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Book Reviews

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The Cavalier Mode from Jonson to Cotton by Earl Miner. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971. Pp. xiv + 333. $9.00.

In this sequel to *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley* Professor Miner argues that Cavalier poetry should be understood as a "social mode," a "mid-aesthetic distance" falling neatly enough between the "private mode" of metaphysical poetry and the "public mode" of Dryden and Milton. Investing the style of Horace with the philosophy of Cicero, the Cavalier poets maintained social ritual and civic virtue even as the political order which had generated their rituals and rewarded their virtues deteriorated. Miner admires this difficult conservatism. The words "Cavalier" and "metaphysical" represent far more than poetic techniques or literary trends in his study. They come to represent nothing less than two responses to life, two ways of preserving sanity in times of violent instability. The "Cavalier" insists on the pleasurable practice of his ancient virtues, both the *vita bona* and the *vita beata*, provided that his happiness can be achieved without illusion. This social man stays warm in the winter of civil strife, not because he has convinced himself that winter does not exist, but because he understands the full meaning of his hearthside in relation to the storm without. The "metaphysical," however, enters the infinite asocial space within him, knowing that his interior self can be shaped to replace the world at large. He retires from history to range along the zodiac of his own wit. If this private man stays warm in winter, it is because he can command the sun. The history of literature comes forth as a didactic fable: Professor Miner has written a moral allegory in the form of literary criticism.

He plans a third book on the public mode of Dryden and Milton. Though his subjects become, by his own decree, more involved with social experience, in critical style Professor Miner is moving from the relatively public criticism of *The Metaphysical Mode* to the social, often private criticism of this current book. Sometimes engaged in close analysis, sometimes in the history of ideas, *The Cavalier Mode* seems squarely in the tradition of learned appreciation—Miner is well on his way to becoming the Sir Edmund Gosse of our times. He chats and he descants, now correcting our misconceptions with a sharp remark, now offering critical apothegms, now recording his private associations with a favorite line of verse and, now and then, confessing his allegiances of taste. Yvor Winters, who wrote appreciative criticism with more rigor than anyone else in this century, once defined a poem:

> A poem is what stands
> When imperceptive hands,
> Feeling, have gone astray:
> It is what one should say.

If criticism is indeed what one should say about what one should say, then Miner has adopted the proper mode. His book is self-consciously moral and hardly

anonymous. The reader is ever aware of the "one" reading, speculating, judging—Suckling, Miner says, is not his "favorite human being." The critic defines his conception of good living, notes his friendships with students and scholars, and in the last sentence explains how he hopes to be remembered by his children. Miner presents himself presenting literature. The labored transitions of *The Cavalier Mode* (and most of the book is by way of transition) may appear to announce the unfolding design of a logical argument but, when examined again, seem more the eccentric turnings of a sensibility. Argument here is the display of selfhood. The price, for Miner as for Winters, is vulnerability. For in judging the book we judge the man.

Criticism should, perhaps, be evaluated by the same standards as literature itself. Critics are, perhaps, no finer than their prose styles. Perhaps one must be a good man to be a good critic. I suspect that Earl Miner would agree with all these propositions—perhaps he would remove my equivocating "perhaps." Without question the aesthetic exhilarates. It suggests the possibility that our critical performance requires, besides drudgery and perseverance and a modicum of intelligence, true moral courage. To take the measure of literature is to take the measure of ourselves: a critic with this assumption must convince his readers that every explication, every historical connection, every literary judgment is the result of a life well lived. But how can one instill this conviction? As others have before him, Miner assumes that the knower becomes the object of his knowledge. One must be a good man in order to recognize a good man, so Miner addresses his book to those readers capable of recognizing him: his audience is men of virtue. Speaking of love, friendship, and social order in Cavalier poetry, Miner imitates his subject by inviting his loving, friendly, and social readers to participate in the learned celebration of these qualities. The word "we" defines a community of true perceivers. Thus Miner prefers Waller's "At Penshurst" to Donne's "The Indifferent" because the first poem possesses "more of what we recognize to be human truth." It is a verbal embrace. Let us suppose that a reader sympathetic to these devices makes his choice concerning that conspicuous "we." The Donne poem, not one of his best, portrays a swaggering male egotist and this twentieth-century reader is somewhat suspicious of the mood—so he includes himself among those who share "human truth" with Waller and Miner and, in the context of the entire study, realizes that he has chosen to be a "Cavalier" and not a "metaphysical." However specious the comparison, the decision is comfortable. But the community of perceivers can demand a more humiliating initiation: ". . . there is no need to be cynical about the Cavaliers. It is enough to say that Lovelace very well reveals that when the Cavaliers fell on hard times they found strength within, they proved their own moral resources." Why are dead commonplaces such as "strength within" and "moral resources" in any sense "enough to say"? Is it not conceivable that Donne and Herbert and Milton fell on times harder than the life of Lovelace, and "proved" themselves with more grandeur than the charming trifler who sung of Althea and tiny animals and wrote one lovely poem, "The Grasshopper"? Was the Puritan Revolution about nothing at all? The phrase "It is enough to say" does not convince with rational argument or ethical power. Magisterial, tyrannical, it exults in the power of mere assumption. The hands of the critic extend to clasp his readers—then a stiff finger is jabbing their chests.

And there are often imperceptive hands. Rightly of course, Miner treats Ben Jonson as the definitive model for Herrick, Carew, Lovelace, Cotton, and the early Vaughan. Each chapter contains a discussion of Jonson and these sections are consistently disappointing. He comments on the conclusion of "Though beautie be the marke of praise":

> In such a delicate situation (and that it *is* delicate many a man has discovered to his cost), the extraordinary and therefore unexpected change of the good woman into a man and a god is a crucial metamorphosis enabling the poet to get away with worshipping a woman he does not love. And the worship of a god one does not adore surely aims at the relief of telling one's unhappy story, and maybe getting *some* kind of help in loving a beautiful woman who lacks both virtues of yielding and constancy. The tone is pure, the social relation sound. The poetic experience is by no means simple.

It is by all means simple in this paraphrase. The delicacy of the last stanza resides in the conditional "if": "Which if it kindle not, but scant/ Appear. . . ." The lady of the poem does not now lack "virtues," as Miner contends, but in the future she may. In the world of this elegy neither lovers nor love poets follow the exacting devotions of the religion of love; the temples stand in ruin; beauty and its praisers have left the ancient garlands of virtue to wither. But through the agency of one woman both lovely and virtuous Jonson remains in touch with the unworshipped god. Another woman may, through the agency of Jonson, catch and tend the divine fire. I cannot imagine what Miner can mean by "a god one does not adore," since the elegy in fact concludes: "Yet give me leave t'adore in you/ What I, in her, am griev'd to want." The point of the "crucial metamorphosis" is that Jonson escapes from the language of beauty praised with which he begins the poem—by the end he is a man in prayer. Miner reads the poem as if it were a clever stratagem intended, like the taking of a narcotic, to relieve tension. Jonson is "maybe getting *some* kind of help." His elegy is reduced to the minor social success of a man venting his self-pity. Miner has no ear for the brave nostalgia of the tone. What makes this passage especially embarrassing is the parenthetical promise of real understanding—"(and that it *is* delicate many a man has discovered to his cost)." The critic proclaims himself a prince of human experience, peculiarly suited by his life to read this poem, and then proceeds to fumble about with rude paraphrases and bewildering assertions of logical necessity ("surely aims") where there is no logical necessity. An extended reading of the Cary-Morison Ode arrives at this pronouncement: "No shrinking violet, he extolls himself among the flowers of light." Here as elsewhere Miner prizes the delicacies of his style more than the accurate representation of his subject. The language is dearer than the truth. This trivializing play on words, juxtaposing a cliche from *Dear Abby* with a phrase from Jonson's finest poem, violates the text with unimaginable indelicacy. Jonson is not among the flowers of light. He has been "long, not liv'd." He has disfigured the harmonious circle of time and action, repeating himself as he repeats himself in the ode he now writes. Miner never confronts the evident argument of this poem. Jonson defends the beauty of short life. "Age" is the one misery his dead son was sure to have escaped: as this stirrer well knows, long life holds more than one

kind of deformity. The Cary-Morison Ode does not present a moral truth easily recognizable to all men of iron virtue and steadfast integrity. A great poem, it is difficult morally in the same way that certain philosophies are difficult conceptually. Our response is not warm or friendly or communal. As with all great moral statements, there is a terror in the understanding. We have not read the poem at all unless we realize how dreadfully Jonson envies the dead friend. After singing the beauty of short measures, he tells Lucius to call for wine. Fate alternates the design and Lucius Cary, like Ben Jonson, must live on in the absence of Morison. But that cup of wine is no triumph for social conviviality: eat, drink, and be merry, my dear friend, for yesterday you should have died. It is a sacrament of stoicism for men who, having outlived themselves, will grow in bulk and fall dry logs at last. They drink to a man whose life was perfect simply because he did not live to drink with them. The moral attitude of the poem, its complexity of tone, eludes the community of perceivers. They are too cavalier with the text.

From these careless readings Miner derives generalizations which become, in turn, large definitions of the "Cavalier mode." In such passages the prose style agitates for greatness:

> Perhaps we can begin to observe what may be termed the ethical decorum of Jonson's poetry: viewing different men and different times differently produces a range of varying ethical responses appropriate to one condition but not another.

In words of lesser majesty, Jonson was a relativist. A banal proposition has been garbed in great dignity here. Speaking of "ethical decorum" instead of "ethics," the critic repeats the word "different" three times without complicating his proposition. Instead of a profundity of thought we have a pomposity of mannerism. His summary of Ben Jonson hovers, as many statements in this book hover, between banality and obscurity: "Reading his ethical poetry, we sense that his central claim (and one that animates us as we read) simply comes to this: 'I am a man, and I am true.'" The period, expanding toward inevitable glory, plunks a dull reduction on the counter. At another point we are told: "In a few lines already quoted, we see that self-knowledge is as essential to Jonson as to Socrates." Is that so? And the community of perceivers see as much in only a "few lines"? The bombast style of *The Cavalier Mode* succeeds most of all in creating an irresistible desire to speak back and, by greeting intolerable inflation with nasty deflation, restore something akin to literary sanity. Again and again the reader is asked to suffer some needless turbulence in the prose. Miner quotes a passage from Herrick with this introduction: "Suppose I had been set these lines to identify for authorship." He continues, having printed the passage: "I should have failed, marking them 'Jonson.' Let anyone else put his hand on his heart and declare that he would have said, 'Herrick.'" So the critic sets himself a test, succeeds in fooling himself, and asks his readers to vow with hand on heart that they, too, were fooled. This little melodrama of failure and confession serves to prove what no one ever doubted: Herrick does indeed imitate Jonson very well. Why must he labor with such energy to exaggerate the unremarkable?

The plan of the study requires Cavalier to be distinct from metaphysical, and

Miner keeps his contrast as absolute as possible. As Jonson is reduced that he may be praised, so Donne is reduced that he may be dispraised. In "Go lovely Rose" Waller exhorts "beauty" to "Suffer her self to be desired." Miner comments on this "social" emphasis: "Contrary to Donne, the world does exist, and everything else is." He preserves the necessary dichotomy between Cavalier and metaphysical only by denying metaphysical poetry its essential trait—wit. In "The Sunne Rising" Donne knows full well that "the world does exist" and it is precisely for this reason that he says "Nothing else is." The wit of the poem depends upon the preposterous discrepancy between its pseudo-logical argument, proving that "Nothing else is," and the dramatic occasion, addressing this argument to the sun itself. What the argument would hope to prove the dramatic facts would seem to have surrendered: this outrageous man seeks to convince the sun that the world does not exist. The poem is a gesture of wit, not a philosophical treatment of the degree of social exposure preferable in love. Miner uses tag lines from Donne as if they enfolded serious doctrines held in common by the metaphysical poets: "The moral conception of the good life and the good man of course expresses the ethical idealism of the age. We do not expect the Metaphysical poets to concern themselves with such matters: their poetic minds are 'gone out,' as Donne put it, in an ecstasy from our world." It would be difficult to argue, even from "The Extasie," that Donne was disengaged from "our world." But Miner, having appropriated the word "ecstasy" in order to counterpoint the "social" concerns of Cavaliers, invokes this word as if it meant something close to "the epithet chosen by John Donne, and promoted by critics favorable to him, to represent the asocial group mind of the metaphysical poets." Plucked out of literary and historical context, "ecstasy" provides just the contrast necessary: "Because Cavalier poets show little inclination to solve present problems with ecstasy, their poetry has sometimes been said to lack transcendence." Does Donne really "solve present problems" with "ecstasy"? Does Herbert? Henry King? Andrew Marvell? We are also informed that Donne falls outside the "main humanist sense of time," and thus outside the main Cavalier sense of time, because he did not write *carpe diem* poems. What of the sermons, devotions, divine poems, and "A Lecture upon a Shadow"? It may be that Donne never overtly threatened his ladies with the choice between sex or death, but surely he cannot be excluded from the "main humanist sense of time." "There is no ritual," Miner states, "in 'The Flea.'" Yet this poem has seemed, to most of its readers, a ritual courtship played out in metaphor between two connoisseurs of wit. A fine distinction concerning the nature of "ritual" is implicit in Miner's observation yet missing from his book. Writng in an oftentimes private vocabulary, he shears the edges of uniqueness from seventeenth-century poets: orderly cleaving is the obsession here.

Miner appears incurious about his methods and purposes. The major argument itself remains little better than an heuristic assumption. "Private" and "social" are the same blunt, ahistorical categories offered English majors on comprehensive examinations. Their usefulness in a serious literary history should be worthy of some scrutiny. Miner attempts no formulation more exact than this one:

> Jonson stands, as it were, in society but not in public, so distinguishing him from Dryden. Jonson speaks in a tone appropriately overheard by others, rather than with a tone of intense devotion to a single person,

> so distinguishing him from Donne. All three poets would agree that social title, good birth, and virtue are standard topics of praise, and that the superiority of virtue to other endowments is also a commonplace. In their ways, Donne and Dryden touched the same commonplaces in writing praise of women. Although much else besides their angle of vision differed, surely it is the radical mode of presentation, the aesthetic distance, or simply the stance that differs among the three poets.

The reader must think with more energy than the critic. If we allow this paragraph to be speaking only of the anthology favorites of Donne, Jonson, and Dryden, if we receive phrases such as "appropriately overheard by others" as generously as possible, if we grant sufficient complexity to the metaphorical notions of "stance" and "distance," then Miner may have his point. But he has organized the history of literary commonplaces about critical commonplaces of the most elusive sort. It seems obvious that, in a sense, metaphysical verse is more private than Cavalier verse—also obvious that, in a sense, the word "private" hardly applies to Donne any more than to Jonson. Why should we be concerned to make these senses exact? Why are the terms "private" and "social" of special relevance to the history of seventeenth-century literature? Like the number of dichotomies, the number of literary histories is theoretically infinite. We might decide to organize seventeenth-century literature about the terms "happy" and "unhappy," "optimistic" and "cynical," or "suicidal" and "generative," endeavoring to define with precision the extent to which Donne is more or less happy, optimistic, and suicidal than Jonson. On what basis is one pair of terms more desirable than another? Are "private" and "social" assumed to represent the intrinsic structure of literary historiography, no matter what the period? Without some examination of its philosophical assumptions history is, like the literary history of Earl Miner, random and therefore incoherent. It is the most precarious of disciplines. If the knower indeed becomes what he knows, then the historian will always be inseparable from the history. But unless there is an object of knowledge, a history to be absorbed, then either there will be no distinction between history and fiction or, more likely, all history will be a form of autobiography. Sensibility alone justifies nothing except itself.

Miner is at his best when recovering lost poems. He convinces this reader that Waller's "On St. James Park" is worthy his attention, and reconvinces him that Charles Cotton is the great unmined treasure of seventeenth-century literature. Another section deals tellingly with the misapplication of "Platonic love." Chapters on Horace, Cicero, and Seneca provide a useful extension of Rostvig's *The Happy Man*. But gratuitous mannerisms obscure the learning. There must be hundreds of ways of making a transition from Jonson's praise of virtue to his rebuke of vanity. Miner finds the most grandiose and disproportionate, the most indecorous: "As Milton said, we are no longer capable of defining good without a knowledge of evil, and Jonson often provides ample shadowing for his bright ideals." The robes of moral sovereignty do not sit well on this critic. It is not that he is trying desperately to seem intelligent. Rather, he writes with the confident tone of a man who expects each ripple in his mind to become a tidal wave in the minds of his readers. He is a man, and he is true—but so, God knows, are we all. The assumption of moral authority prevents him from clarifying his history, from arguing his case as fully as he should, from reading

literature as sensitively as he might. Though we must finally stand with our truest perceptions, it is unfortunate when we true perceivers imagine ourselves intelligent in our every whim.

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The Schlemiel as Modern Hero by Ruth R. Wisse. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971. Pp. ii + 134. $5.45.

One night, in the mythical East European village of Chelm, a poor Jew searches under a street-light for a dropped coin. A second Jew comes up and offers his commiseration and is told that the first Jew lost the coin in a dark street, "But it's easier to look for it here under the light." Four thousand miles and an undetermined number of years away, Moses Herzog retreats to western Massachusetts and contemplates his lot: "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." Shortly thereafter, Professor Ruth Wisse attempts to define the similarities between the schlemiel of Chelm and the busy conductor of the world's most famous imaginary *Briefwechsel*. Despite the brevity of her book, Wisse's attempt is more successful than most of those that have been made in recent years.

The merit in Wisse's study lies not in her analyses of Yiddish stories and American novels but rather in her subtle sense of the relationship between the archetype of the schlemiel and the historical context in which he—more or less—flourished. It was the social conditions of life in Eastern Europe that brought to birth the little Jew who glumly accepted the fact that he was of the Chosen People but wondered all the same why God might not have chosen someone else. In Wisse's words, "The schlemiel is neither saintly nor pure, but only weak. The sleight of hand of his comedy is intended to persuade us that this weakness is strength." But he is no Moses, no Abraham, no Isaac, certainly no Samson and no Moyshe Dayan. He is the creature of an age and the age is past; there are no stories to tell how the Jews of Chelm responded to the holocaust. "The destruction of European Jewry during World War II, the systematic slaughter of millions of people and the annihilation of thousands of communities has necessarily influenced our attitude toward the schlemiel as the victor in defeat. How does one retain the notion of psychic survival when its cost has been physical extinction?" Surely the relationship between history and literature is more complicated. After all, "Jewish humor" survived numerous pogroms through the great age of Yiddish literature. Nonetheless, the future of the archetype is in doubt. The context is gone. Moreover, the creation of the State of Israel has meant the nurture of new kind of Israeli sensibility for which the experience of the East European *shtetl* is as foreign as it now is to the majority of American Jews. *Fiddler on the Roof* may leave *Oklahoma!* and *Annie Get Your Gun* far behind, but it cannot bring back the vanished world of Sholom Aleichem any more than musical comedy can resurrect the Wild West.

Working within this framework of historical fact, Wisse anatomizes the archetype of the schlemiel and examines the varieties thereof—Political, Social, Hasidic, Folkloric. The varieties do not, however, seem distinct one from another. The

value of such categorization is questionable. More impressive is Wisse's informed discussion of comic technique. She rightly sees that the whole point of the schlemiel is the sophisticated story-teller's delight in the fool who cannot understand why others make life so complicated. The schlemiel tells the soldiers not to shoot because someone may be hurt. Which of them is more reasonable?

Between her theoretical discussion of the archetype and her commentary on Bellow's self-aware schlemiel, Moses Herzog, Wisse moves quickly—too quickly—through the classic age of *Yiddishkeit* and offers some interesting remarks on Mendele Mocher Sforim, Sholom Aleichem, and Isaac Bashevis Singer. She speaks briefly about a variety of American writers, including Philip Roth (for *Portnoy's Complaint*) and Norman Podhoretz, but there is little in these chapters that seems new.

The major fault of the book is the brevity of the discussions and the paucity of the scholarship. The bibliography re-enforces the impression one gets from the text. Wisse is fairly well informed about Yiddish literature but her knowledge of Jewish writers in America can charitably be described as scanty. *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* is a useful book which might have been, with a year or two of further investigation, the definitive study of an archetypal character.

ALLEN GUTTMANN

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Edmund Wilson by Leonard Kriegel. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971. Pp. xi + 145. $5.95.

"And what is the author of this protest to do?," Edmund Wilson asks in *The Cold War and the Income Tax*: "I seem to be respected by the administration and was invited a few years ago to be present at some sort of official affair in honor of Henry Thoreau. I refrained from attending this and making a speech on the subject of civil disobedience." *Cold War*, especially faced with the suggested comparison, is a curious failure, inclining one to agree with much of Leonard Kriegel's criticism in a book that might be subtitled "The Lost Leader." Eloquent and timely in some ways, *Cold War* nevertheless goes sour, for Wilson, troubled at American apathy over American war research, troubles us with his own decision merely "to feel that this country, whether or not I continue to live in it, is no longer any place for me." One hears there echoes of Thoreau and remembers that from jail Thoreau returned to huckleberrying and Walden and in three years was again paying his poll-tax. But Thoreau left behind a call for courageous dissent that became one of the highwater marks of the American spirit, while *Cold War*, Kriegel observes, "never opens avenues of resistance for us." And for Kriegel this is an important matter.

This balanced, judicious book does what Kriegel himself praises Wilson for doing, it makes more generally attainable a prolific, valuable writer. His pages limited, Kriegel has had to ignore plays and poems, and, more unfortunately, has little space for degrees of biographical information and speculation one comes to crave. Proceeding chronologically, he selects out major essays, chapters, and

works; in precise and suggestive form he gives one a sharp sense of them, often taking insightful critical positions, as he does, for example, on Wilson's Marxism. Arguing that Wilson's imagination was captured in 1931 by the "human aspirations voiced in Marxism," he sees the subtle trouble Wilson had in retaining his faith in those aspirations when later rejecting the authoritarian temper he came to recognize in Marxism. If one might wish to hear more, say, about Wilson's handling of Proust and Joyce or his antagonism toward Eliot, Kriegel still inspires one toward the appropriate work, and one could easily multiply instances of praiseworthy analysis.

Pointing out the specific economic context of *Axel's Castle*, Kriegel urges recognition that critical works emerge from particular circumstances, and one of his successful endeavors is to demonstrate this throughout Wilson's career. He suggests, less directly, that criticism *should* derive from one's own experience, although one should avoid "an excess of the personal," should universalize the individual, and should strive for "judicious assessment." This concern for the involvement of self in criticism is not novel, but it is still worth stressing for we have lost perhaps too many interesting personalities to ideals of mere objective analysis and scholarly detachment. *Edmund Wilson*, at any rate, exemplifies Kriegel's thesis, deriving from a contemporary socio-political context and from an author in his late thirties who, for one thing, very personally reflects a common sense, in this critical age, of a lack of strong, honest leadership.

Kriegel finds irony in Wilson's criticism of symbolists and new humanists for detachment from their own times, for after *To the Finland Station*, Wilson increasingly isolates himself in a patrician past, taking as his theme survival in an antipathetic age. While in the thirties, accordingly, *The American Jitters* powerfully brought home Depression suffering, *Patriotic Gore* in the early sixties mainly ignores the slave and is blind to what Kriegel sees as our disastrous racial situation; *Cold War* fails to provide the intellectual leadership so needed when the world "is burning beneath our feet." Other recent books, recognizing Wilson's withdrawal, do not take Kriegel's stand. One may admire the integrity in Wilson's refusals and may argue, as one critic does, that Wilson's style and content represent significant political gestures. Kriegel admires the integrity, but feels that what engagement the work reveals is insufficient.

What right, beyond his own personal right, has Kriegel to feel this way? What right to call on a major critic for influential political dissent? No real right, perhaps, although one very much sympathizes with the impulse. If Orwell maintained, as Kriegel pointedly mentions, his commitment to reform up to his death, Wilson is not Orwell nor is Orwell's world his. One could argue, too, that Wilson had no right to take symbolists to task for lack of social responsibility. Proust, after all, in his cork-lined room achieved an understanding of the human condition that, whatever we think of Proust's particular perspective, adds dimensions to our existence that we, this writer certainly, would not willingly sacrifice. Wilson, acknowledging this, still refuses to recommend as guides such writers as Proust.

And Wilson himself? Throughout his career he has provided inspiring examples of critical attitude: his "greatest virtue," perhaps, "was his ability to share his sense of discovery, to communicate without even trying why literature was important." He has also "given us an example of the kind of integrity which our

world finds both frightening and meaningful." But one justifies him less easily than Proust, for his withdrawal has not led to great achievement; his best books were written in periods of greater engagement. No substantially influential philosophy has come from his retreat, and little of the final depth and reverberation found in Proust and, Kriegel remarks, in Proust's handling of his own past. One waits for Wilson in *Cold War* to seek out, at least, a Thoreauvian rhetoric to crack our stupendous apathy, but he hasn't the Thoreauvian grip on the matter. On the highest level, then, for that is where Kriegel and all of us find Wilson, Wilson is in the end found wanting. He has done work American experience would be the less without—a rare accomplishment. And this Kriegel fully acknowledges and demonstrates, for his own, sometimes passionate disappointment springs from admiration for a man who kept alive, during graduate years in America ("where scholarship is an industry") and in what has been called the Age of Objective Analysis, Kriegel's own love for letters, belief in creative intelligence, and desire for integrated existence. "The trouble is," Kriegel writes in his see-saw final paragraphs, "that he now rarely says very much of significance to us. Still, we continue to read him, because we expect so much."

Edmund Wilson is informative, judicious, and insightful, and, fortunately, more than this: it becomes a personal and provocative polemic. And it is there, in its quality of engagement, worthy of the best of Wilson, that the book finally sticks in the mind.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER

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Black Portraiture in American Fiction: Stock Characters, Archetypes, and Individuals by Catherine Juanita Starke. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971. Pp. vii + 280. $6.95.

The topic of Catherine Juanita Starke's *Black Portraiture in American Fiction: Stock Characters, Archetypes, and Individuals* is of crucial importance. The wide range—it includes works written by black and white American writers—is essential to the notion of a national letters. The point of view combines commitment to the social role of literature and to racial equality in America.

Professor Starke's study spans works written over a hundred and fifty year period. She begins with a discussion of the context of our national culture: northern and southern white attitudes toward black people, the role of Afro-Americans in American society, and aesthetic symbols of culture and personality. In the central three chapters she groups black figures in American fiction. First she shows stock characters, subdivided into accommodative slaves, counter images, free slaves, brutes, buffoons, and contemporary figures. Next she analyses archetypal images: mulattoes, sacrifice symbols, mammies, primitives, and alter ego symbols. She then discusses characters she defines as individuals, grouping these into transitional figures, youthful males in search of self, token blacks, and black avengers. In the final chapter, Professor Starke concludes that as the attitudes of black and white Americans toward black people have changed, portraits of

black people in popular fiction by black and white authors have become less stereotyped and more individualized.

One could wish for a more rigorous discussion of the basic aesthetic questions raised in the introductory chapter and of the categories of stereotype, archetype, and literary individual into which Professor Starke places the fictional characters. Because the scope of this study includes over a hundred full-length works, comment on any single character is necessarily brief. The method causes the discussion of literary works which include characters in more than one category to become fragmented. Figures in *Moby-Dick*, for example, are analysed in two separate chapters—Fleece is seen as an accommodative slave stock figure, while Dagoo and Pip are archetypal symbols of the primitive and the alter-ego—and they are not seen in relation to each other or within the context of the novel. The method also causes the author to blur distinctions between first and second rank authors and between major and minor works—for instance, Irwin S. Cobb's comic Jefferson Exodus Poindexter is allotted almost twice the space devoted to Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas.

Further work in this rich area will undoubtedly uncover many comparisons and contrasts between the black figures drawn by white authors and those depicted by black writers. William Edward Farrison, for example, has noted that William Wells Brown, the first Afro-American novelist, based his "tragic mulatto" on a character drawn by Lydia Maria Child, a white abolitionist. But the heroine of the fugitive slave author does not die of a broken heart after her betrayal by a white lover, as does her model. Instead she escapes north, is seized as a fugitive, and commits suicide to avoid recapture and re-enslavement. When he later revised his book for a black audience, Brown relegated this pathetic figure to a secondary role and focussed instead on a mulatto heroine who loved a black rebel. In this instance, a black writer transformed the stock "tragic mulatto" figure drawn by a white author, then reshaped her when writing for a black audience.[1]

Over the past two generations critics as diverse as William Stanley Braithwaite, John H. Nelson, and Alain Locke have addressed the problem of black portraiture in American fiction by black and white writers, and Sterling Brown has distinguished himself by publishing major criticism on this topic for thirty-five years. See, for example, his *Negro in American Fiction* (Washington, D. C., 1937); "The American Race Problem as Reflected in American Literature," *Journal of Negro Education*, VIII (1939), 275-90; "A Century of Negro Portraiture in American Literature," *Massachusetts Review*, VII (1966), 73-96. At the same time numerous other scholars have written on various aspects of this broad topic, limiting their discussions of black portraiture to the fiction of one author, period, region, or race. (The following are representative works: Sidney Kaplan, "Her-

[1] William Edward Farrison, *William Wells Brown: Author and Reformer*, Chicago, 1969. Lydia Maria Child's tale, "The Quadroons," *Fact and Fiction: A Collection of Stories* (New York, 1846), first appeared in 1843. William Wells Brown, *Clotel, or, The President's Daughter* . . . (London, 1853); revised and retitled *Miralda; or, the Beautiful Quadroon* . . . , *Weekly Anglo-African* (November 30, 1860-March 16, 1861); later versions are *Clotelle: A Tale of the Southern States* (Boston, 1864); and *Clotelle, or the Colored Heroine* (Boston, 1867).

man Melville and the American National Sin," *Journal of Negro History*, XLI (1956), 31-38; XLII (1957), 11-37; Theodore L. Gross, "The Negro in the Literature of the Reconstruction," *Phylon*, XXII (1961), 5-14; Tremaine McDowell, "The Negro in the Southern Novel Prior to 1850," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XXV (1926), 455-73; Blyden Jackson, "The Negro's Negro in Negro Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, IV (1965), 29-95. The shifts in critical vision over the years are discussed in Seymour L. Gross, "Introduction: Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism," *Images of the Negro in American Literature*, ed. Seymour L. Gross and John Edward Hardy, (Chicago, 1966.) Professor Starke's study thus is the latest in a growing body of criticism in this important field; not the first, as the publisher indicates.

Until recently, most serious commentary on black characterization in fiction was published in black journals which the literary profession did not review, and little of it was included in the professional bibliography. Today works on this subject are no longer routinely ignored. The value of Professor Starke's book lies in the extent to which her discussion of black figures in current fiction brings these earlier studies up to date.

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A Scrupulous Meanness: a Study of Joyce's Early Work, by Edward Brandabur, Illinois University Press: Urbana, Chicago & London, 1971. Pp. 184. $6.95.

Epiphany in the Modern Novel, by Morris Beja, University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1971. Pp. 255. $7.95.

The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus: The Conflict of the Generations in James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," by Edmund Epstein, Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1971. Pp. 219. $8.95.

The basic questions asked by these three studies are easily summarized: How did Joyce's sado-masochistic tendencies help shape his work? How broad a reading can one give to the concept "epiphany" as it applies to twentieth century fiction? How does the question of paternity, as it relates to the developing character of Stephen Dedalus, take shape in Joyce's major fiction and what are its implications? These are all reasonable problems with more or less predictable solutions, or so it seems. Any study concerned with the first will focus on the psychological (or why), the second on the formal (or how), and the third on the thematic (or what) aspects of the fiction. One would expect the first to be sensational, capitalizing on available explicit documentation of Joyce's preoccupations, but in fact Edward Brandabur's *A Scrupulous Meanness* deals mainly with the broader implications of sado-masochism, and moves toward analysis, using psychoanalitic texts to help explicate a subtle web of allusion and implication. Maurice Beja's *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* bends its formal subject matter in the direction of theme, describing a limited range of visionary experiences in

terms that virtually exclude questions of manner. Edmund Epstein's *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus*, while emphasizing thematic concerns, the repressive power of the "fathers" over the "sons," works largely below the surface of the narrative with symbolic emanations and mythic overtones. His Stephen Dedalus is a romantic hero who gradually cuts the paternal enemy from his soul. The result is a highly personal and sometimes quirky reading.

Unlike those who tend to psychologize over Joyce, Edward Brandabur tries to show through a careful consideration of the texts how perversion is sublimated to become a key to the presentation of an underlying pattern. Joyce's Dublin is, like Joyce himself, given to a sado-masochistic "vicarious 'feeling into' the ordinarily humiliating but occasionally triumphant experience of others." Brandabur recognizes other possible causes for the "spiritual paralysis," but his subject matter is this particular and apparently consistent impulse. His goal is to disclose how it works both in obvious and subtle ways in stories as different as "An Encounter," which deals fairly openly with perverse sexuality, and "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," which treats a paralytic social order. *A Scrupulous Meanness* is as true to its title as Joyce's *Dubliners* is to the Joycean tag meant to characterize its style: scrupulous and circumspect and consistent, making few unwarranted generalizations, no flamboyant statements, but elaborating a systematic vision of the work. Brandabur has deliberately limited his study to nine stories from *Dubliners* grouped so as to illustrate facets of the problem. He devotes a chapter to the failed play *Exiles*, which he examines with fresh sympathy and understanding as revealing strange power by virtue of partially sublimated sado-masochistic impulses. *A Portrait* and *Ulysses* are treated briefly in a coda as the means by which Joyce tried (and failed) to write a "therapeutic document."

Most of the book is devoted to the stories, in which we discover increasingly subtle patterns of evasion and substitution, versions of the vicarious and vicious, modes of use which turn subtly on the abuse of another's psyche in the service of unrecognized personal needs. *A Scrupulous Meanness* points up indirectly a heady *fin de siècle* side of Joyce manifested in shadowy eroticism of the sort ascribed to Stephen in both *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*:

> On swift sail flaming
> From storm and south
> He comes, pale vampire,
> Mouth to my mouth.

Imbued with the profoundly sado-masochistic burden of his early reading (a point which Brandabur should have made), Joyce emerges from this study as a singularly ironic but often distressingly humorless fellow, secret even when unmasked, barely likeable; simultaneously heroic and compulsive in his need to work *against* the givens of any situation. But it is less Joyce than the early Joycean vision and its adequacy which interest Brandabur, less the source of the hangups than the manner in which, by expressing them, Joyce conveys the essential nature of his world. Thus, for example, when pointing up homoerotic and sado-masochistic themes and overtones in the early fictions, Brandabur shows how they function to supply mystery and evoke interest which other critics have noted perhaps but never so fully explained on the level of theme and impulse.

There are certainly lacunae. We miss a considered treatment of the means by

which Joyce realized and masked his themes. Joyce's narartive tactics (his "style") surely merit study, as does his irony. Take the emotive landscape in passages like the following from "A Little Cloud":

> You could do nothing in Dublin. As he crossed Grattan Bridge he looked down the river towards the lower quays and pitied the poor stunted houses. They seemed to him a band of tramps huddled together along the river-banks, their old coats covered with dust and soot, stupified by the panorama of sunset and waiting for the night to bid them rise, shake themselves and begone.

Here technique permits us to "feel into" the experience of Little Chandler *feeling into* a landscape. We may compare this passage to the sort of hallucinated magic we find in the opening of 'Circe' where the themes and our relationship to them are more pronounced and immediate but more subtly stated:

> *The Mabbott street entrance of nighttown, before which stretches an uncobbled tramsiding set with skeleton tracks, red and green will-o'-the-wisps and danger signals. Rows of flimsy houses with gaping doors. Rare lamps with faint rainbow fans.*

Elsewhere in "A Little Cloud" Chandler recalls seeing "richly dressed ladies" in "noisy dresses" catch "up their dresses, when they touched earth, like alarmed Atalantas." The appeal through style and content is to a fearful erotic delight of the sort Bloom repeatedly communicates prior to the purge in "Circe." The classical allusion (probably derived from Swinburne) is followed by more direct references to Chandler's self-induced excitement and anxiety.

Though Brandabur is generally careful not to overstate, I find his allusions to oral sex in "Two Gallants" unconvincing. On the other hand, by excluding the two stories which feature sadistic female characters, he unwittingly weakens his case in the male-oriented tales. Can we agree that ". . . in 'The Boarding House,' and in 'A Mother,' apparently helpless men, such as Bob Doran and Hoppy Holohan, employ their passivity to avoid victimization at the hands of domineering women, but at the same time they precipitate their own downfall"? Surely, Doran and Holohan are not in the same case, Holohan being the trickster rather than the victim. Surely, Mrs. Kierney's relationship to the organizers of the concert is complexly sado-masochistic and the two women play far subtler parts in the tales than is suggested.

The strongest chapter in this book contains an extended discussion of *Exiles,* examined from a variety of angles but focussing on Richard's effort to "stage his own betrayal" in relation to his need to "act out the wishes of his dead mother," a ghost on the order of May Dedalus in *Ulysses.* Viewed in the light of a complex of themes seen developing through *Dubliners, Exiles* becomes itself more interesting and complex, if no better theatre. It is precisely because the play is a personal document carefully shaped for esthetic ends that we may value Brandabur's discussion of it in the light of voyeurism, latent homosexuality and lesbianism. We may value especially the distinctions he makes between the sado-masochistic impulses Joyce was aware of and the deeper implications of the theme exposed in Wilhelm Stekel's work. We may also welcome his careful working out of character relationships and mirror situations, his intelligent investi-

gation of *Giacomo Joyce* as source material, and his appreciation of comic elements which many critics have overlooked.

Morris Beja has not written a book about Joyce, but his book would not exist had not Joyce coined the term epiphany to describe a variety of literary experience and varied literary events. *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* tries to define a lowest common denominator experience which Beja finds proliferating as the novel moves toward poetry:

> I would call [the epiphany] a *sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event, or memorable phase of the mind–the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produced it.*

The argument is supported by a carefully documented treatment of the evolution of such moments through religious and literary history, but given the Joycean resonance of his definition, Beja's account is curiously incomplete.[1] His treatment of Joyce's theory and the continuing controversy is at best sketchy as is the discussion of Joyce's sources. Neither Tolstoi nor Flaubert are dealt with though both were important for Joyce and both produced splendidly managed "spiritual manifestations." In *Anna Karenina* there is Levin's moment of bliss following the second proposal to Kitty. In Flaubert there is Frederic Moreau's first view or "vision" of Mme. Arnoux in the first chapter of *Sentimental Education,* to say nothing of Emma's moment of beauty at Vaubyessard. These and other passages are analogues for Stephen's instant of triumph in *A Portrait* I, his sexual submission in II, and his vision of the bird-girl in IV. In each case the distance between the outer and inner realities are briefly and sharply diminished and the reader is obliged to participate directly in a complexly modulated revelation. The protagonist's desires are imposed on the landscape. These positive moments are usually measured retrospectively against negative, non-lyrical, distanced "manifestations" which might also be called "sudden" and "spiritual." Further, in Flaubert and Joyce the lyrical moment is invariably undercut by muted but significant irony. Beja is only peripherally concerned with such matters. His analysis stops short of explanations of how effects are achieved and balanced though he (unsuccessfully) attempts to show us how epiphanies (help) organize the work.

It is Beja's romantic impulse, his emphasis on elevation and awe that leads him astray, at least where Joyce in concerned. (It also dictated his choice of writers to consider.) A lengthy but unconvincing reading of the conclusion of "Circe" suggests that, when, drunken and half-crazed, he denies his mother's ghost and dints the whorehouse lamp, Stephen is uttering a final "*non serviam*": "we realize that this time it is probably true and he will never have to repeat it again." Bloom's maudlin vision of Rudy-Stephen is called "the most effective moment of vision in all of Joyce"! We may ask if it is indeed an epiphany and if it really "completes the theme of the entire novel by revealing to Bloom his son as a

[1] Though this study contains several unsupported lists of writers, no mention is made of Rilke whose *Malte Laurids Brigge* abounds in lyrical "epiphanies." Nor are there any references to J. P. Jacobson and D'Annurzio, both of whom influenced Joyce.

sudden spiritual manifestation." If this is what Joyce has labored so long to produce, why then did he choose to include the last three chapters?

Beja's approach fails to convey the complexity of the stimulus-response mechanism of the epiphany. Too little distinction is made between the epiphany as a revelation *for* the character *and* the reader and epiphany as revelation *of* character or situation for the reader. For Beja character and reader have very similar experiences at the moment of insight or vision. But one detects an important difference between Bloom's vision of Rudy and ours, or between the "Circe" passage and Bloom's perception at the cemetery during "Hades":

> Mourners came out through the gates: woman and girl. Leanjawed harpy, hard woman at a bargain, her bonnet awry. Girl's face stained with dirt and tears, holding the woman's arm looking up for a sign to cry. Fish's face, bloodless and livid.

(See the early epiphany beginning: "Two mourners push on through the crowd. The girl, one hand catching the woman's skirt, runs in advance. The girl's face is the face of a fish, discoloured and oblique-eyed . . ." in Scholes and Kain, *The Workshop of Daedalus*.) Bloom's (and the narrator's) view of the mourners is, in Joyce's terms, "a sudden spiritual manifestation"; there has been little preparation for it, but it contributes powerfully to a total effect. Though it does not constitute a lyrical moment or a climax, and it affects the reader more strongly than it does Bloom, we experience it through Bloom's awareness and we share with him a discovery. Such moments in *Ulysses* as in *A Portrait* are important *as* epiphanies (if the term has any meaning at all), for they effectively throw into high relief aspects of the personal landscape. They belong most properly to the family of events which includes the vision of Emma Bovary recovering the last sweet drop of liqueur with her pointed tongue or Flaubert's Salomé gracefully, mysteriously exploring the contents of her hamper before the hungry-eyed Herod in *Herodias*. This points up the fact (ignored in Beja's discussion) that the great moments in "modernist" fiction are not always the ones so labelled by the narrator or presenter. Proust's *A la recherche*, for example, abounds in visionary encounters like Marcel's view of the hawthorn blossoms or the mating ritual which he associates with the fertilization of an orchid: epiphanies, both, in slow motion, but "spiritual manifestations" nonetheless.

Though Beja does better with Woolf, Wolfe and Faulkner, he has failed to sharpen the meaning of an abused term. What is needed is a far more rigorous approach to the concept in all its richness, an examination of a full range of theoretical and practical applications. Such a study should tell us how (and why) as well as what is working upon us.

Edmund Epstein's title, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus* suggests the sort of Meredithian position its author takes towards Joyce's developing (and ironic) hero: Stephen must first free himself from the oppressive "Fathers" before, in *Ulysses*, he strives "to *become* a father, to fulfill his Aristotelian drive toward completeness." In *Finnegans Wake* "the only reason the sons seek the father is to destroy him." Such positions, though reductive, are far from absurd, so long as they make distinctions between thematic, allegorical, and "realistic" readings.

Whatever his views, Epstein's presentation is often complex and subtle, drawing

upon a remarkable range of sources for support, exhibiting considerable control over all of Joyce's writing. Frequently, his comments illuminate portions of the text or underscore important truths: e.g. June 16, 1904, is "probably the worst day" in Stephen's life. The theme of parenthood is one of many nodes in Joyce's web, and we should welcome a through investigation. But Epstein tends to prefer metaphorical constructs to issues. For example, the obvious thrust of his argument is Oedipal and even Freudian, but the role of the mother is hardly accounted for in a schema which adduces as proof of the generation struggle the "customary coldness and whiteness" of the enemy-father out to inhibit his son's growth.

Reading images rather than contexts and scamping Joyce's fundamentally ironical and paradoxical mode, Epstein seems willing to reduce all conflict to the struggle against a rather vague and generalized parental will. He seems unaware that Joyce-Stephen's word "static" as applied to art works means "internally dynamic," that is, leading neither to action nor to neat conclusions about profound matters. Repeatedly, he assigns single meanings to the families of allusions and images through which he reads the books, or worse, takes metaphoric identities literally. Stephen is capable of comparing himself to Daedalus but he is *not* as Epstein has him a "hawklike man." After all he also resembles and identifies with Icarus. He does not *actually* hold an "augur's rod," when he stands on the steps of the library. Rather, using his ashplant as a synecdoche, he imagines himself in the augur's role. As Epstein says, the chapters of *A Portrait* have parallel structures, but the emphasis should be on the plurality of the organizing devices rather than on a single over-riding device, theme, or image cluster, or on a subliminal structure composed of elements so arcane that one frequently needs an encyclopedia to fathom them. If we agree that Stephen's attitudes toward darkness (dampness) and warmth are reversed in later chapters, do we have to read this development as the assumption of fatherhood? . . . or even as a rejection of sonship? . . . . Is there no irony here? Epstein's metaphors strike me as simultaneously slippery and rigid—confining Joyce more than they do the critic. Finally, I find it difficult to read Stephen exclusively as a romantic hero, especially since Stephen sees himself so much in that light; but this is one inevitable result of a largely non-ironic reading. It leads Epstein to the following conclusions?

> Stephen must go into exile to begin his new life as a creator. Cissy Caffrey is an unworthy choice for Stephen; as an Irish girl walking out with British soldiers she is hardly the consort for the new "king" of Ireland. Nor are her friends any more worthy of the role; they all are involved with foreigners (U431). Molly and Milly are also unsatisfactory, since accepting either of them would also be accepting a role as Bloom's son, a little Harry Hughes enticed to his (spiritual) death by a Jew's daughter (U690-92). Stephen, therefore, leaves the house of bondage and goes on his way under the chariot of David. As he goes, a Jew's harp sounds in Eccles Street for the beginning of his life as the new David, the mature creator, and the dawn prepares to rise.

For all of this, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus* makes one important contribution to the study of Joyce's themes. An extended discussion of the hitherto over-

looked King David allusions and an authoritative outline of the many treatments of this figure in literature and theology help illustrate not only how that particular body of allusions operates but also how Joyce's allegorical patterns function. Since David is certainy one of the subidentities for Stephen and Shem, we ought to understand his role.

For all the differences in value, tact, method, focus, and interest, each of these studies is at base thematic. That is, none of them approach the work, especially Joyce's work, as a totality or from more than one rather fixed position. Each writer begins with thematic presuppositions. Brandabur's position is the most gracefully defended because it is the least literal, because his vision takes him beyond the author's intentions to recognizable drives, and because his treatments verge on the formal. Beja's study is a thematic study masquerading as a formal one. The "visionary moment" is his theme. Nowhere does he show why it is effective, or how it works. When he tries to make a case for the epiphany as a device for informing fiction, he does no more than the average symbol-monger; for an image cluster repeated with variations is little more than a motif. Here is his major failure, since Joyce, Wolfe, Proust *et al* do in fact structure their works with the aid of a variety of epiphanic moments, of positive and negative and even neutral-seeming showings-forth. For Epstein the parent is male, parental power is virtually inseparable from the power of culture (church, nation, politics, language), symbolic representation is indistinguishable from narrative presentation, and symbols retain throughout Joyce's career a single consciously-bestowed and non-ironic charge. (I am doubtless over-simplifying, but this is the impact of his argument.) We need not ignore or understate the thematic content of Joyce's work (or of the Novel). But we must reassess continually the sort of meaning inherent in the works, recognize a validity which operates (as Brandabur seems to understand) against unblinking fixity and undermines the very answers it proposes to the questions it appears to raise. The polysemous work is a relational construct which enacts its own truth and meaning and needs no *key* because it contains no *secret*.

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Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe by Daniel Hoffman. Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1972. Pp. xiv + 369. $7.95.

Hoaxiepoe the Puzzle Buff, Edgarpoe the Poet, Inimitable Edgar the Variety Artist, Horror-Haunted Edgar, Poe the Sooth-Sayer, Poe the Rationalist, Poe the Demonic Mystic are the nominal subjects of Hoffman's book. But the relevant question which Hoffman poses for people who read magazines like *Criticism* is the adequacy of critical methods, for Hoffman believes that criticism ". . . requires a full commitment to only a partial truth." Standard critical approaches are satisfactory for explicating a specific theme or symbol or any single aspect of Poe's work, but to capture the artist's imagination in all its richness and variety demands a shifting focus, a variety of moods, an interplay of modes which number at least seven.

At times Hoffman leaps back to his pre-adolescent youth when he thrilled in unsophisticated horror to the magical aura of the number seven and the terror of "A Predicament" and "The Pit and the Pendulum," the time when Poe first sneaked under Hoffman's skin and he became obsessed with Poe's eerie, inexorable, inescapable art. Across the fly leaf of his edition of Poe, he had firmly written "I hate Poe" and signed his name.

> I remember pressing the pencil so hard that the writing came through in reverse, a hieroglyph in secret code across the phrenological features of the author's daguerreotype. And I held the book up to the mirror, seeing Poe's image in my hand and the image of his image in the image of my hand, my adolescent hatred inscribed both backwards and forwards across his forehead.

Hence the reason for this book, begged in the first two sentences, is clear: "What, another book on Poe! Who needs it?" Hoffman needs it. He must do this criticism for the same reason the writer must write—compulsion and, moreso with Poe than with less demonic writers, exorcism.

To exorcise Poe requires more than mere intellectual distancing and objective analysis; Hoffman has read Poe too early for that. Instead he must plunge into Poe's psyche and partake of his complex imagination, becoming Poe's *semblable*, the alter ego of this man who is exactly the same height, combs his hair in the same way, and has the same large, luminous and liquid eyes. Hoffman must, not only because of Poe's baffling mysticism and perverse imps, but because as any professor has to admit two-fifths of Poe is sheer fudge. To distinguish which of Poe's statements are fudge and which are flights of genius insists that Hoffman match Poe mood for mood. Like William Wilson, he must create the image in the mirror before he can attempt to grapple with it.

This ambitious attempt must sometimes fail, and the failures, though few, are present. The attempts to forge mystical connections between Hoffman's life and Poe's occasionally are gratuitous as when Hoffman points out that the 1938 Modern Library Edition from which he is working was published the same year he had his first traumatic Poe nightmare, hinting that Bennett Cerf was somehow in collusion with Destiny. (Why not go one step beyond and mention that the story under discussion, "A Predicament," was published in 1838?) In like manner, when Hoffman poses as scientist and lectures on the Symmes movement which enabled Pym to return to New York, the pose is incongruous, for we know that for Hoffman the poet and critic it is enough to know that Pym *did* survive and the literal how is unimportant. The goal is to discover what changes in Pym's mentality have been wrought to permit him to gain salvation, and Hoffman should know better than to trifle with mechanical irrelevancies and fall into one of Poe's rationalist traps. Although he objects to another critic's overly rationalistic and too ingenious interpretation of "Ligeia" and draws back earlier from deigning to offer a rational explanation for the combustion of the house in "The Black Cat" because it would be "irrelevant," when he analyzes "The Purloined Letter" we find that Dupin is actually the queen's lover who has been supplanted in the queen's affection by Minister D—who is in fact Dupin's father and that the tale is a nineteenth-century parable of the story of the House of Atreus. Altogether too much sauce to swallow. In trying

to be as analytical as Poe in his "Maelzel's Chess-Player," Hoffman sometimes is too clever, a quality he decries in others.

The problem with these shifting critical modes is that the focus sometimes blurs. For example, Hoffman dismisses Jean-Paul Weber's rather bizarre Freudian interpretation with a one-word paragraph—"Bullfeathers." While this evaluation is probably fair, one would like more background and justification of this appraisal. Hoffman's objection is certainly not to Freudian criticism, for he often uses the same approach as when he discusses man's desire to return to the womb:

> What have I been hearing but mankind's yearning to return to its mother. For no other motive can so strongly act on nations so diverse, peoples so rivalrous, to unite them in their fascinated, their mesmerized following of the thrust of the phallic rocket, the detachment of the little spermship, the slow and calculated opening thereof and the cautious emergence of Astronaut Neil Armstrong, in the protective encasement of his pressure suit.

When he applies this Freudian mode to "The Black Cat," he alters the standard Freudian symbolism somewhat and improves upon the usual interpretation by Marie Bonaparte, providing the most persuasive interpretation of the story to date. However, when he tries this approach on "The Tell-Tale Heart," the technique falls flat. The eye which Hoffman had earlier established in "The Black Cat" as a vaginal symbol somehow becomes both a symbol of the old man's sexual power and the source of conscience which castigates the boy's sexual misdemeanors. While possibly a symbol for the latter, it is difficult to accept the eye also—the diseased eye of the old, passive, always recumbent man—as a symbol of sexual prowess. Hoffman shuffles such symbols about too slickly, and when he finally shows his cards one can not but help suspecting some sleight-of-hand.

As might be expected, the most successful parts of this book are when Hoffman sheds the various, shifting modes and concentrates on one. Sometimes when he does not, the result is a hodge-podge, a problem of focus which Hoffman realizes: ". . . what a hell of a time I'm having holding it together when it keeps wanting to go off on tangents. . . ." When Hoffman does have his theme in focus, he produces original and solid contributions to Poe scholarship. One such is his explication of "The Philosophy of Composition" which critics have long puzzled over trying to decide whether this essay is a hoax or sincere or whether it began as a hoax and turned into a serious essay somewhere along the line. Hoffman's conclusion is that "The Philosophy of Composition" is not only sincere but profound. Besides the usual accolades awarded this essay because of its emphasis on poetry as a craft and as a careful composition of individual elements, Poe's main point is that this close attention is necessary in order to achieve unexpectedness and indefiniteness. Meticulous attention to the prosodic components is essential in order to surpass the formulaic niceness of the poem. Through careful, skillful construction of thought, the poem achieves an "approximation of the suprarational which is Beauty, sublimity, or, to put it metaphysically, the primal unity from which we come and whence we shall return."

Hoffman sees this goal as the fundamental unifying theme of all of Poe's works which is most comprehensively illustrated in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon*

Pym, Eureka and "The Fall of the House of Usher." In *Pym,* the body ranges the world, voyaging away from the self just as the *Grampus* sailed away from Edgartown, and the hero seeks to master the uncontrollable imp of the perverse which rules life. In *Eureka,* the mind is the voyager, attempting to transcend the world completely and ultimately discovering that the prime mover of the universe is the soul. In the finite, physically restricted setting of "The Fall of the House of Usher," the soul itself is captured, explored and found to be the memory of a divine state of being, one that had once been experienced and one that will again be had. The poet in his exalted moods can glimpse this state of being, but the glimpse is fleeting and the raven intrudes to remind him that "known life is an unmitigated disaster, a spell of suffering, loss, horror, and sorrow, of longing almost unbearable for the bliss he can almost remember, for the obliteration he yearns for as much as he dreads." Through the poems, the tales, the essays and the one novel, this one theme is predominant and is, to Hoffman's mind, the Poe theme.

This discovery of the fundamental unity in Poe—the hegemony of Art which imitates the plots of God—comes as no surprise to those who have already read Georges Poulet and others, and Hoffman provides a notable refinement of the theory. Moreover, his eclective impressionism, the process of discovery which results in discovery, makes the book essential reading, not only essential but fun for Hoffman believes that criticism, like literature, should delight as well as instruct. Watching the many facets of Poe's art refract through Hoffman's critical and poetic sensibilities is indeed delightful and instructive. If one has read William Wilson on William Wilson, one must read Hoffman on Poe.

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