Walton’s book suggests that something else happened to Ruskin during this period of experimentation as an amateur draughtsman that was profoundly to influence his career as both an artist and a theoretician. In 1835 Ruskin and his family travelled across France to Switzerland and spent three months making a thorough exploration of the scenery of the Alps. A comparison of the diary of this trip crammed with geological observations and sketches reveals a much greater maturity than the methodology of 1833. Although the drawings continue to show what Walton calls “the slow rhythm of the traveller’s progress from town to town,” he departs from classical symmetry to induce a strong tension between receding diagonal accents and soaring vertical lines. Although there is often a cottage or other human habitation in the center of some wide-angled landscape, Ruskin also comes to experiment by stretching the lines of his compositions and surrounding them with empty paper to set off delineated shapes. Thus, although continuing to think of his sketches as part of the tradition of the travelling observer, there is abundant evidence of a departure from an interest in linear, picturesque scenes to a focus upon structure. It was just before this Continental tour that the young Ruskin had started a mineral collection and began a serious study of the relatively new science of geology aided by the gift of Saussure’s *Voyages dan les Alpes*. What was happening to Ruskin’s art, exemplified in *Fribourg*, a sketch of the Black Forest town made in 1835, was the same thing that the formulation of a science of geology by Lyell and Chambers was doing to the writing of history: chronology was to become a function of layering or sedimentation. Time was but the systematic organization of the earth’s space. Slowly, Ruskin was becoming a structuralist manqué. But the important feature is the way in which the theory grew out of his practice as an artist.

The series of articles done for Loudon’s *Architectural Magazine* under the title “The Poetry of Architecture” is a comparatist’s vision of the cottages of Switzerland and Northern England based on a study of the drawings he made on the Continent in 1835 and in the Lake District in 1837. It is a combination of picturesque concerns and the newer structuralist interest in the relationship between architecture and existential space. In comparison with English cottages, those mountain chalets of the Swiss Alps exhibited a neatness and decorative

effect which formed an inharmonious contrast with the strength and majesty of mountain scenery. On the other hand, the Westmorland cottage has great ease of outline since it is built of hand-shaped stone and falls into complete harmony with its environment, so that "rock, lake, and meadow seem to hail it with brotherly affection." But Ruskin then goes one step beyond this kind of comparison of forms which will eventually enable him to see the transformation of Gothic into Romanesque as an historical watershed. The form of the English cottage expresses the gentleness and simplicity of its builders who live in an easy relationship with nature, whereas the weak visual lines of Swiss homes betray a lack of national character in the Swiss people and explains their stony neutrality. Ruskin comes to be less interested in the aesthetic object than in the relationship between the person who inhabits that object, the one who built it, and the nature of the correspondences set up with its environment. By looking at the drawings done between 1835 and 1842 reproduced in Walton's volume, a revisionist thesis of Ruskin's development might be postulated. It is perhaps not so much that the critic of art became a critic of life after acknowledging the decadence of nineteenth century landscape, but rather that quite early Ruskin's interest in structures led him from geology to anthropology. His world was transformed from a cluster of surfaces of inert objects to a range of totems. And, in making such a transition Ruskin became part of a tradition of ethnological thinkers that included the respected Matthew Arnold, on the one hand, and quacks like Count Gobineau, on the other. Ruskin's comparative study of style quickly became a comparative study of life styles. After all, that map of Europe which is a sort of prelude to "On the Nature of the Gothic" is not far different from the map of history drawn by Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, which imagined the armies of Hebraism and Hellenism struggling for control of western civilization.

In the third chapter of *The Drawings of John Ruskin* Professor Walton suggests that a shift in the membership of what had now become the Old Water-Colour Society had a significant influence upon Ruskin's development. The young Ruskin took on a new drawing master, J. D. Harding, who began to imbue his students with the technical freedom and impressionism of Turnerian naturalism rather than the careful washes and sharp outlines of the older Varley-Fielding methodology. Harding sought to transform the standard pictorial composition into an impression of permeable, infinite space by placing the objects of a scene in such a way so as to avoid any horizontal or vertical alignments. The consequence was a network of diagonal force lines which drew the eye forth into an elongated and enlarged space instead of the planar arrangement which characterizes Ruskin's earliest work. Thereafter, and during the writing of *Modern Painters I* and *II* Ruskin was not only defending Turner's aesthetic as a *cause celebre*, but was shifting the way in which he perceived the natural world. Ignoring the traditional parallelism between the line of sight and the ground plane, Ruskin's sketches from this period radiate from some central point with a slow, swirling mass that seems to expand within a newly found limitless environment. Ruskin was thereby enabled to discover rectilinear space for himself. It caused a whole sequence of reversals in aesthetic scheme; it was not only that his drawing style loosened, but that the kind of rigid relationship previously established between landscape and human history weakened appreciably. Al-

though he continued to believe in the moral influence of nature upon man, Ruskin came to assert that this influence was exerted primarily through historical associations inserted in the landscape by human design—that is to say, architecture.

Yet, Walton's volume suggests that Ruskin was never able to marry the two extremes that had been present in his studio training from the outset: the picturesque "observation" and the vaulting impressionist lines of the Turner whom he so admired. For in 1851 John Ruskin came to the defense of the fledgling Pre-Raphaelites with their attention to microscopic detail. Shortly thereafter, most of the drawings fall into one of two categories: either the sketchy, somewhat incomplete larger forms or the minute studies of small objects. At the same time that he can sketch a picture like those typified in the "Chamonix Series," Ruskin is coming forth with pronouncements that, in effect, the universe is revealed in a grain of sand, to paraphrase Blake:

The fineness of Nature's work is so great, that into a single block, a foot or two in diameter, she can compress as many changes of form and structure, on a small scale, as she needs for her mountains on a large one . . .

(*Modern Painters IV*)

Such statements of course imply some notion of correspondences between the mighty and the small—a system of regulated interrelationships that was later to govern a protectionist economic theory. We are all one large family whose joint welfare is a function of mutual interdependence. If every stone is indeed a "mountain in miniature," as Ruskin suggests, then a hierarchical vision of the natural world (which had been part of Ruskin's earlier conviction that nature was part of Divine Witness) has been replaced by a more egalitarian perceptual scheme. But when it came time to write a manual for his own art students at the Working Man's College, Ruskin insisted upon an uncompromising naturalism. He even went so far in *The Elements of Drawing* as to have each student trace exactly the pattern of tree branches against the sky, as if to enable them to recover what he called the "innocence of the eye." And that notion of innocence, of some notion of uncorrupted space even came through in his descriptions of colour:

When white is well managed, it ought to be strangely delicious,—tender as well as bright,—like inlaid mother of pearl, or white roses washed in milk. The eye ought to seek it for rest, brilliant though it may be; and to feel it as a space of strange, heavenly paleness in the midst of the flushing of the colours.

(*The Elements of Drawing*)

Perhaps Ruskin was unable to decide whether the best way to recapture such sacred space was through minute attention to detail which illuminated the natural world at the expense of a monotonous focus, or to the swirling masses of the Alps whose vital space was contained within its force lines at the expense of uniqueness.

Whatever the explanation, Walton's chapter entitled "The Late Drawings (1860-1887)" reveals a Ruskin no longer willing or able to make linear state-

ments. His drawings rather become calligraphic scribbles which build up effects of light and shade with flickering, hatched lines. The two kinds of vision have to be portrayed separately, but there is still present some attempt to preserve a quiet center. He becomes fascinated with shells, flowers, and fountains, shapes that will balance centrifugal and centripetal lines. The last drawings are fragile exercises, and yet they seem to tell us something about the relationship between Ruskin's drawings and the remainder of his life's work. For surely the Gothic and Venice both share some structural similarities; they are both unfinished cities that have become ruins within their own time. The interior of both hold out against overwhelming forces by virtue of narrow aisles in one case and narrow canals in the other. And in *Unto This Last* Ruskin advocated a socialist state by using the metaphor of a reservoir behind some dam. The function of governments was to insure the regulated flow of wealth so as to avoid periods of flood and famine in favor of a delicate equilibrium. The Renaissance, like the *laissez faire* attitudes of the mercantilists, threatened him by proposing a three-dimensional space, which shifted the center of things. In *Fors Clavigera* he claimed that he wrote "as a man who has always been in the centre of the universe, and now feels himself to be the centre of the universe for other men." And in the rambling autobiography, *Praeterita*, Ruskin was to speak of the onset of his melancholia as a threat to the center of his mind. In contrast to the mountain crags of those numerous trips to the Alps, Ruskin's last drawings—*A Vineyard Walk at Lucca* (1874) and the *San Martino, Lucca* (1882)—have a vacuum at the center threatened by implosion from the outside. It is almost as if the viewer were looking into a tunnel which recedes into the background of the sketch. Again, it is the sacred mystery as sacred space that is threatened and must be preserved. Clearly, the Ruskin sued for divorce on grounds of non-consummation of his marriage by Effie Millais neé Gray shares the same psychopathology as the artist, the critic, and the social theorist.

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Circles Without Center: Paths to the Discovery and Creation of Self in Modern Literature by Enrico Garzilli. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972. Pp. xii + 170. \$7.50.

This book deals with a topic of central interest to modern literature and criticism. Like Sypher's book *Loss of Self in Modern Literature and Art*, it discusses a significant humanistic problem: the anonymity of self. While Sypher claims that the modern self acts, but that its activity lacks a substantive form of self-assertion, Garzilli extends his discussion to more positive ground where the explorations of the fragmented and lost self are, indeed, the groundwork for the creation of the self and are thus the primary form of self-assertion.

Garzilli demonstrates through his analysis of several modern novels and dramas the different forms which the exploration of the self may take and shows that the principle underlying these various explorations is the creativity of the explorer.

In this fundamental sense creativity is "the ground of person and personality." Creativity, he points out, means that the creator is always in the process of becoming and that he can never be defined; hence, the self is a mystery, always in need of reevaluation and redefinition—exemplified by Jung's metaphor that serves as an epigraph to Garzilli's book: "the self . . . is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

He begins his analysis with two examples of characters in search of the self in isolation from others. Both Valery's *M. Teste* and Beckett's *Murphy* attempt to discover their real selves through probing and intensifying their consciousness, but both come to realize that the attempt to isolate themselves will not reveal this self, that they need "the other" for their own definition.

Garzilli carries his discussion to the theme of "the other." "The other" functions as a witness for one's existence and as a foil for distinguishing the uniqueness of the self. Beckett's plays are the touchstones here. The doubling or pairing of characters in Beckett's works, though often parodic, is a means of mutually reinforcing the sense of personality and self in the characters. The need for "the other" provides the hopeful element in Beckett's otherwise bleak universe. But the journey towards selfhood is incomplete; the difficulties the characters have with names and pronouns testify to the problematic relationship between language and the self. This relationship forms the third phase of Garzilli's discussion.

In order to demonstrate that the language of myth and the language of self are identical, Garzilli uses Levi-Strauss, Cassirer, and Frye as the theoretical basis for his discussion. He establishes the most important function of mythical language: it calls things into being by naming them, and it involves a continual process in which contradictions seek mediation. For example, the source of consciousness in Beckett's *The Unnamable* attempts through language to call himself into being; the novel oscillates between silence and words, and attempts at self-definition generate a series of masks, or personae, an activity pointing inevitably to the conclusion that the search for self is partly a creation of self. Further, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* exemplifies the process through the multiplication of narrators of the Sutpen story: in creating Sutpen they also create themselves. Also, Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* illustrates it: the subconscious dream structure generates and transforms a multitude of personae, or masks.

The relationship of masks to the self forms the next part of Garzilli's analysis. Distinguishing between personality as "the stable core which exists between the public and private life of the self" and personality as "the sum of all possible judgments about the self," he shows that in Pirandello's plays the "I" may be expressive of both. It is the sum of all masks, or judgments that are made by the characters in the work upon each other, but also the judgments made by the readers and the author upon the characters; and yet it is a stable construction of art fixed in the characters. The structure of this relationship between the self and its masks, an important aspect of which is the relationship of the author to his creation, is a labyrinth whose design is susceptible of continual change.

The labyrinth myth is central to modern literature. Examining Gide's *Thésée*, Borge's short stories, and two of Robbe-Grillet's novels, Garzilli shows that the labyrinth is both outside of man and a construction of his self. The writer,

through his narrators or masks, and the reader, through his imaginative participation, are both drawn into this construction and find themselves looking for the way out. The process of searching takes on a reality more forceful than the public reality of the searchers; the searchers lose their fixed identity in the process of searching. This reality of fiction is further shown in Gide's *Faux Monnayeurs*. The mirror structure of the work, and Gide's constant intrusions for the purpose of drawing attention to the fiction suggest that total sincerity is possible only in fiction and that for the discovery of self, fiction is more reliable than are non-fictional forms of writing. In this discovery, form and content are inseparable. Man's need to survive demands that he be self-creative, that he create the content of the self; and in this struggle, language provides the forms not only for communicating the self but for creating as well.

In his conclusion, Garzilli analyzes the prologue to St. John's Gospel to show that all the paths of self-discovery can already be found in that familiar passage. Because creativity is the ground for personality and man is always in the process of creating himself, no single adequate definition of self is possible. "The mystery of self is one of continual revelation which transcends time" (p. 52).

Garzilli's approach is obviously thematic; it is a synthesis linking together several works from different countries. However, by making the general assumption that the search for self is basically a positive activity, he sometimes overlooks textual details that weaken this assertion. For example, he claims Beckett's plays are hopeful, though he admits that the characters are incomplete and parodic. Furthermore, the characters' futile vigils and pursuits, their cruelty to each other, their absurd postures, e.g., living in ashcans, their inability even to destroy themselves—these are not easily read as signs of hopefulness in Beckett's plays. Again, the discussion of Robbe-Grillet's *In the Labyrinth* reveals an inconsistency since it leaves unaccounted the significance of the narrator's escape from the maze at the end of the novel. If, as Garzilli establishes, the labyrinth is a construction of the self and involves a never-ending process, how is escape possible? And, indeed, if the process is never-ending, by what measure is it to be regarded as positive, and not simply as neutral? Furthermore, the conclusion, in which he treats "synthetically what has already been the subject of analysis," adds little to his discussion, merely repeating what has already been elaborated in earlier chapters. Finally, a bibliography of works mentioned and of important major works on such a significant topic would have been useful to the reader. Despite these shortcomings, Garzilli's book is wide in scope, elaborate in analysis, and often penetrating and insightful.

NILLI DIENGOTT

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Ezra Pound: An Introduction to the Poetry, by Sister Bernetta Quinn. New York: Columbia University Press, 1972. Pp. xvi + 191. \$8.95.

Ezra Pound and the Troubadour Tradition, by Stuart Y. McDougal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972. Pp. xii + 159. \$8.00.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Literature and Existentialism* points out that a contemporary of Rousseau and Gobineau would have to choose between their ideas of natural man and racial superiority but that now, since both ideas are safely dead, one can consider them with equal sympathy. This seems to be the rationale behind both Sister Bernetta Quinn's *Ezra Pound: An Introduction to the Poetry* and Stuart McDougal's *Ezra Pound and the Troubadour Tradition*. Especially in regard to the unpopular notions, they proceed as if Ezra Pound's views are or should be already dead and as if the reader has been so displaced by time that he no longer has to choose from among them. Both argue for the historical importance of Pound as a modernist and translator. At the same time, they would play down, as in the case of Quinn, his inadequacies as a political theorist or, in the case of McDougal, his idiosyncracies as a translator. Repeatedly they connect their arguments to premises which no one would question but which, also, bear little relevance. Historical importance leads them to aesthetic importance, and whereas no one, for instance, would question the fact of the modernist movement, it does not necessarily follow that one has to accept Pound as a modernist because he supported James Joyce or T. S. Eliot. Moreover, if one concedes the historical importance of certain technical innovations or such loyalties, one cannot—however much one wants to do so—close the door on the historical significance of Pound's anti-Semitism and Fascism. Similarly, one cannot argue about Pound's translations of the Provençal the same way one can about his translations of the Chinese. No one—not even McDougal—is willing to claim that Pound invented Provençal poetry for his time, and the critic is consequently hard pressed to minimize that which he is coevally praising. In both cases, some of the pitfalls for a critic dealing with a contemporary figure become apparent.

First, any dismissal of Pound's anti-Semitism on the grounds that when he uses "Jew" he does not mean "Jew" seems to defeat all of Pound's pronouncements against a poet's using sloppy language. Either "Jew" is not "Jew," as Quinn would insist, and one must convict the poetry of the same imprecision that Pound attacks in politicians; or "Jew" does mean "Jew," and critics like Quinn must face up to this fact and justify the greatness of the poetry despite its content. The same problem occurs with Pound's wartime broadcasts. Quinn would argue sentimentally that he made them in order to keep his family from starving. This may well explain the reason why he broadcast for Italy but it does not explain the content of those broadcasts or the content of much of his other writing during the 30's. In fact, Quinn ignores most of this writing in order to stress her image of the harassed poet, incarcerated near Pisa "more sinned against than sinning." Yet, the positions that oppose hers are as excessive. Pound's effect at the time he made his statements about Jews and politics was certainly not that of an Adolf Eichmann or a Charles Lindbergh. He was simply not the public figure he became after the war. Although he did have a devoted

following among a small segment of the intelligentsia, his notoriety is due mainly to his incarceration and, later, to his having been awarded the Bollingen Prize for poetry. To blame him for the atrocities committed against Jews in Germany and Italy seems absurd and comes out of the greatest hope—or worst fear—about writers: that they affect politics immediately. Unsuccessful efforts like those of Denise Levertov and Robert Lowell to end the Vietnam War ought to offer ample proof of the fallacy of such a belief.

Any defense of Pound's views of translation which does not take into account the relation of sound to word meaning invites a similar questioning. Here Pound has been subject as well to the charge of having used sloppy language, and examples like McDougal's of times when a rejected dictionary meaning has led the poet to inventive and exact analogues do not balance the greater number of inaccuracies that scholars cite. Pound's statement in the *ABC of Reading* that "poetry begins to atrophy when it gets too far from music" is in this matter relevant. His esteem for language seems intimately linked to both its sound value (*melopoeia*) and Walter Pater's notion of all art's aspiring to the condition of music. What the translator sees as an original work is a series of sounds to be rescored into English words. Such a vision is itself transcultural and atemporal, and it suggests *ratio* in its Augustinian sense is a better explanation for precision in language than the *res-verba* relations that most critics employ. The view also allows the poet under the international language of music to revive the past and make its poets his contemporaries as well as to hold coexistent the permanent products of any civilization. Louis Zukofsky's *Catullus* is the logical extension of such a position, just as his "upwards music / downwards speech" is a concise statement of its practice.

Nevertheless, both Quinn and McDougal are correct in assuming that language is the key to whatever greatness Pound may earn as a poet. The reader is immediately struck by an unusual vocal vividness that Pound derives from Robert Browning and that John Donne in a different way possesses. Bizarre spellings and phrases, colorful diction, and fragmented syntax evoke Ben Jonson's remark about Spenser, that "in affecting the ancients, he writ no language," and it is a charge that at various times Pound has had to bear. Yet, the very archaism, as McDougal's tracing of translations from the Provençal proves, seems deliberate. It is as if by creating an artificial language Pound is defying the lockstep of his age and, like *The Faerie Queene*, the *Cantos* projects a voice that is more than the voice of a particular community. Its vision of proper behavior and earthly paradises not only suggests the biblical prophets but the style, too, seems to have gained from a study of the King James version of the Bible. When Ford Madox Ford advised Pound that poetry should be at least as well written as prose, it was to the Bible that the poet went for one model, and various cantos owe phrases and rhetorical devices to what he learned from reading the ethical and prophetic books.

Critics have tended to play down these stylistic matters for what W. D. Snodgrass once called the "flash-card" nature of the language. Reviewing *Cantos* 96-109, he complained that "life with Ezra had come more and more to be a daily mid-semester test. I must spend hours each day watching him flash (a little faster each day) note cards containing significant phrases (a little shorter each day) past my nose. For each snippet of phrase I must produce a full his-

torical context together with the received interpretation." Most books on Pound are precisely the laying aside of the reader's vision to memorize the poet's life view that Snodgrass indicates may result from such examinations. This laying aside of vision prevents a number of these critics from seeing in the *Cantos* what Randall Jarrell termed "the Organization of Irrelevance": "If something is somewhere, one can always find Some Good Reason for its being there, but if it had not been there would one reader have missed it; if it had been put somewhere else, would one reader have guessed where it should have 'really' gone?" It also prevents them from seeing how much a work like the *Cantos* is a cultural document and how the greatness of its poetic art consists in its triumphing over an enormous prose content. Here Quinn's direction of readers away from the occluded sections of the poem to its more lyrical passages proves useful as does McDougal's demonstration of how the revisions of Provençal lyrical poetry allowed the pieces finally to include more prose.

Quinn and McDougal are also correct in stressing the historical importance of Pound. He helped clear poetry of some of its false poeticisms and was *the* important publicist and mythmaker for the modernist movement. In addition, for good or bad, he took American letters out of the coterie and put it into the marketplace where it has remained. It is to Pound—though perhaps not singly—that one owes the subsequent literary campaigns and orchestrated receptions of modern writers that have democratized literature and secured so many raises and tenure for academics. He abroad and H. L. Mencken at home helped turn literary criticism into an adjunct of journalism and, while Pound complained of comparable debasements in other fields, this debasement of criticism seemed not to have bothered him. Rather, like the cultural imperialism which underlies his practice of using foreign phrases, his references, and his translations, a belief in the ultimate good judgment of the average magazine reading citizen then common to Americans supported his actions. In fact, some of his most famous attempts at reform came out of his journalistic efforts.

A formalistic approach to Pound's writings may have resolved better than the approaches of Quinn and McDougal some of these matters of language and history by imposing rhetorical and temporal frames. Quinn's approach is patently personal. What she provides in her introduction is a particular voice that complements the sympathetic, *ad hominem* approach she takes to the subject. As an introduction, her book strikes one as weaker than M. L. Rosenthal's *A Primer of Ezra Pound* (1960) and her own fine essay on the *Cantos* in *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry* (1955). Much of the material she provides has been dealt with more fully elsewhere and this is as it should be. If at times she loses her focus to comment on anthologists of Pound or his editor or his critics, she never loses her voice or her humanity. Nor does it diminish Pound's achievement to have such an impressionistic approach. Her quoting of lyrical passages does much to dispel critics who see Pound's work as strung out prose or phrases on flashing note cards. It is a pity that she did not do what Jarrell did in his impressionistic essay on Whitman, namely show how the same genius that provides the lyrical passages also is capable of dullness and stretches of bad writing, but such objectivity may be too early for a poet whom Quinn fervently hoped might "some day . . . win the Nobel Prize." McDougal's comparative approach is more problematical, for it sets as its purpose the relevance

of Pound's Provençal translations to the *Cantos*, a relationship it asserts and never really explores. McDougal rejects Eliot's belief that "one of Pound's most indubitable claims to genuine originality is . . . his revivification of the Provençal and the early Italian poetry." McDougal sees this revivification not as a lasting integral entity but as important for its day and a footnote to other interests in Dante and the techniques of the *Cantos*. McDougal is left, as a consequence, with no justification for his working in such detail except that at some time the work may have satisfied the requirements of a dissertation and is now filling those of an academic promotion. What he has to say, it seems, should have been expanded to treat the *Cantos* at length or compressed into a short essay.

JEROME MAZZARO

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Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy by Michael Baxandall.
Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972. Pp. 165. \$11.95. Illustrations.

"The fifteenth century was a period of bespoke painting . . . and this book is about the customer's participation in it." But the book is not what the subtitle claims, *A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. Baxandall examines some technical aspects of 15th century Italian painting that were appreciably influenced by the customer's taste and sense of value (social and spiritual), and certain of the stylistic habits of the painter that were in large measure responses to contemporary cognitive skills. Thus, rather than being a polemic on the sociology of style or on the social origins of painting style, this slender volume, based on a series of lectures given at the University of London, is a concise, delightful excursion into the environment of art criticism in which the painter worked on commissions.

Almost two generations ago art historians and critics, recognizing the limitations of treating art as a self-sufficient entity subject to internal laws of change and development exclusively, began to examine with great energy the social dynamics of the artist's time, feeling that there and only there could the why and wherefore of art be discovered. Unfortunately the most enthusiastic investigators of social context were of Marxian persuasion; with the at times charming naïveté of the newly converted they purged the art scene of all but social determinism. The art work became little more than a reflex of social imperatives. This hard-nosed attitude obliterated old romantic meanderings of history and criticism based on such elitist notions as genius, inspiration, creativity, ideals, autonomy of the art work, great men, subjective values, etc. Painting and sculpture lost their uniqueness, becoming thermometers that registered the class struggle. And, of course, in that art was produced for princes and prelates, for mercantile lords and landed gentry (who else could afford it?), it registered the progress of social ills; it was a thermometer with no 98.6 mark.

Time softened the hard-liners as did the counterpunching of other new unilateral explanations of art phenomena, such as that of the psycho-analytic. However, it is true that in the past half dozen or so years the new social

consciousness has rescued the Marxian dialectic of art theories from the critical geriatrics ward and shoved it back into the arena of aesthetics, uncomfortably saddled with jejune elitist theories of ethnicity and womanism.

It is clear in the first few pages of the book that Baxandall understands the complexity of art historical processes too well to be enticed into any such unilateral, simplistic cause-and-effect explanation of the developing art scenes of the 15th century. He has profited from the old social materialist historians and critics of art, taking over their positive contribution: to know a painting fully we must know the political, economic, social, cultural climate in which it was engendered. Without such knowledge the critic can do little more than chronicle his emotional (read intuitive) responses.

Hence, Baxandall's project is to illuminate the art customer's participation, great or small, in the formation of pictorial style. He selects three types of evidence which comprise the three sections of the volume. First, he reviews the written evidence of "bespoke painting," the contracts drawn up between artist and client for the production of the projected painting. Similar to modern contracts drawn up between architect and client for the design and construction of a building, the artist legally agreed for a stipulated price to provide a finished work composed of specified elements, colors, and subject, and of a specified size and format. Often penalty clauses were included against late delivery, and arbitration procedures specified in the event of non-satisfaction upon delivery. The terms of the contracts help explain why, to some measure, paintings looked the way they did, but Baxandall also suggests how changes in contract specifications over the century indicate the changing standards and values of society. (Contractual art production, as opposed to art produced and then sold, is the rule, of course, throughout history; the concept of *ars gratia artis* is, from an historical point of view, a very new, wobbly notion that shows every sign of being short-lived.)

In his second part Baxandall re-emphasizes the point that perception of the world about us changes according to time and place, that different peoples have their different conventions of perception, that in painting the distinguishing of significant object from the field about it depends upon a local concept of what is important. The 15th century client and the 20th century museum visitor see two different art works in one panel. Baxandall discusses the perceptual conventions of the 15th century in order that we can "see" (at least intellectually) what the artists and their patrons saw in a composition because they recognized what was significant from their daily experiences, experiences different from ours. In working out what Renaissance man saw in a painting, Baxandall treads on very shaky ground, for he must establish certain *a priori* assumptions without subsequent proof of their correctness. For example, he at times forgets his own qualifying distinction between "renaissance people" and "cultivated people." After all, there can be little question but that the 15th century populace cared for and understood painting about as much as the population of the 20th century, and probably even a good deal less. When we discuss the art patrons of the Renaissance, "cultivated people," we are talking about a statistically miniscule group. But given the variety of motivations for being an art consumer, can we safely posit a common denominator of perceptual habits even for that minute enclave? I suspect, using for example

the case of the late 19th and early 20th century America art customers as a comparison, that the term "cultivated people" implies a cohesiveness, a commonality that did not exist in fact. Baxandall also makes some assumptions about carry-over of cognitive skills that, to convince me, would require clinical testing before application. For example, he assumes that Renaissance business men, trained in gauging and harmonic proportions, experienced in the everyday activity of visually measuring mass and volume of grain and wood, would be particularly receptive to volumetric mensurations and proportions when they came to view a painting. But is this so? I know of no startling evidence of modern building contractors and carpenters, who are remarkably skillful in estimating volumetric mensurations, demonstrating an intuitive grasp of a Mondrian, a Gabo, a Moholy-Nagy. As a matter of fact, I have never thought that a trained musician or a trained poet is any more conscious of harmonies or proportions in a painting than is anyone else. (Quite the contrary: students of literature have the most difficult time seeing the self-same compositional elements in a painting that they read so easily in a poem or story.)

The last section of the book discusses the meanings that held for various critical categories, artistic *desiderata*, mentioned in 15th century literature on or about the arts. To understand in what sense Renaissance writers used such attributes as "ease," "perspective," "grace," "ornateness," "variety," "blitheness," and "devotion," as applied to an artist or a painting, would give insight into what was considered of critical importance in art, and, hence, show how the artist's hand would be directed in the desire to satisfy his customer by including such qualities in his work.

Baxandall's demonstrations are perceptive and refreshing. His re-emphasis of what he terms society's "visual practices"—i.e. that any one society is accustomed to look for, group, associate, evaluate, and measure in accordance with its unique perceptual habits—is always welcome. It is a healthy corrective to the analysts of form in art with their tacit assumption that our current, enlightened compositional preferences are and were universal and omnipresent.

BERNARD GOLDMAN

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Aldous Huxley by Keith May. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973. Pp. 252. \$12.75.

In an introductory section called "A Variety of Fiction," Dr. May plunges at once into the central questions about Huxley. Was he a "congenital" novelist? Did he write novels or some other kind of fiction? How successful was he at whatever it was he wrote? One question inevitably leads to the next.

There is no doubt that Huxley held a high opinion of fiction as a literary genre. In a passage from *Writers at Work*, which May uses as a kind of prefatory motto, Huxley says:

I think that fiction and . . . history and biography are *immensely* important, not only for their own sake, because they provide a picture of

life now and of life in the past, but also as vehicles for the expression of general philosophic ideas, religious ideas, social ideas, My goodness, Dostoevski is six times as profound as Kierkegaard, because he writes *fiction*. In Kierkegaard you have this Abstract Man going on and on—like Coleridge—why it's *nothing* compared with the really profound Fictional Man, who has always to keep these tremendous ideas *alive* in a concrete form.

But more than once Huxley admitted that he was not a "congenital" novelist. Even if we do not accept Philip Quarles in *Point Counter Point* as Huxley's alter ego when Quarles writes in his notebook "I never pretended to be a congenital novelist," (Ch. 22) we have Huxley's own comment, "I don't think of myself as a congenital novelist." (*Writers at Work*, p. 227) Huxley once wrote a lady correspondent that his novels "represent experiments in the technique of narrative and of the exploration of the mind carried on by one who is not congenitally a novelist and therefore is compelled to resort to devices which the born novelist would never think of using—being perfectly capable of covering the necessary ground without departing from straightforward techniques." (*Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 12) Huxley also confessed, "I have great difficulty in inventing plots. Some people are born with an amazing gift for story-telling; it's a gift which I've never had at all." (*Writers at Work*, p. 235) Even though plots and story-telling are now held in less high esteem than they were in the great days of the novel a century ago, still one has to admit that a writer without the story-telling instinct and talent is not a born or "natural" novelist. Nonetheless, Huxley chose to write in the novel form because, as stated earlier, he believed fiction to be immensely important and because he found ideas expressed by Fictional Man more profound than those expressed by Abstract Man.

Dr. May discusses three ways of dealing with the "Huxley problem." One is simply to accept the fact that Huxley "was a congenital essayist who encroached (though brilliantly) on congenital novelists' preserves." (p. 10) Another is to borrow from Northrop Frye and call Huxley a "Menippean satirist" like Voltaire in *Candide*, Swift in *Gullivers Travels*, or Butler in *Erewhon*. The third is to affix the label "novel of ideas" to Huxley's fiction. May finds none of the three invalid and none wholly satisfactory, but seems inclined to settle for the "novel of ideas."

If Huxley was not much of a hand at plots and story-telling, how good was he at the touchstone of all great fiction, the creation of character? Dr. May believes that "most of Huxley's people have a good deal of substance." (p. 14) Some, like Mark Staithes and Helen Ledwidge in *Eyeless in Gaza*, are "round" characters and pass Forster's test of "surprising in a convincing way." Even Huxley's "flat" characters have some "degree of livingness." In summing up, Dr. May asserts that the great majority of Huxley's characters "remain in the memory as distinct individuals." (p. 15) Even if we grant all this, must we not also admit that Huxley's serious characters are, frankly, bores? Aren't they all examples of "Abstract Man going on and on" as if they were Coleridges in fiction?

Dr. May concludes his introductory remarks with some comments on Huxley as a stylist. His verdict is that Huxley "was very sensitive to words . . . but there is no evidence that he reflected much upon his style or took great pains

over it. . . . It does not seem that . . . he paid much attention to his manner of writing. . . ." (p. 19) This evaluation, incidentally, seems contradicted occasionally in Dr. May's analysis of the individual novels.

Having established the ground rules, as it were, Dr. May then proceeds to a title-by-title analysis of Huxley's novels. These he divides into "Novels of Exploration Seeking Reconciliation of the Absolute and the Relative" and "Novels of Certainty Seeking Perfection of the Life and of the Work." The first group, beginning with *Crome Yellow* (1921) and ending with *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), were all written in England. The second group, beginning with *After Many a Summer* (1939) and ending with *Island* (1962), were all written in this country. Of the last novel, Dr. May says, it "gives an impression of culmination because every important problem which ever occupied Huxley has been manoeuvred into it and, seemingly, solved within the limits of present knowledge." (p. 206) However, except for *Island*, it has never seemed to me as I read the novels that the second group is any more "certain" than the first, nor has Dr. May succeeded in convincing me that my initial impression was wrong. But if Dr. May's exploration-certainty thesis is accepted, then one has to conclude that exploration makes for better novels than certainty, since the later novels generally seem inferior to the earlier ones, less vivid, less entertaining, less biting, and generally less readable. Huxley never equalled the critical success of *Point Counter Point* (1928) or the popular success of *Brave New World* (1932).

It is undoubtedly unfair to fault a critic for what he never intended to do. *Aldous Huxley* is a critical study and not a critical biography. Hence there is only fleeting reference to events and people in Huxley's life. Unfortunately, this gives a bloodless, ethereal quality to the novels, as if they were disembodied spirits floating around in outer space without any anchor in reality.

The perceptive reader of this review will have noticed by now that the third question posed at the beginning—how successful was Huxley at the kind of fiction he attempted to write?—has not been answered. Dr. May gives Huxley credit for "formal originality," for "positive aesthetic achievement," and for a successful "combination of the aims of the generalizing philosopher and the artist." (p. 14) He believes that Huxley's fiction "will chiefly endure for the usual reasons of form and (in its own curious way) fidelity to nature." (p. 226) But none of this gives Huxley his place on the muster roll of British novelists, possibly because Dr. May considers him "unique." My own judgment is that Huxley, when compared with the giants, must inevitably seem second rate. In fact, in any list of the world's great novels, is there a single novel of ideas? Nor should there be. The very phrase "novel of ideas" indicates why. A novel should not be about ideas; it should be about people.

Dr. May must be admired for the thoroughness, the perceptiveness, and the intelligence of his analysis of Huxley's work. But Huxley is simply not a very exciting novelist. Hence it is difficult to write an exciting book about him. Dr. May did not overcome the difficulty.

ROBERT ASHLEY

Ripon College

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

I am glad to be able to believe that, in writing his remarks (which I am also glad he does not call a review) on my book *Chaucer and the English Tradition* (*Criticism*, Winter, 1973, p. 69) Professor B. F. Huppé took his own advice not to read the book; for, had he done so, his failure to report to your readers that the book contains a rather careful argument demonstrating ways in which he, Professor Huppé, is unable to read Chaucer, would have inevitably seemed disingenuous. Had Professor Huppé read the book he must have discovered that, far from accusing him and his allies of being "eggs-heads," a word I never use, I demonstrate that the processes by which Professor Huppé attributes his prejudices to Chaucer are wholly without intellectual substance. Your publication of Professor Huppé's remarks make an interesting gloss on the title of your journal.

I think you should print this letter.

Yours faithfully,

IAN ROBINSON

English Department
University College of Swansea, Wales
16 May 1973