

1967

## Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism>

---

### Recommended Citation

Editors, Criticism (1967) "Book Reviews," *Criticism*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 6.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol9/iss2/6>

## Book Reviews

*A History of Modern Criticism: Vol. III, The Age of Transition*, pp. xvi + 388, \$8.50; Vol. IV, *The Later Nineteenth Century*, pp. vi + 671, \$10.00, by René Wellek. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965.

The third and fourth volumes of Professor Wellek's monumental study of modern literary criticism in the western world covers France, Italy, England, America, Germany, Russia, and "The Lonely Dane: Georg Brandes." Within this comprehensive scheme he is able to give marked attention both to movements and to individual critics. Carlyle, for example, receives 18 pages, Ruskin 14, Emerson 13, Taine 31, De Sanctis 28, Arnold 15, Henry James (very properly) 27, Brandes 19, Saintsbury 12, and Baudelaire 18.

The "Preface to Volumes 3 and 4" "in part reasserts the Preface of the first volume and in part takes some account of the objections raised against it." The earlier Preface is not at hand for reference; but one may take the opportunity to rehearse some objections that may be raised against Professor Wellek's previous work in general. With the present volumes the nature and the pattern of his effort, always evident, become still more distinct. He has steadily sought to be rational, comprehensive, cosmopolitan; and, above all, just. There is a negative side, however, to this attempted universality and justice. In proportion to Wellek's total achievement it is a minor quantity, but it may have a major effect upon scholars and critics of more limited scope.

Thus while combatting provincialism in English and particularly in American scholarship, he has sometimes emphasized sheer relationship to the point where it would seem that there was indeed nothing new under the sun. This his tremendous learning and formidable command of modern European languages have enabled him to enforce with ease. When Wellek footnotes his chapters on Russian criticism in the original, most of us can only sigh in hopeless admiration, both of him and perhaps also of the resources of the Yale University Press.

Correspondingly, he has appeared to accent unduly the *concepts* of criticism, to the detriment of the claims of the individual critic. Clearly, the more general and abstract the level of discussion is made, the easier it is to identify one doctrine with another, or to assert the derivation of one critic's use of a doctrine from another. Thus Wellek's studies have occasionally seemed atomistic in breaking down critics into their identifiable concepts, without sufficiently noting the internal relationships which may represent a critic's true unity, coherence, and vitality. In weaker moments his pursuit of even-handed justice has taken too narrow and legalistic a course, has been too much simply an affair of *meum* and *tuum*, leading him into arid and tendentious discussion of sources. In some instances, indeed, as with Coleridge, his enormous influence has stood as a barrier to free and disinterested critical speculation; to talk about Coleridge you have first to find some way of getting around Wellek. And this obscures the fact of Wellek's own great critical intelligence. As a historian of criticism he has the advantage of being a first-class critical theorist to begin with.

Happily, the volumes under consideration are little subject to the strictures outlined above. It is my impression that they represent an advance, too, upon the two early books in *A History of Modern Criticism*, though they describe what is in Wellek's opinion a decline from the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries. The general assertions of the prefaces, introduction, and "Postscript" are no less than masterly in their comprehensive grasp, their decisiveness, and their balance. It is particularly comforting, too, to have at this juncture a ringing defense of the humanistic approach to criticism and to literary studies as a whole, at a time when so many seem prepared to sell their critical birthrights for a mess of false objectivity.

Wellek argues for the essential unity of criticism with aesthetics and with the individual work ("I am convinced that literary theory cannot be divorced from aesthetics and from practical criticism in the sense of judgment and analysis of single works of art"). He speaks up also for the necessity of judgment, as an essential part of the critical act. Judgment, one may say, is the most difficult and the final step for the critic to take. Few have ever been able to combine the judicial spirit and instinct with a just sense of what they are judging, and most judicial criticism begins and ends with the attitude itself. Nevertheless, it is inherent and indispensable in criticism.

One heartily agrees with the statement that "Complete relativism, as advocated by some scholars, leads to skepticism and finally to a paralysis of judgment: to a surrender of the very reasons for the existence of criticism." Wellek disavows both relativism and absolutism in favor of "perspectivism," which "tries to see the object from all possible sides and is convinced that there *is* an object: the elephant in spite of all the diverse opinions of the blind men." To the question that is obvious at this point, he replies, "The only answer is precisely that which grows out of history itself: a body of doctrines and insights, judgments and theories which are the accumulated wisdom of mankind." It would seem self-evident, indeed, that criticism must begin with the assumption of its object's reality, but experience tells us that it is far from evident to many. And thus result the shortcuts, the reductive attempts at certainty through the methods of other disciplines, the quests for some hidden bedrock of completely demonstrable truth.

In his "Postscript," discussing what a history of criticism should be, Wellek makes allowance for time, environment, political belief and philosophical doctrine; yet he affirms the ultimate autonomy of criticism. "Criticism is not completely involved *in* history; rather it has its own history, which is comparatively independent of its relations to other endeavors of mankind." This leads him once more to assert the necessity of judgment and selection on the part of the historian of criticism as for the critic himself. Mere description and summary cannot suffice. One cites with enthusiasm his notion of the interplay of literary theory with the individual work ("there is an interplay between the intense contemplation of the object and the desire to organize our experience into a network and even system of concepts"); perfect balance here would constitute the ultimate success. And one is inspired by his repeated rejection of scientism.

Wellek's view of late nineteenth-century criticism is on the whole unfavorable. It was, to state his position more flatly than he does, a retreat from the achievement of the great Romantic critics. The main new enterprise, the attempt to formulate a new poetics on the analogy of the natural sciences, was a failure,

as were therefore both realism and naturalism. Historicism, the other great movement of the nineteenth century, along with its broadening also had adverse effects in relativism and anarchy of values, which culminate in impressionism, "The adventures of the soul among masterpieces."

Nineteenth century criticism lost its grasp on the unity of form and content, and fell into the extremes of didacticism and art-for-art's-sake formalism. It was valuable, however, as a laboratory in which almost all modern theories were tested and pushed to their ultimate limits. Here Wellek remarks that the most important consequence of the discussions of these issues was the emergence of critical personalities. "Happily, concepts, arguments, and doctrines come alive in the work of a great critic in a configuration that is not repeated anywhere else, that is unique and therefore valuable if we value personality and man." This is a fine and humane statement on a crucial issue; the precise degree of success with which the author is able to practise it is too difficult a question for this review. It should be noted that Wellek wisely distinguishes "personalities" from "persons," thus avoiding the irrelevancies of literal biography and a false theory of sincerity.

A few critics are cited as preservers and transmitters of the great tradition, which for Wellek moves without a break from neo-classicism to romanticism. These are "Taine and Baudelaire in France; De Sanctis in Italy; Nietzsche and Dilthey in Germany; Henry James in the United States." James, he comments, "is saturated with an almost Goethean sense of the organicity of art." One might consider Coleridge a closer source of influence; at any rate, the remark is just and penetrating. James's critical vocabulary is pervaded by metaphors of organic life such as "seed" and "germ." The importance of these critics lies, like Shelley's West Wind, in their rôle as preservers preparing for the regeneration that was to come: ". . . something has been reconstituted in the 20th century that had fallen apart in the 19th: a sense of the unity of content and form, a grasp of the nature of art." Wellek concludes his general discussion with a brief but balanced account of critical nationalism as a factor to be reckoned with.

It is impossible to speak adequately of the author's treatment of individuals or even of movements. This is unfair, since it to some extent ignores the living substance of the book; but it is pretty well inevitable. It can be said, however, that Wellek's criticism in these two volumes seems everywhere just, central, trenchant, and shrewd; his sections on Taine, Baudelaire, and James are notable examples of his quality. What he says of Emerson and Poe is not enough, of course, to satisfy a specialist, but it is remarkably decisive and sure of touch. I find myself so completely in agreement with his view of Victorian criticism (including E. S. Dallas), that I can do no more than register satisfaction. Finally, Wellek's surveys of current scholarship, briefer than in his earlier volumes, admirably exemplify the "perspectivism" of his critical position. Occasionally harsh in judgment, they are nonetheless salutary and genuinely judicial, at a time when such surveys are usually either over-kindly or too directly and narrowly controversial.

RICHARD HARTER FOGLE

*Tulane University*

*Prose Styles: Five Primary Types*, by Huntington Brown. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966. Pp. ix + 149. \$4.50.

This illuminating study, which has been underway since 1946, takes up 124 pages of leisurely prose; that in itself is matter for admiration. Mr. Brown is immensely learned in his subject, but sees no reason to inflict the more recondite or pedantic aspects of his learning upon his readers (and he will thereby acquire more numerous and willing readers than most of us do). What he has done, in prose which he calls expository but which certainly has its oracular moments, is to present an outline description of prose styles which is simultaneously limited, opinionated, original, open-ended, and very suggestive.

By prose style, Mr. Brown means detail rather than form or genre, and he finds style most significantly apparent in sentence structure. Believing that there is no single prose style, no positive element that divides all prose from verse, he establishes five primary types which can be found either singly or in combination, in any age, in practically every piece of English prose, fiction and non-fiction alike. These types are the deliberative (debate, history); the expository (lecture, sermon, occasional oratory); the tumbling (colloquial pamphlet, sports column); the prophetic (Biblical prophecy, Stoic philosophy, essay); and the indenture (legal document, formal message). While certain styles occur most naturally in particular forms or genres, there is no hard and fast rule: every style, for example, can be found in the novel.

None of these five types is a new discovery, and no effort is made to give an exhaustive account of any of them. Mr. Brown's intended achievement has been to place them in timeless parallelism, and to suggest a very few identifying characteristics, with perhaps one creative trademark, which remain recognizable through successive reappearances of each style in very different periods or fashions. Thus the climactic and persuasive deliberative style of ancient oratory is last cited in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. The tumbling style links Bishop Aelfric's Middle English with the insistent rhythms of today's sports columnist.

Mr. Brown considers his book a follow-up of Morris Croll's fine studies, and such an extension of Croll is long overdue. We are still absurdly dependent on the terminology of ancient rhetoric, which, as Mr. Brown notes, was intended to describe oratory only. Croll's studies, while still the best of this century, were primarily confined to Renaissance Attic prose, and did nothing to liberate our thinking from the Senecan-Ciceronian polarity, which is quite misleading for English literature. Mr. Brown's book provides at least some important suggestions for a vocabulary of prose style that has the temporal flexibility of that of prosody.

Some readers will be disconcerted by some of Mr. Brown's techniques and views. He ends chapters with pages of quotations, and has no concluding chapter at all, evidently assuming that having said a thing once he need neither summarize, defend, or reinterpret. His final long chapter, which follows the same pattern, is a discussion of the legal indenture style containing much more evidence of his own fascination with the subject than of its relevance to literature. Granted, he never claims to be concerned only with literature, much less first-rate literature, but that lack of concern sometimes permits him to be merely self-indulgent. The word "prophetic," it's true, has been consistently used here for prose that doesn't really prophesy, but it seems arbitrary to illustrate the

style out of R. L. Stevenson and Logan Pearsall Smith when natural prophets and fine writers like D. H. Lawrence and James Baldwin are available.

However, it is good to be able to read a book whose author is willing openly to like some writers and dislike others (Mr. Brown loathes Lyly and Carlyle). He is there to be argued with. And the book contains all sorts of possibilities for further exploration and elaboration. It is obvious everywhere that he could have gone farther, but he chooses to leave something for the reader to do. One is stimulated by him as by conversations with one's friends, conversations which are, like this book, a pleasure and a challenge.

JOAN WEBBER

*The Ohio State University*

"*Twelfth Night*" and *Shakespearian Comedy* by Clifford Leech. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965. Pp. vii + 88. \$3.50.

This latest book by Professor Leech, distinguished critic of Elizabethan drama, consists of three lectures given at Dalhousie University as part of a Shakespeare Quadricentennial celebration. Delivered originally from the stage of the Neptune Theater in Halifax, they offer a large perspective on Shakespeare's comedies at the same time that they focus attention on only four plays. *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is taken as representative of Shakespeare's earlier romantic comedy. *Twelfth Night* is given central prominence as a crucial turning point in Shakespeare's handling of comic theme and form. And *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Winter's Tale* are viewed as supreme examples of Shakespeare's mature achievement in comedy.

The essays are a pleasure to read: they are thoughtful, urbane, wide-ranging in reference, and attuned to the humane concerns of Shakespeare's art. Particularly impressive is the first essay, which very gracefully outlines the various conventions and themes of comedy and romance which Shakespeare used and transmuted in his earliest comedies. Professor's Leech's main thesis is that the early comedies were designed primarily to entertain an audience. Thus while the romanticism of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is tempered by a skepticism about ideals of friendship and love, no strain of discord is allowed to mar the concluding harmony or to shadow the prevailing festive optimism. In *Twelfth Night*, however, the necessities of Shakespeare's maturing vision of life preclude simple optimism or delight. For now, according to Professor Leech, Shakespeare suggests the artificiality and the precariousness of comic delight in the face of human malice and pretensions, vulnerability and suffering.

Since criticism is so often intent on defining the essential form of Shakespearean comedy, the suggestiveness and openness of Professor Leech's approach is welcome. Still one may object that his argument seems to slight the achievement of the romantic comedies and, indeed, to undervalue romantic comedy itself as a form of dramatic art. Not every reader, moreover, will agree with Professor Leech that *Troilus and Cressida* is a more perfect comedy and a less ambiguous work of art than *Twelfth Night*. But this is not a book which reaffirms the ancient saws about Shakespeare's comedies. In a deceptively quiet manner, it presents a fresh and stimulating view of its subject.

ROBERT ORNSTEIN

*Western Reserve University*

*Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of 9 American Women Novelists* by Louis Auchincloss. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965. Pp. 202. \$4.95.

There is an epoch between Ellen Glasgow's *The Battleground* and Mary McCarthy's *The Group*, and Louis Auchincloss attempts to scan that epoch in his sensitive, if occasionally dilettantish, study of nine American women novelists, *Pioneers and Caretakers*. While the consideration of Miss McCarthy's latest novel and Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools* are highlights of this volume, the bulk of the book is devoted to novelists of the past: Sarah Orne Jewett, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather.

What makes these women notable, according to Auchincloss, is that they have struck a more affirmative note than American male novelists: "They have a sharper sense of their stake in the national heritage, and they are always at work to preserve it. They never destroy; they never want the clean sweep. They are conservatives who are always trying to conserve." Although it is doubtful if Miss Jewett can be classified a novelist, I suppose she earns her place in this volume by being conservative. What she wanted to conserve was the charm of certain little villages along the rocky coast of northern New England. Her numerous sketches, then, and her loose-leaf novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, are limited in point of view. Auchincloss, in commenting on the setting of the latter, emphasizes that they were intentionally so limited: "Dunnet may be seen too idyllically, if realism is what one wants, but this is not because the individuals are Greenaway ladies or bunny rabbits, but because they have been selected to substantiate the author's thesis that Dunnet is a lovely place, full of integrity, good neighborliness, thrift, and industry, as neat as it is honest, as tactful as it is unaffected, as simple as it is profound."

While it seems slightly jarring to turn from Dunnet Landing to Mrs. Wharton's New York, Auchincloss assures us that the world into which the younger novelist was born was equally provincial, "a small, sober, proper, tightly knit society, of Dutch and English descent, which lived in uniform streets of chocolate house fronts on income largely derived from municipal real estate." Mrs. Wharton became nostalgic over her milieu only toward the end of her career; at the height of it she was highly critical. The critical tone characterizes her most significant novel, *The House of Mirth*, in which, amid the struggle between early and later materialists, the decline of the individual and the attempted destruction of beauty are dramatized. The materialism toward which New York society inclined could not admit beauty because it suffered by contrast, thus the opposition to Lily Bart, the personification of beauty: "Lily's beauty is the light in which each of her different groups would like to shine, but when they find that it illuminates their ugliness they want to put it out." Affection for this society is latent in the author's criticism, however; Lily's beauty is "the haunting symbol of what society might be—and isn't." While Mrs. Wharton never claimed such ideal beauty for the society of her birth, she detected in social restrictions an opportunity for maturity. After these restrictions disintegrated she could look back to that tight society through the rose-colored glasses of Miss Jewett.

Ellen Glasgow also saw social restriction as a test of individualism. The restrictions were Southern, more specifically Virginian, and their disintegration

could be traced to the Civil War, which was more catastrophic than anything New York experienced. Nostalgia for the Old South permeates the best work of Miss Glasgow. While it lapses into sentimentality in *The Battleground*, it is pitted against the facts of modern life in her more mature work, and the result is a fruitful conflict. In depicting a society emerging from defeat and reconstruction, with its old legends intact, and attempting to adjust to an industrial age, Glasgow explores all its levels from "white trash" to aristocrat. The range of this novelist is astonishing. More metaphysical than either Cather or Wharton, she equalled the former in *Barren Ground*, a novel of the soil, and the latter in the great trilogy of Richmond. As Auchincloss comments, "Turning from *Barren Ground* to *The Romantic Comedians* is like turning from Hardy to Meredith, from *The Return of the Native* to *The Egoist*." The consideration of the Richmond trilogy (*The Romantic Comedians*, *They Stooped to Folly*, and *The Sheltered Life*) comprises Auchincloss' most valuable pages on Miss Glasgow. Although the central novel is not properly evaluated, the discussion of the last is absorbing. Its climax, occurring when Eva Birdsong shoots her husband and his body slumps amid the carcasses of the ducks he has killed, is the climax of the conflict between romance and reality: "It is the ultimate dramatization of the divorce between the Virginian myth and the Virginian fact, the climax of the novel and of Ellen Glasgow's fiction."

Willa Cather came from mid-America, which Mrs. Wharton viewed through inverted opera glasses as a barbaric place. The tension in Miss Cather's work concerns her attempt to link wild country with the European past she idealized. She viewed this as the major challenge of the pioneer and grew nostalgic over the process. Auchincloss makes his most penetrating statement about her in this regard, noting that the most important aspect of her two historical novels, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*, "is the new light that they shed on the ancient 'international problem,' so dear to the hearts of Henry James and his disciples. The Jacobites were apt to see the problem in terms of the effect of a wicked old Europe, charming, cultivated, but deeply corrupt, on a young, idealistic visitor from over the seas, undereducated, raw, but pure. . . . Miss Cather, who had traveled extensively in Europe, saw that the vital aspect of the 'problem' was the impact of the new world on the old in the new world." There is an adolescent expectancy in much of Cather, an idyllic magic connected with hearing the Walkyries over the plains of the West. While this characterizes her best work, it is also the source of bitterness in her worst. The materialism of her Nebraska and of modern life in general made her a bitter old woman, but not before she fused the European past and American present in her Southwest, an artistically realized setting based on physical reality.

As I have tried to indicate, *Pioneers and Caretakers* presents a rather sweeping view. This is not to say that it fails to consider particular scenes, characters and descriptive passages; it is, in other words, literary criticism as well as literary history. While the theme of conserving is loose enough to enable Auchincloss to treat each novelist without distortion, one could hope for a better integrated study. One could also lament that some of the novelists, like Elizabeth Madox Roberts, whose *The Time of Man* is at least as great as any other novel considered, are treated so briefly. (The eleven pages on Miss Roberts would hardly serve as an introduction to an edition of her work.) One could also complain

that the treatment of significant novels like *They Stooped to Folly* and *The Professor's House* suffers from a too obvious lack of sympathy, or, as in the case of Selden in *The House of Mirth*, from unchecked temptations to make biographical connections. The book is worthy despite all this, however, because it is a serious and generally successful attempt to fill a gap in criticism of the American novel by considering some novelists of the first rank who have been either neglected or dismissed by foolish criticism of their femininity.

JOHN J. MURPHY

*Merrimack College*

*Modern Literature, I: The Literature of France*, by Henri Peyre. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1966. Pp. xiii + 242. \$9.50.

This volume, so essentially concerned with the relation between the humanities and French literature and, particularly, with American publications and scholarship in this literature, was rightfully commissioned of Professor Peyre by the acutely perceptive Council of the Humanities of Princeton University. And the author, to assess the American scholarly and critical contribution to the study and interpretation of French literature, ranges the entire field from the very beginnings through the present day. His pages bear evidence of his awesome powers of absorption and critical acumen, of an ability to synthesize and popularize—all of them indispensable qualities for fulfilling the purpose he has assigned to himself in this volume.

Eschewing, as he welcomingly assures us, both pendency and sterile bibliography, the author surveys the positive and negative aspects of American scholarship and concludes the volume with incisive and constructive criticism. Recognizing that such a review, actually a running list of scholars and their contributions, will be arbitrary and guilty of omissions—thus irking the sensibilities of some colleagues,—Professor Peyre confesses his wish to be fair to all. And a reflective study of his list does indeed show that not all the scholars whom he mentions are giants (although many are!) or even necessarily the best considered authorities. To the contrary, too, some important scholars are embarrassingly absent, the mention of whose names here would be tactless and ungracious. Nor can this lacuna be glossed over even by a sympathetic reader when he finds in this context the name of the author of a forthcoming study.

Yet on every page Professor Peyre shows his well-known and encyclopedic grasp of his chosen field. The reader soon is prompted to ask: Where has American scholarship failed? In terms of periods, it shows itself to be weak in medieval studies and the Renaissance. Studies in the earlier period, suggests the author, can be improved only if ways and means (which he specifies) can be found to equip students with knowledge of Old French, Provençal, Old Spanish, German, etc. The Renaissance, too, suffers because of basically the same reason: a lack of familiarity with the Greek and Latin classics as well as a thorough knowledge of Italian. The author, who has for so long now, through his knowledge of classical and modern languages and literatures, stressed, in his

approach to literature, the importance of humanistic values, has broadened for us the idea of literature, as it is or should be. Instead of retaining the unfortunate departmental partitions, with a monolithic, "purist" approach, he suggests a kind of horizontal view which would relate French literature to philosophy, history, the social sciences, ideas, other literatures, art and music. This volume is thus given its *raison d'être*, and it highlights the author's originality—which is essentially to suggest innumerable subjects yet to be explored and investigated by both Ph.D. candidates and veteran scholars (and which, incidentally, remind this reviewer of a similar feat performed by the author some twenty (?) years ago at an MLA Convention). These subjects, it should be emphasized, deal with authors—even secondary ones—, themes, and myths. At the same time, they suggest the need for greater knowledge in related areas and for a change in American premature and excessive specialization. This raising of the signals is an additional debt we owe the author.

If, on the other hand, American scholarship has at times been berated unjustly in France, it is partly because the critics have become envious of American material facilities and advantages, which include the bounty of our Foundations. The fact of the matter is, as the author assures us, the study of western European literatures has made, from 1919 to 1965, gigantic strides in the United States. Even more striking is the observation that the study of contemporary French literature, in contrast with what used to be called philology, gained academic respectability and came of age in the United States only since 1930, and is today second to none; indeed, no one in France can successfully do research in this period without reading American academic critics. This is the period, indeed, as we all know, that the Ph.D. candidate favors especially. The positive side of the ledger reveals, too, that American scholarship on certain authors during the last ten or fifteen years has surpassed even the French contribution. Included among these authors are Montaigne, Molière, Racine, Diderot, Gide, Proust, Malraux, Camus and Sartre. But again, what, with few exceptions, is especially lacking in American scholarship, unlike the situation in France, is the attempt of vast syntheses, of a trend, an idea, an age. This, too, is due to the American's fear of venturing bold value judgments and to his reliance on the accumulation of data, detailed demonstration, systematization—in all of which he excels. At his best, the American scholar stresses, most often, the aesthetic.

Bringing thus into bold relief the necessary relationship between the humanities and French literature, one that will fortunately shake the stodginess of some, Professor Peyre sees literature not only as one of the best means of delving into the subconscious sensibilities of individuals and groups but, more importantly, as a way of better understanding the roots of wars, riots, economic revolutions. He would wed literature, in its broadest meaning, with the movement of ideas, social history, and the history of science. His philosophy, which regards man as a rational animal who can sink to levels of the subhuman, recognizes the importance of foreign relations and the fact that, to win the willing cooperation of other countries, we have to understand their literature, *mores*, culture, and art. For similar reasons, he lauds humanistic scholarship which has gained insight into foreign cultures, a *sine qua non* in a world where isolationism and egocentrism are virtually gone.

As a critic, Professor Peyre is eclectic in his approach to the endless quarrel

between the "Ancients and Moderns," combining as he does the ideal and knowledge of classical learning, together with a dissident 'modern' perspective that does not see man's behavior and thinking as a continuous way of progress; rather, he views it as "regressions, moments of stagnation or of barrenness, sudden leaps forward." A relativist who eschews the dogmatic, he nevertheless has definite convictions. Convinced that no single method can seize the uniqueness of each personality, that no standards of yesterday can necessarily prove valid for tomorrow, he also gets into the volume original opinions on Pierre Reverdy, Apollinaire, André Breton, Camus, on the "baroque" and on the "new novelists." Ultimately, what matters to him in the teaching and study of literature is the importance that should be given to erudition which embraces several disciplines and to the even greater emphasis that should be placed on imagination, emotional and sensuous enjoyment, subjective taste, and the eternal sense of wonder and beauty. Not surprisingly, therefore, he attacks structuralism, the use of computers, of card indexes, in favor of flashes of insight, intuition, and the sudden perception of new relations. In this sense, too, one must equate his notion of literature with humanism.

Although this volume has not touched on many important themes that have been studied elsewhere and is not, obviously, a precise or complete bibliography, it is indispensable to every serious student and scholar of French and other literatures and the humanities; for, indeed, it is pregnant with insights and interpretations, inspiring and breathtaking in its scope. For Professor Peyre's objective and constructive criticism, encouragement, and suggestions that will spur literary scholars in this country to further efforts and to a more intelligent approach, one that will hopefully eliminate the dangers of over-specialization, all readers owe him their gratitude.

The reviewer takes this opportunity to conclude with a personal note. For many years Henri Peyre has increasingly come to be regarded as America's "cher maître." A prolific writer, a profound thinker, a universally acclaimed ambassador of good will between America and France, he has, in the opinion of many, done more than any other Frenchman or American in this country to act as friend, mentor and guide to students and scholars. As essayist and critic of international repute he certainly should have been included in a dictionary of French literature with which this reviewer's name is associated and would have been had it not been that he is, as so aptly described by the general editor of this series, so "wholly American" (in addition to being "wholly French"). For this grievous error of omission, due to an unconscious identification of him as an American critic, *mea culpa!*

SIDNEY D. BRAUN

*Wayne State University*

*Turner: Imagination and Reality*, by Lawrence Gowing. New York: Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966. Pp. 64; Pl. 61 + 16 color. \$4.95; paperbound, \$2.95.

Lawrence Gowing has filled a compact, well-written book of 64 pages full of pertinent comments and illustrations covering the last twenty years of

J. M. W. Turner's life. Turner's popularity today is widely acknowledged and is evidenced in the 25 exhibitions since 1946 (p. 64), and in the rather extensive bibliography since 1946, which includes five books and 34 articles (pp. 63-64). This publication coincided with the loan exhibition of Turner's paintings and watercolors which was held at the Museum of Modern Art (March 23 to May 22, 1966). Turner, in a sense, is being reevaluated in the light of the contemporary scene, just as Monet had been earlier in his connection with Abstract Expressionism. Among the many illustrations are works which had never before been exhibited.

The theme of the book might be caught up in two passages. Gowing states, "Turner looked at the intrinsic visual character of painting with a directness that anticipated the studies of modern painters" (p. 24), and "Now we find that a kind of painting, which is of vital concern to us, was anticipated by Turner. And by Turner alone; no one else before developed so far and with such devotion this special order of painting, which is so hard to define and yet so recognisable. It is hard to define because the fantasy and the image are implicit in the material it is made of, inseparable from the actual behaviour of paint in the painters hands" (p. 56).

It is to this end that the author systematically builds his case for Turner as truly one of the greater "modern" painters of the past century. Beginning with an early Turner, *Buttermere Lake, 1797-98*, Gowing points out that even in this work "Light and the grandeur that it gave the place excluded everything else. But as the light fell it scattered shining flecks, sprinklings of incandescent pigment. They suggest that one other thing was real to him, the paint itself" (p. 7). In the succeeding works of the early 1800's, Turner began to exert his personal force more emphatically: "He proceeded to synthesize it [pictorial effect] afresh with an almost excessive richness" (p. 11). Turner added the independent imaginative element, and "his imagination was like an insatiable appetite" (p. 11).

Thus, Turner's vision in the beginning of the last two decades of his life was moving dramatically towards a broader and less specific reference. "It offers, perhaps, pictures of everything rather than of nothing. But eventually no single touch of paint corresponded to any specific object; the equivalence was between the whole configuration and the total subject" (pp. 13, 16). The greater whole was, in truth, more than the sum of its parts.

His first journey to Italy (1819) afforded Turner the opportunity to fully explore the potentials of watercolors (e.g., *Monte Gennaro*) long before the works of Cézanne. Turner's interest, however, was not in the impression of a scene, but rather in the potentials of the medium. In a later work, *Ehrenbreitstein, c. 1842-4*, Gowing states, "It is the paint, or rather the whole technical repertory and its capacity of metaphoric evocation, as much as the picturesque subject, that are real to us. . . . He was concerned with the capacity of paint and nature together to fulfil an imperative requirement of his own" (p. 19).

Turner displayed two sides in his works, one stable, classical, and like Claude, and the other more turbulent and tempestuous. It is the latter which concerns Mr. Gowing. It was drawn into sharp focus for the artist by the burning of the Houses of Parliament. Working directly from the subject, Turner "blotted the pages of his sketchbook one against another in his haste. A drama of flame and water on which he had brooded all his life was being acted out in reality in front of him" (p. 33). In the sketches and the paintings of this subject,

Turner realized fully the potential drama and expressiveness of color and light and water. Toward the end of the thirties, Turner's work became even more vaporous and evasive, and his light and color became more brilliant.

The period of the 1840's was marked by a significant shift in which Turner began to look inward. Imagination, mystery, symbolism, reality, fantasy all merged into one, and the line which divides became obscure. Thus, *The Slave Ship*, 1840, became an invention of boldly imagined forms treated with great colorful effects. The best known Turners (*Snow Storm; Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842; *Seascape*, c. 1840-5; *Rain, Steam and Speed*, 1844) were done in this period, and show the obvious reasons for Turner's popularity today. Color and imagination are fused into one moving force, and Turner is here as modern as any contemporary painter.

Gowing suggests that the late works of Turner were marked by a relaxing of the previous restless tension, and could well be summarized in the multiple, complex meanings that the artist gave to water. "It was not only, more often than not, his subject; it was in many senses his medium. Water typified the world as he imagined it, a world of rippling, echoing light" (p. 51). A light which absorbed reality and fantasy and which was capable of devouring the whole living world—a light which was glorious and sacred, and voracious and unsparring. It is these elements which Turner incorporated in his late works.

Throughout his book, Gowing relates interesting and humorous anecdotes about Turner (especially on Varnishing Days). He provides a brief biographical note (p. 58), a catalogue of the exhibition (pp. 59-62), and a selected bibliography (pp. 63-64), which should be of assistance for those desiring to pursue Turner further. Lawrence Gowing has done an admirable, thorough job in this small volume, and has provided good illustrative material so that we can heartily agree with the author when he states that "Turner showed that a certain potentiality was inherent in the nature of painting. The latent possibility has emerged again. Turner's vision and his towering fantasy remain his own, beyond compare. Nevertheless we meet him with a sense of recognition" (p. 56). In this sense, J. M. W. Turner is indeed a painter of the contemporary world.

SADAYOSHI OMOTO

*Michigan State University*

*The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens*, by Joseph N. Riddel. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965. Pp. ix + 305. \$7.50.

Readers of Mr. Riddel's recent article "The Contours of Stevens Criticism" will recall his quoting Roy Harvey Pearce on "the task ahead" for critics: "to penetrate Stevens' late poems, to visit upon them the kind of 'preliminary exegesis which even their most enthusiastic readers on the whole so far have declined to give them.'" Exegesis is a peculiar word, and is not synonymous with explication, let alone with criticism. But it is exegesis that Mr. Riddel's book hopes to be (he refers to the critic as "the exegete" in his comments on "The

Auroras of Autumn") and my reaction to this aim is a double one. First, to fight aloud is very brave, and most critics of Stevens, whether eminent or obscure, have evaded difficulties, skimmed over problematic verses, flattened surfaces, and continually hedged their bets. Mr. Riddel doggedly confronts poems stanza by stanza, the wilful with the lucid, the perverse with the plain, and if his summaries sometimes deal too lightly with a knotty section, still he has laid his views on the line more than any of his predecessors. On the other hand, such outlines make paralyzing reading, and turn this volume into a non-book, more often than not. "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," for instance, as everyone knows, has thirty stanzas (or "cantos," as Mr. Riddel calls them), and about twenty pages are devoted in this book to the poem, in a sequence of stupefying paragraphs. I give the form of their topic sentences to render the method of the book:

"*It Must Be Abstract.*" Opening with an imperative, the initial poem makes its appeal to innocence. . . .

Canto two, beginning with the awareness of this naked idea, investigates the origins of our absolutes. . . .

Having proclaimed metaphor as the poverty of truth, Stevens submits his proclamation to investigation (iii).

Hence the proposition of canto four. . . .

The tension is given dramatic body in canto five. . . .

The poet's constricted vision, therefore, demands of him the most concentrated attentions . . . (vi). . . .

Cantos seven and eight . . . develop the possibilities of this discovery.

The concluding figure of canto eight . . . leads predictably into canto nine. . . .

In sum, major man proves the argument for abstraction, the flesh become word . . . (x).

And so it goes, through the thirty cantos and their coda, with an organization so predictable that it becomes a parody of itself, as in long poem after long poem the soporific roman numerals stretch down the pages. Even Mr. Riddel's endurance yields to the *longueurs* of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," however, and the summary is summarized at the beginning:

- |       |             |  |
|-------|-------------|--|
| Poems | i-ii:       | provide the basis of meditation                                    |
|       | iii-viii:   | develop out of the initial problem the following:                  |
|       | ix-x:       | conclude the questioning . . . by indicating . . . etc.            |
|       | xi-xvi:     | elevate the I-other drama into the more abstract relation of, etc. |
|       | xvii-xviii: | consider the same question in terms of, etc.                       |
|       | xix-xx:     | present the opposite problem . . .                                 |
|       | xxi-xxiii:  | respond to previous problems, etc.                                 |

This sort of exegesis, followed by paragraphs of amplification, asks too much of the reader, however willing, however enthusiastic about Stevens. I doubt whether anyone can really bear to read such pages, even in a piece of article-length, and the problem is compounded out of all proportion in a three-hundred page book.

What, then, is a critic to do with the long poems? If the answer is not, in Mr. Riddel's style, to engage in exhaustive and repetitive summaries of content,

neither is it to skate gracefully along, "unwilling," as Mr. Frank Kermode professed himself to be, "to disgrace Stevens' greatest work with plodding commentary." (Mr. Kermode rather spoiled his elegant gesture by publishing somewhat obscurely a set of "notes" on "Notes" which are often entertaining, but remain unworked into article form.) I suppose the answer is obvious: to treat these long poems as good critics have treated other large works, whether *Paradise Lost* or *The Dunciad* or "In Memoriam"—to have an "angle" and hope to avoid evasions within that chosen precinct. It is an angle of this sort that Mr. Riddel's book lacks. In his wish to be comprehensive, to say something about close to two hundred poems, he is unfair to all. His thesis is a true and welcome one: that Stevens improved as he got older, speaking in general, and that the late poetry has glories as yet unappreciated. But these glories are not demonstrated by summaries of "problems" of meaning any more than Wordsworth's are. Who has not been put off by the dreary ethical and doctrinal summaries of Wordsworth—on the extent of his Godwinism, on his Hartleian psychology—only to find in *The Prelude* those stunning lines which alone justify the inquiries, but which seem scarcely noticed by the inquirers. The thing to be said for Mr. Riddel is that when he allows himself time off from his outlines, he *can* notice particular lines, and has often enough an apt phrase for them, like his remarks on the "strident tone and opaque rhetoric" of "Bantams in Pine Woods" or on "the pretentious bursts of verbal puff" in some poems. But such distillations of response are rare, by and large, in these pages, and an obtrusive and finally irritating morality takes their place.

Hawthorne says, in the "Preface" to *The House of the Seven Gables*, that "a high truth, indeed, fairly, finely, and skilfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work . . . may add an artistic glory, but is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first." This is as true of Stevens as of any other writer: one can hardly write without some ethical substance, but it is as likely to be a cliché as not, and predictable once known. Describing the "philosophy" of poets is a dull science, and the quasi-theological language it seems to lead to nowadays [what Stevens himself once called "sacerdotal jargon" (NA, 174)] is an embarrassment. Riddel's summary of Pearce in the article mentioned earlier is a case in point:

Picking up Stevens' phrase, "modern reality is a reality of decreation," Pearce applies it to the later Stevens' "act of the mind" claiming that his search for an "ultimate poem" (or ultimate reality) constituted an act of imaginatively breaking down the commonsense structures of reality by way of possessing a reality within reality, a pure abstraction. This is a difficult idea to conceive. It does not, for instance, claim this ultimate reality to be a Lockean substance, nor God, nor an Emersonian super-nature (oversoul). It is rather a transempirical and imaginatively conceivable truth.

This is Mr. Riddel's direction, too, though he is not so fancy as Mr. Pearce: but I cannot feel shamed to admit that I cannot conceive "a reality within reality" or a "transempirical truth," nor do I think they have much to do, whatever they may be, with what Stevens has given us by way of addition to poetry in English. His new and distinctive voice depends not so much on

"transempirical truth" but on a new selection of verbal possibilities from the canon of the language, and if it be asked why he made the selection he did, the answer I think lies in the realm of temperament, not the realm of philosophy. Stevens' temperament was at once fantastic and chilly, demure and flamboyant, deliberate and airy, self-indulgent and ascetic. These qualities, though they may cancel each other in a list, do not in life, and the dimensions of Stevens' self, half-concealed, half-revealed in the poems, will become clearer in time, so that critics will be more likely to read the poems as "the cry of an occasion" and not as a treatise.

Finally, the delicate art of paraphrase must take the manner for the meaning if it is to be exact. "The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," for instance, begins with a bit of nursery nonsense:

The garden flew round with the angel,  
The angel flew round with the clouds,  
And the clouds flew round and the clouds flew round  
And the clouds flew round with the clouds.

Mr. Riddel comments humorlessly: "Note the driving rhythms of stanza one, the verbs of motion, the continuity between real and imagined." The third stanza of the same poem, a famous one, goes:

Mrs. Anderson's Swedish baby  
Might well have been German or Spanish,  
Yet that things go round and again go round  
Has rather a classical sound.

"The concluding strophe," continues Mr. Riddel, "suggests that beneath the particularities or contingencies of life (what might be or might have been) is one certainty: a roundness, a circularity, an orderly motion. Life is progress; all particulars are subsumed under this first law, this "classical sound." Elemental, it is true! and that is exactly the point." Now whatever this poem needs in the way of remarks, it is not "exegesis" in this sense. I should think it would be clear to anybody that the poem is "about" arbitrary chance versus our liking for the notion of order—as in fact many of Stevens' poems are. But the carousel silliness of the first stanza (in charming alliance with its pretty décor of gardens and angels and clouds) and the reductive tone of the last stanza (what philosophical argument could survive the introduction of that baby), together with the hint, once voiced by Reuben Brower, that "classical" has overtones here of "classy," put the poem straight into a very queer genre of its own, rather like the alarming and energetic religious minatory rhymes for infants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—although this is a very sophisticated instance of that tradition.

In Stevens, with his limited range of subject matter, tone is everything. In this he resembles Herbert, whose repetitive verses of unworthiness, resentment, repentance, and hope, would appear to be all the same poem if it were not for the fineness of nuance peculiar to each. For this reason it is impossible to quarrel with Mr. Riddel's summaries: they are often not so much mistaken as inappropriate. He is best, of course, on the poems he likes best, and when he is not bound by his commitment to line-by-line commentary, he makes useful generalizations. This book will be looked to, I think, by novices who need to know

Stevens' general orientation and the clusters his images tend to make, but it is not the work that those already acquainted with Stevens' main concerns are still looking for: a book that will tell us the talismanic dialect invented by this poet, that will describe his grammar, his lexicon, his articulations, his accent—all springing, of course, from a unique self trying to “deal out its being,” to “selve, go itself,” to “fling out broad its name,” to find the arbitrary personal equation in language for its equally arbitrary human temperament.

*Boston University*

HELEN HENNESSY VENDLER