Criticism

Volume 4 | Issue 2 Article 6

1962

Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

Book Reviews

Hippolyta's View: Some Christian Aspects of Shakespeare's Plays by J. A. Bryant, Jr. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1961. Pp. ix + 239. $6.50.

"This is the way with those cursed English; they think more of a play of Shakespeare's, a plum pudding, or a bottle of rum, than they do of the Pentateuch," remarks a Catholic young lady in one of Voltaire's tales, and many devout readers over the centuries have agreed with her in seeing Shakespeare as the antithesis of their religion. In recent years, however, Christian interpretation of Shakespeare has become something of a vogue, which like most vogues contains much that is insubstantial.

J. A. Bryant, Jr.'s *Hippolyta's View* illustrates, even exaggerates, some of the errors and vices to which Christian interpreters of Shakespeare are prone. The title refers to Hippolyta's answer to Theseus' famous speech about poetry in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Bryant reads this answer as a theory of poetry, that, taken together, the various elements of a poetic dream can grow into "something of great constancy," i. e. a universal (for Shakespeare's age, a Christian) truth. He then proceeds to combine various elements of twelve "representative" Shakespeare plays into allegories of Christian stories and doctrines.

Christian interpreters of Shakespeare generally argue that Elizabethans, accustomed to allegorical (I use the word in its special hermeneutical sense) and typological interpretation of scripture, were more prone than succeeding ages to see allegories and types in secular literature and history. Thus, for example, S. L. Bethell: "Shakespeare's audience were accustomed to having the mystical significance of scriptural passages laid bare in their weekly sermons. . . . Now if the exotic and sensual *Song of Solomon* may be understood allegorically as the marriage of Christ and his Church (as traditionally and very properly it has been understood), then it is not unlikely that the exotic and sensual *Antony and Cleopatra* might also yield its hidden meaning to an audience simultaneously aware of the two levels of story and significance" (*Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, p. 140). And Paul N. Siegel: "The presence and significance of biblical analogies in Shakespearean drama are only just now being realized. . . . By [Theobald's] time the Elizabethan audience's habit of thinking in terms of biblical analogy had been lost." (*Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise*, p. 89).

There are two difficulties with this view. The first is that typological interpretation of the Old Testament did not die with Elizabethan England. Probably Dryden, Theobald, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold heard such interpretation in sermons as often as Shakespeare did, without transferring the method to secular history and fiction. The second is that there is little evidence that Elizabethans made such a transfer. Bryant apparently recognizes this when he states, or rather understates, "Needless to say, this compromise [between history as

events and history as divinely inspired pattern] never succeeded in producing a rash of typological interpretations in formal historiography during the Elizabethan period. . . . Historians generally did not go about finding figures of Christ in their pages" (p. 11). But having dutifully made such concessions, Bryant feels free promptly to forget them; thus, "The twentieth-century reader is apt to miss the significance of all this. Undoubtedly a great many Elizabethans, who were long accustomed to seeing typological interpretations of Biblical history, saw in this presentation of Richard as a sort of Adam-Christ a typological interpretation of their own natural history" (p. 25).

The reason Christian interpreters of Shakespeare insist on the Elizabethan propensity for typology is that the internal evidence for their interpretations is generally so tenuous that no one would notice it unless, like themselves, he had been looking very hard to find it. Bryant has his full share of tenuous evidence. Take his suggestion that Antony is a Christ figure, for example. As nearly as I can make them out, the principal pieces of evidence for this are the following. 1. "'O, that I were / Upon the hill of Basan,' [Antony] cries . . . 'to outroar / The horned herd.' . . . The allusion here is to Psalm xxii, which by almost any criterion is one of the most striking of the so-called Messianic Psalms. It begins with the words used by Christ on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" (pp. 179-180)

2. "Readers familiar with the Old Testament must have seen in Antony's story certain resemblances to the story of Samson, who has often been treated as a type of Christ. Like Samson, Antony has his Delilah to tempt him from his destiny; but, even more important, Antony, like Sampson the Nazarite, has a special destiny" (p. 181).

3. "Antony does fulfill his destiny, which is to produce an image of greatness more striking than even his friends think possible. His refusal to take the Roman way prompts Enobarbus to contemplate for himself the Judas way; and the farewell supper that follows in Act IV, for all its derivation from Plutarch, continues the familiar pattern" (p. 182).

4. "Meanwhile . . . Antony's god, Hercules, is forsaking him; and by morning Enobarbus has gone too. To compare the defeat and complete betrayal that follow to Golgotha might seem to some blasphemous and to others absurd; but Antony in the rage that Shakespeare, not Plutarch, gives him does not hesitate to draw a comparison with the death of the god he recognizes: 'The shirt of Nessus is upon me. / Teach me, Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage'" (p. 182-3).

To cover up the weakness of such evidence, Bryant resorts to some devices which most of us have preached against to freshmen and which are more appropriate to admen than to literary critics. We have seen one of these devices already in the mention of the nonexistent "rash of typological interpretations"; another is his trick of defending himself against the charge of blasphemy when that of absurdity is more pressing. Perhaps the commonest device may be illustrated by the following. After noting that Hamlet's remark, "I have shot mine arrow o'er the house / And hurt my brother," is "strangely reminiscent" of Peter Comestor's story of Lamech's accidental killing of Cain, Bryant concludes, "There is no clear evidence, of course, that Shakespeare thought of the legend here; but the consonance of that legend with *Hamlet* as regards the spread of sin, the blindness that precipitates the catastrophe, and the catastrophe that purges is

a further indication of the general background against which Shakespeare wrote his play" (p. 135). The method here is first to offer a piece of evidence, then with an "of course" or a "needless to say" to admit its weakness, then to bring in a "but" or "however" which suggests that the validity of the evidence will be asserted, and finally to assert something which sounds meaningful but is not. Needless to say, the evidence can be taken as valid later on in the discussion if it suits the writer's purpose.

With all these false assumptions, weak evidence, and shady methods of persuasion do the Christian interpreters give us richer insights about Shakespeare's plays? On the contrary, their views are narrow and they strangely distort the works of art that millions have loved and admired for centuries. Take Bryant's treatment of the Henry IV plays, for example. Bryant implies that Falstaff represents the "old man" of the Pauline epistles and that the knight's vices are those inveighed against in *Ephesians*—lying, stealing, fornication, foolish talking, jesting, drinking. Now St. Paul's attitude toward these sins is simple: he is against them. But Shakespeare's attitude is so extraordinarily complex that we hardly know how he means us to feel. In St. Paul a whore is simply dirty and sinful; Falstaff's Doll Tearsheet is loyal to a degree, comic, stupid, and pathetic, as well as criminal and dangerous. Arguing that we can see Shakespeare's characters in both ways at once is like telling Plato's philosopher that a man is both the shadow on the wall and the figure at the mouth of his cave.

Furthermore, Bryant's interpretation does the harshest sort of violence to the traditional view of Shakespeare's character. One reason that people like Voltaire's young lady have found Shakespeare antithetical to their religion is that in Falstaff he created a powerful popular symbol of the harmlessness, even attractiveness, of the rum and plum pudding kind of vice. If Shakespeare preached the Henry IV plays on the Pauline text of putting away the old man, he could hardly have failed more miserably to get across to his audience.

WALTER F. STATON, JR.

Southern Illinois University

The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry, by Samuel Hynes. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961. Pp. ix + 193. $5.00.

Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy, edited with an introduction by John Crowe Ransom. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961. Pp. xxxiii + 134. $4.50.

Mr. Hynes believes that "great poets need great partisans of their poetry. . . . At some point in his career the poet needs enthusiastic admiration, true-believers to enumerate and formulate his virtues." Mr. Hynes is a true-believer but not a fanatic; and he is less concerned with praise alone than with explanation of what is praiseworthy. He explores the crucial issues: diction, imagery, the "philosophy" and its meaning for the poetry, the famous awkwardness, and the relation of *The Dynasts* to the short poems. Like others, Mr. Hynes is attracted by the integrity and decency of Hardy himself, and he recognizes the poetry's power of wakening certain decencies in readers. Out of his feeling for Hardy's readers,

for all of Hardy's writings, and for Hardy himself, Mr. Hynes has fashioned a book that is unobtrusively learned, confident, modest in a manner quite in tune with Hardy's own character, and sensitive to the richness of the poems. We do not have many good writers among our scholars; but Mr. Hynes is a good writer, and with this book he joins the small company of distinguished scholars whose own works are serious literature—for example, Maynard Mack, Samuel H. Monk, and B. H. Bronson.

Mr. Hynes's study is so concise that it is difficult to paraphrase. But his guiding idea is perfectly clear. He argues that there is indeed a pattern in Hardy's poetry; he explains what previous critics have found in it; he elucidates the exact function of Hardy's philosophical ideas within the poems; and he identifies and explores the "pattern" which Hardy sustains among poems written during a period of some seventy years. The pattern is "simply the eternal conflict between irreconcilables." Mr. Hynes invigorates the phrase by revealing the relevance of each of its terms to the structure, diction, rhythm, and imagery of the poems. The pattern "gives form to every aspect of substance and technique."

In explaining the pattern within the particular poems, Mr. Hynes reveals his own great sensitivity to the craft of poetry itself. Here his learning and his own native alertness support each other in ways that become extremely interesting. For example, he remarks that Hardy, far from being indifferent to metrical experiment, actually possesses a prosodic curiosity similar in kind, though not in depth and intensity, to that of Hopkins. Then Mr. Hynes writes several striking pages about the neglected William Barnes. Hardy valued the older Dorsetshire poet's philological studies as well as his beautiful poems; and Mr. Hynes, while never losing sight of Hardy himself, evokes Barnes and his theories in order to show that Hardy's admiration was justified. Such passages moved me to hope that Mr. Hynes will write something on Barnes alone. The use of knowledge to illuminate the main subject—the pattern of Hardy's own poetry—is itself one of the choice attractions of this excellent study.

I agree that it is time for Hardy's poems to be assigned their proper place. The high excellence of the best of them is no longer in question. Hardy is among the poets. But critical judgment is hindered by inadequate understanding, and Hardy has especially suffered from plain misreading. To blame obscurities on Hardy's clumsiness is beside the point. Certainly he wrote clumsy poems. He also wrote a few of the best poems in the language. Mr. Hynes recognizes both kinds; and, since the same pattern pervades both, he brilliantly discusses the bad poems in order to explain the pattern that is subtly absorbed into the good ones. In effect, Mr. Hynes has shown how to read Hardy. Anyone who follows his suggestions will find the great poems without getting lost. Mr. Hynes has written the best general introduction to all of Hardy's poetry that I have ever read.

Mr. Ransom's presentation of Hardy is of a different kind, more personal and direct. He has selected 125 of Hardy's strongest poems, and introduced them through one of his own most beautiful essays. For many years Mr. Ransom has been contemplating Hardy. It is pleasant to see this selection appearing in time to aid Mr. Hynes's purpose: to give Hardy his truest, most serious reading. Mr. Ransom's essay is the fullest of several which he has written on Hardy. He concludes by describing Hardy's place among the poets. It is Mr. Ransom's most

considered statement on the poet so far. Someone should publish all of his Hardy essays in one place. They are literary criticism; but they have further interest as poetic documents in their own right. They are the reading which one remarkable poet has given another; and, as such, they resemble Coleridge's readings of Wordsworth, or the meditations on Antonio Machado by Juan Ramon Jiménez.

Mr. Ransom strengthens his sense of the poetry's art by seeing it in its living habitat. He evokes the post-Darwinian chaos of belief; the dreadful quarter-century when the rural districts of southwestern England were afflicted by a modern restlessness, when people like Jude Fawley and Clym Yeobright went prowling from country to city and back again. Moreover, in his devotion to Hardy the man, Mr. Ransom exemplifies the rarest and truest kind of literary criticism. His knowledge of external facts comes alive at every point, and illuminates the poetry through the character of the poet.

To see Hardy as a living man means to know what he knew, and Mr. Ransom is able to explain Hardy's major problem as a poet and its solution. It is the slightly embarrassing problem of finding oneself a religious poet in an age of naturalism. Any reader must sense Hardy's Christian charity. It is not a formal article of faith but rather a trait of personality. As some men are choleric, so Hardy is charitable. Not that he is non-intellectual. In fact, he intellectualizes with awful persistence. But his charity remains unarguable, a fact like a reddleman, a discontented wife, a hayrick, a Stonehenge. Hardy is trapped with it. His poems suggest a man who fully pays the price of a defenseless compassion, and who is incapable of lying himself to sleep. His charity touches even the clumsiest of his phrases. His talent for belief is curiously combined with a flair for doubt. He could find evidence only for a God ultimately mindless. The philosophical validity of his ideas is a secondary matter, as both Mr. Hynes and Mr. Ransom recognize. But the ideas themselves are facts of the first importance. The traditional elegiac mood becomes in Hardy a funeral for God Himself; and the modest lament for small creatures is no less intense than the poet's grief at the absence of God. I do not think I am distorting Mr. Ransom's reading of Hardy when I say that it implies a Franciscan man, who longs to preach to the birds but who cannot, because his very devoutness conflicts with his sorrowful honesty. He knows that the birds are properly interested in suet, not in displaced believers. But the religious emotions rise in Hardy anyway, in spite of his doubt.

This clash, so well explained by Mr. Ransom, is another version of the pattern described by Mr. Hynes: "the eternal conflict between irreconcilables." Such a conflict may be philosophically intolerable. But Hardy the poet learned to bear it. Instead of being torn apart, he accepted the conflict as a dramatic occasion for his art. It was the best he could do. Few poets have done half so much.

A great poet possesses what I might call the religious imagination. He can see local and private details within a vision of the entire creation; and the facts of his personal experience include some kind of order, some tragic pain and the courage it evokes, and some kind of glory. Perhaps Yeats is the best example of a modern master who reveals such imagination in his perpetual struggle to deepen his vision through his style. Although Hardy was more concerned with metrical experiment than is usually recognized, he is not a dramatic stylist as Yeats was. Still, he belongs in Yeats's company.

Although Hardy left no stylistic heirs, he survives as one kind of great poet: a humble workman who remained his own man come hell or high water. Within traditional forms, he wrote some poems that can bear the most severe scrutiny.

Perhaps Hardy's poetry is being increasingly admired and studied because it embodies, in a truly artistic way, his personal character. It has a home-made quality, a power of insisting on its own tone of voice, a tough evidence of true workmanship. These are the signs that a decent man has maintained his decency in the presence of the same inhumanities that threaten us. The rhetorical splendor and the transfiguring imagination are, perhaps, higher poetic powers than Hardy's, in the end. And yet, as Ezra Pound observed, Hardy has the "solid center" of genuine poetry. It is this poetic integrity—and the word should imply honesty as well as wholeness of art—which Mr. Hynes so clearly describes. Mr. Ransom's essay introduces a selection of poems which pretty fairly represent the poet's personal manner, and which often display his excellence. Of course, a reader already familiar with Hardy will wish to add a poem here and omit one there. As Mr. Ransom says of anthologists who deal with Hardy, "Rarely do two of them come out with anything like the same list of poems chosen. . . ." Perhaps one reason for such disagreement has been simply the absence of the sustained criticism for which Mr. Hynes asks. Even so, the disagreement also testifies to a power which Hardy possesses, almost alone among the best modern poets: he has the fecundity, the power of abundance. In an age often characterized by sparse poetic production, he has the old easy richness of a man who can trust the Muse as his own rustic characters depend upon the vitality of the seasons.

JAMES WRIGHT

University of Minnesota

The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism by Ernest Lee Tuveson. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1960. Pp. 218. $5.00.

Convinced that the Copernican Revolution led to changes in every phase of culture so great and deep that we are even yet far from understanding them fully, Mr. Tuveson attempts to chart one aspect of that change: "The emergence of a new idea of the creative imagination," a process, he claims, "which might be described as the epitome of the romantic revolution." For Mr. Tuveson, the problem centers in the disintegration of the old publicly accepted symbols:

> Before the rise of the new cosmology, the macrocosm-microcosm relationship had for centuries been the stuff of poetry. The belief had been that the universe speaks to man in symbols: we read God's book in the sun, the moon, the very stones. The objects we observe have clear, public meanings which can be ascertained by reasoning. Locke's psychological system completed the process of destroying this confidence, a process which the disappearance of a man centered universe had begun. Poets were left with nothing but the images in their limited selves, to work upon. (p. 190)

Thus the eighteenth century becomes a period when a new relation between artist, audience and universe is slowly established.

As a result of Newton's description of the cosmos and, even more important, Locke's description of the human mind, art was no longer regarded as a form of knowledge, an aspect of objective truth, but was rather seen as a subjective impression, something that happens to consciousness. Before 1690, men were still clinging uneasily to the medieval-renaissance notion of the mind with its hierarchy of powers ranging from feeling, wit, imagination, through reason and *intellectus*: such a mind, as Mr. Tuveson remarks, was an instrument too fine, too perfect in itself ever to be at home in nature. Yet for all its deficiencies, this theory seemed preferable to Hobbes' view of the mind patterned after the physical universe and at the mercy of its unpredictable adventures with matter. It was thus Locke's achievement to explain the human mind in a way that would account adequately for its relations with the outside world and at the same time avoid undue violence to religion.

As his discussion of Locke proceeds, Mr. Tuveson emphasizes primarily the shifting state of mind or consciousness which he sees as central to Locke's theory of personality and which connects Locke with modern psychology. Hence children "begin to receive simple ideas as soon as they live, perhaps even in the womb; those ideas remain in the memory and eventually influence adult behavior" (p. 32). Similarly Mr. Tuveson points to the chapter on Association of Ideas where Locke speaks of the frequently irrational connections of ideas "wholly owing to chance or custom; ideas . . . not at all of kin . . . so united in some men's minds, that it is very hard to separate them"; and no sooner does one idea enter the understanding than "the whole gang, always inseparable, show themselves together" (p. 34). It is this recognition of the irrational and the unconscious that distinguishes Locke's associationism from that of Hume or Hartley. Similarly Locke is distinguished from the later mechanistic philosophers by his far more complex (or is it only more tentative?) view of necessity and free will.

Having described Locke's account of the mind, Mr. Tuveson proceeds to the ethical and aesthetic consequences. Here he sees as crucial Locke's failure to provide for a sense of value, and examines the efforts of Thomas Burnet and later of Shaftesbury to add the moral sense to man's intellectual endowment. The implication is that once a power capable of judging moral or ethical value is established, a similar power for judging beauty can be inferred. Nevertheless it is not made quite clear how such a power for discerning value can be logically reconciled or organically fused with the Lockean mind.

From a confusing welter of theory, Mr. Tuveson labors to outline an evolving role of the imagination in the new epistemology. The sharpest distinction is that between Hobbes who sees in the creative effort the active fancy ranging over the materials of the memory forming new combinations for the judgment to assess, and Locke who constructs a much more static and passive faculty concerned mainly with assimilating sensations which will eventually arrange themselves into patterns. This is very obviously one way of explaining the decline of metaphysical wit. But more important for Mr. Tuveson is that, according to Locke, "the materials [the mind] uses . . . now become the work of impressions moving of themselves . . . the gangs of ideas in the area outside the understanding, lead

their own lives" (p. 91). From this it follows that the artistic imagination is both independent and self justified, divorced from the didactic or useful. And, for Mr. Tuveson, Addison's "Pleasures of the Imagination" becomes "the gateway to the age of the aesthetic."

In what for many readers is likely to prove the most rewarding part of the book, Mr. Tuveson offers a sympathetic and insightful consideration of Addison's series, which he calls the "first real treatise on aesthetics." Most important is the fact that Addison "had given 'pleasure' a new and truly ontological meaning" (p. 94). Addison, according to this analysis, endows with new meaning the Longinian categories of "the great," "the beautiful," and "the extraordinary." The difference between Addison's notion of "the great" and the Longinian is that for Longinus the "great in nature *calls out* the great which is already there in man"; in Addison, "the great in nature *produces* greatness in man" (p. 104). One might argue carelessness here, since it isn't greatness that is produced, rather apprehension of the great. In any case, the effect is to fill a need overlooked in Locke's system. Since Locke had allowed no innate knowledge of God, and since the reason is unable to reach to any knowledge of God's essence, a great object (a storm at sea) raises in Addison's thoughts "the idea of an Almighty Being, and convinces . . . of His existence as much as a metaphysical demonstration" (*Spectator* 489).

Beauty for Addison is no longer objective knowledge but rather "shows and apparitions," "imaginary glories," made up of Locke's secondary qualities, but as illusion it nevertheless serves to arouse delight and to reconcile us to living in the universe. Addison, however, is aware of the consequence of this concept of Beauty. The soul at present "lost and bewildered in a pleasing delusion" is like the "enchanted knight" who when the "fantastic scene breaks up" "finds himself on a barren hearth or in a solitary desert" (*Spectator* 414). Addison is more complacent about the situation than is Keats, who sees in it the poet's sense of imprisonment in a world of subjective phenomena with the subsequent yearning for "fellowship with essence." The third category, "the new" (sometimes "the strange") derives from Longinus' "extraordinary." For Addison, "the new" serves to combat ennui—to give the mind new sensations—though it also serves the desire for new knowledge. Equally significant is the stress which Mr. Tuveson justifiably gives to *Spectator* 419, "The Fairy Way of Writing."

But in spite of the wealth of judiciously selected texts and the close and often brilliant comment that accompanies many of them, the reader may still remain unconvinced. It would not be altogether unfair to suggest that the author has been swept along with some of the optimism of the time:

> As the universe became impersonal, material, terrifyingly vast and empty, it would seem that there *must* have been a breakdown of the sense of value in the cosmos, and of confidence in the dignity of man . . . the great crisis of change from an anthropocentric and geocentric cosmology, to the Newtonian world machine produced no great spiritual upheaval. . . . The delicate operation of moving the locus of divinity to nature was accomplished with wonderful ease and speed. (p. 67)

One might just as plausibly argue that the problems accompanying this cosmic dislocation were not that readily resolved. Certainly the eighteenth century

provided illustrations: Hume could find no spiritual comfort in any physico-theological explanation of God. Samuel Johnson, though widely read in Newton, Burnet, and the Cambridge Platonists, achieved belief only by an agonizing effort of the will. And Burke was reconciled by fiat: let us look to the wisdom of our ancestors.

I can find no important point that is not supported by relevant quotation; hence the argument of this book will carry conviction to the extent that one accepts the selection and emphasis. To subsume under the Renaissance world view everything before Newton and Locke is to ignore the whole neo-classical system; similarly DesCartes is given no attention. Nor is Mr. Tuveson concerned particularly with any interaction between the neo-classical and the emerging romantic aesthetics.

It may be urged that Mr. Tuveson has emphasized unduly the notion of the passive imagination (e. g. the Aeolian Harp) while neglecting its more active functions (e. g. Coleridge's "shaping power of imagination"), or Wordsworth's "what they half perceive and half create." In fact his book might be more accurately titled "Locke and the Aesthetics of Symbolism"; by the time Mr. Tuveson ends, we are into Yeats and Verlaine, and the concern is with the precision and ambiguity of the symbol. More attention is given to later nineteenth century figures, especially Poe, than to Wordsworth and Coleridge.

This book must nevertheless be called an important effort which merits attention. To suggest that it is likely to provoke profitable dissent is still only to award a negative praise which does not do full justice to the frequently brilliant comment. Though I am left with the impression that Mr. Tuveson is best at detailed analysis, least convincing in broad formulations, no one concerned with understanding what happened in aesthetics between 1690 and 1800 can afford to neglect this book.

EDWARD EMLEY

Eastern Michigan University

The Plays of T. S. Eliot by David E. Jones. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960. Pp. xiv + 242.

Mr. Jones's essay on Eliot the dramatist is a welcome addition to the list of more general studies. We are reminded that "the later three of the *Four Quartets* constitute all the important non-dramatic poetry Eliot has published since 1936" (55), and that the last of these was published nearly twenty years ago. It makes good sense now to focus specifically on the dramatic artist. Thus, his apprenticeship in a genre new to him as a practitioner, his public speculations about poetry and drama, and the measure of his success and failure in the theater become the critical topics for the chronicler of what is in effect Mr. Eliot's second career.

Mr. Jones is a perceptive and careful guide through the plays (from *Sweeney Agonistes* to *The Elder Statesman*), combining as he does the literary techniques of the scholar with the informed point of view of one who has worked over some of the plays in production. One of the commendable features of the detailed commentary is that it explores the meaning of each play, not merely through an

exegesis of the text, but in terms of a coherent theatrical production. Not surprisingly, Mr. Martin Browne is called upon more frequently to give direction and support to the argument than any other established commentator on Eliot—except Mr. Eliot himself.

Murder in the Cathedral is obviously the author's favorite play, and he writes about it with authority. It sets up the central theme of Eliot's religious theater: "the role of the spiritually elect in society, the fructification of communal life by the example of the saint and the saintly" (50). In the following plays Mr. Jones traces the partly disguised manifestations of this theme in contemporary settings and also its attenuation in a drama which more and more approximates the atmosphere of naturalistic parlor comedy or melodrama. As we move from the Lord Archbishop to Lord Claverton, the exceptional person and the exemplary conversion disappear from center stage to be replaced by the group leading ordinary lives, but none the less in need of Christian illumination (124, 178, 192-95). Still, Mr. Jones is convinced by this sequence of plays that the "wholeness of outlook" which poetic drama requires can only come from religion, "for nothing else comprehends all aspects of human life" (214). And that is the sense of his interpretations of Eliot's modern morality plays.

He knows enough about the theater to admit that the spiritual life as dramatic subject presents all kinds of difficulties, but more often than not he is inclined to defend Eliot's practice against other critics, and even against Eliot's own strictures. For example, he devotes a special appendix to answering Miss Helen Gardner's misgivings about the dramatization of the temptations in *Murder in the Cathedral*. "We have to take it for granted," says Miss Gardner, "that Thomas dies with a pure will, or else, more properly, ignore the whole problem of motives as beyond our competence and accept the fact of his death." Both parts of his answer are weak: that Shakespeare in not dissimilar circumstances (he cites *Hamlet* and *Lear*) could do little more; and that to expect more than Thomas's verbal assurance and the subsequent action of the play "is to misunderstand the nature of Eliot's art" (217). It would be more to the point for a dramatic critic to suggest, as Harley Granville-Barker has done, that Eliot had "not yet mastered with perfect certainty the visually imaginative side of his dramatic art."

The other crucial difficulty in presenting a religious inner action is that of not being able to assume a common belief in the modern audience. But here again Eliot's uncertain hand as a craftsman in the theater makes the problem worse than it need be. One of his solutions is to fall back on his tried gifts as a religious poet:

> Where does one go from a world of insanity?
> Somewhere on the other side of despair.
> To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
> A stony sanctuary and primitive altar,
> The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
> A care over lives of humble people,
> The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.

But in the theater the Christian experience as well as (more broadly) the idea of a Christian Society must be explored with *dramatic* integrity; it cannot be

merely referred to. Ten years later he tackles the same problem by a logic also foreign to the drama. Celia Coplestone actually goes where Harry says that the elect must go, and the report of her crucifixion in Kinkanja is blandly, yet sensationally, introduced in the third act of *The Cocktail Party*. The obvious *coup de théâtre* is intended to arouse a spiritually sluggish audience, but it does not solve the problem of belief. Even when a skilled dramatist can assume common belief and can work with recognized conventions, as for example Shakespeare could, he will in each new play instinctively recreate his "universe," an order, natural or supernatural, within which certain modes of action are logically and dramatically possible and therefore credible. Mr. Eliot, however, is perpetually torn between two worlds when he plays in a contemporary setting; it may be that he underestimates the capacity of his audience to enter fully into the world which he considers significant. Mr. Jones recognizes the dangers of presenting serious religious themes in increasingly naturalistic guise; the gap between the elect and the ordinary characters is too great to be sensibly bridged. And when the religious hero gives way to the more ordinary protagonist, Mr. Jones rightly deplores the loss of powerful statement. But he so admires the poet's seriousness of purpose that he is willing to forgive the playwright some cardinal sins in execution. "Celia's death," says Mr. Jones, "the gruesome details of which momentarily cloud the domestic atmosphere of the Third Act, is remote from that setting, but relevant to it. The emphasis is upon the salvation of a group and not an individual . . ." (131).

These are minor quarrels with the author in his role as interpreter which as a rule he fulfills with distinction. But in his speculations on poetic drama in the first chapter and his running commentary on this topic in the following chapters he takes too simple a view of the matter. "Only when naturalism became the dominant mode was poetry ousted from its rightful place in the theatre" (4). Now the problem is how to get it back in, because great poetic drama is an "extension of sensibility." Many critics talk as if it had been some egregious error in the history of drama that naturalism did and does still dominate the stage. But in the last century and a quarter, say, beginning with Büchner's *Wozzeck*, the drama has undergone many changes in the hands of knowledgeable masters since the search for subject in the modern world, the search for a fable, has become critical; the loss of poetry was only one of the changes. Its restoration cannot be talked about regardless of the other differences between the old drama and the new. With regard to the contemporary situation, Mr. Jones takes Eliot's own pronouncements largely as the basis of evidence for his argument, although he claims that he has occasionally ventured to disagree (xi). Mr. Eliot has, of course, many excellent things to say and he sheds light on his developing sense of what a modern poetic drama ought to be and might be; yet a critic who claims that Mr. Eliot has been intent on "reviving poetic drama" and that the plays have substantially contributed towards the recreation of poetic drama must somehow reach beyond his subject's understanding of what is involved in order to test the claim.

For example, Francis Fergusson's telling review of *Poetry and Drama* (reprinted in *The Human Image in Dramatic Literature*) might have furnished a starting point for further critical reflection, especially since it illuminates the paradox that Mr. Eliot's theoretical understanding of poetic drama "appears to be

deepening, at the same time that his plays grow thinner." Though Mr. Jones is not uncritical of the last plays, he does not resolutely face the distinction between poetic drama and the versified play; in fact, he shares to some extent Mr. Eliot's reluctance to see that the art of drama itself is a form of poetry and to recognize (again in Mr. Fergusson's words) "lyric verse as merely one of the resources which great dramatists can use for their wider purposes." Ronald Peacock, whom he quotes liberally, offers a similar theory: "What moves us in a play is not the words, or any other particular, but the whole situation." Yet Mr. Jones prematurely abandons this lead to follow Mr. Eliot's speculations. "Most attempts at reviving poetic drama," he says, "have failed in the very first requirement; the poetic idiom employed has not been sufficiently alive" (21). True, but that may be the *effect* of an inadequate dramatic conception of "the whole situation"; the live poetic idiom springs from a live dramatic action, which Mr. Jones clearly understands in his excellent remarks about Eliot's most successful poetic drama: "Each chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral* has an emotional shape determined by its place in the dramatic development, whereas even the best choruses of *The Rock* have no more than an intellectual, self-determined shape" (48).

But *Murder in the Cathedral* could not become the prototype for the development of a specifically modern poetic theater. And since then Mr. Eliot has decided to tone down the lyrical and rhetorical power of his language, a change in strategy to "prevent the audience from being aware that it is listening to poetry" (55). Now, therefore, Mr. Jones pursues his discussion of poetic drama mainly on the grounds that the plays are still built on an action of the spirit, a significant interior action, though they challenge West End comedy on the surface. Yet it seems fair to say that the last plays, however distinguished they are among the run-of-the-mill productions of the commercial theater, must be disappointing to anyone who has been watching Mr. Eliot at work at developing a new form of poetic drama.

ALFRED SCHWARZ

Wayne State University

The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James by J. A. Ward. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961. Pp. xi + 185. $3.00.

In his interpretation of Henry James's fiction in the light of the novelist's own statement, "I have the imagination of disaster," J. A. Ward is caught between conflicting responsibilities of scholarship and criticism. On the one hand he sets himself the plausible task of isolating and explaining instances of moral error in the major novels and stories. On the other hand he treats "the changes and patterns in James's characterizations of the evildoer" as constituting a new focus for explication. Mr. Ward exhibits thoroughness as well as taste in carrying out this double task; and some readers may feel that he has successfully transformed a restricted point of view into a basis for general criticism. My own opinion is that the author's initial search for overt examples of good and evil has prevented him from doing full justice to James's moral vision and its dramatic expression.

Mr. Ward's competent efforts indicate little more than the danger of applying rigid moral categories to the work of any successful novelist.

Mr. Ward's difficulty stems in part from the ambiguity of any discussion of evil *in* a novelist's work, and in part from the special problem of handling James's fiction in this way. Mr. Ward defines what evil means to James as "the complex of forces, internal and external, which prevents the individual from moving toward completion, always moral and spiritual, and sometimes intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic, toward which his nature strives." Though such a definition is probably as good as any, it has the disadvantage of lumping together environmental pressure, personal malice, traits of personality, stupidities, misfortunes, and other forces that might cramp a character's natural development. Thus Mr. Ward allows himself to describe as manifestations of evil such diverse items as the open villainy of the Bellegardes, the deception practiced by Kate Croy and Merton Densher, the "moral limitation" of Daisy Miller, and the "evil of the New England conscience" that Lambert Strether takes to Europe. Mr. Ward does not confuse these various degrees and types of evil, but he clearly wants to explain them all in terms of an underlying sense or consciousness of evil in the novelist's work.

To this task Mr. Ward devotes his best efforts and achieves a measure of success—as long as the reader is willing to discount what is implied about the theme or structure of particular stories or novels. Mr. Ward leaves the impression not only that he believes Daisy Miller to be the agent of a mild evil, but that he believes her lack of moral and aesthetic consciousness, as he phrases it, to be the most important feature of the story in which she appears. The condemnation of Daisy for learning nothing from her experience is perhaps a healthy antidote to the usual and no doubt oversimple view that Winterbourne's aestheticism and the stale conventions of the society he represents are responsible for Daisy's inability to flourish. But James's condemnation of American expatriate society should be given at least comparable attention in any comprehensive account of evil *in* "Daisy Miller." In spite of his generous catalogue of evils, Mr. Ward concentrates his attention upon individual evildoers, whether they are malicious or merely suffering from an environmental limitation. This explains his willingness to characterize both Daisy Miller and Mme. Merle as *agents* of evil. Such an emphasis causes him virtually to disregard the more complex manifestations of Jamesian morality that critics have declared to be implicit in the handling of specific dramatic situations, though not directly revealed in a character's personality or fate. Mr. Ward focuses upon moral qualities that are directly exposed—upon the ingredients of good and evil supplied to characters regardless of their social involvement.

Because of its emphasis upon moral struggle, and upon the isolated hero or evildoer, Mr. Ward's methodology is much more appropriate to such melodramatic works as "Madame de Mauves" and *The American*, where good and evil undress upon the fictional stage, than to such later novels as *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Ambassadors*. Thus Milly Theale and Lambert Strether are described not as confronting European institutions and values, but as encountering European evil. Milly uses her "transcendental imagination" in order to subdue evil, specifically "to convert an agent of evil to good." Milly's flaws are also discussed, "her pride, her excessive reliance on money, and her hesitation to face

life in its fullness." In a similar way, Strether is described as having to deal with two kinds of evil, American puritanism and a "less explicit" European evil. It is Mr. Ward's inability to define this less explicit evil, I think, that causes him to place excessive emphasis upon what he takes to be concrete examples of it–Mme. de Vionnet's deception of Strether, and her adultery with Chad Newsome. Strether's failure to break with Mme. de Vionnet is nevertheless described as indicating his acceptance of the evil of which she is an agent "as endemic to the world in which she lives." His initial shock and disillusionment are replaced by a sober recognition of universal human frailty. In achieving "self-fulfillment," Strether has had to cast off "the American evils of prejudice, intolerance, narrowness, and smugness," and to come to terms with the evil of Europe.

Though this view of *The Ambassadors* can be defended, it seems to me much less rewarding than the usual description of Strether's psychological awakening and the usual treatment of Mme. de Vionnet as a charming but desperate woman. Strether's loyalty to her can be seen as evidence of moral growth; but it is more clearly a symptom of Strether's change of mind or development of consciousness. Finally, Mr. Ward describes Strether as a genuine "spectator hero" who combines action with vision and is not "held back from life." What I object to may be only Mr. Ward's critical vocabulary, but I must confess that I do not find Strether to be either this kind or this much of a hero. In any case, Mr. Ward's descriptions are too closely related to his scholarly search for unambiguous instances of evil. I suspect that although James did have an imagination of disaster, he kept it better concealed than Mr. Ward wants us to believe.

PETER SWIGGART

The University of Texas