

1962

## Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Editors, Criticism (1962) "Book Reviews," *Criticism*: Vol. 4: Iss. 3, Article 7.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol4/iss3/7>

## Book Reviews

Rolf Nesch: *Graphik, Materialbilder, Plastik*. Einführung by Alfred Hentzen. Stuttgart: Christian Belsler Verlag, 1960. Pp. 122. Plates. DM 82.00.

This is a monumental publication dedicated to a monumental artist, one of the great renewers of the arts in our time!

Alfred Hentzen, the Director of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, has written what he modestly calls an "Einführung" (introduction), but it is the most thorough essay in German on Rolf Nesch, whose work was so far chiefly written up in Norwegian by Pola Gauguin, the son of the great French painter, and Rolf Stenersen, the friend of Edvard Munch and collector of his work. Excerpts from their writing appeared in English translation on the occasion of Rolf Nesch's Show "Graphic in Color" held at the Kleemann Galleries in New York, October 1949.

As a result of Nesch's stay in New York with his wife Ragnhild Hald, one of Norway's finest actresses, the artist created the color print "Trinity Church," a meaningful abstraction of the heart of the metropolis in its symbolical juxtaposition of "Old and New," "Life and Death," the "Temporary and the Eternal." Thus, Rolf Nesch is not entirely unknown in the U. S. A., but in spite of the fact that our great museums and many private collectors have bought his work, he is not yet sufficiently appreciated. Therefore, it might be permissible to use a review of a most valuable book as a welcome opportunity to point again to the greatness and originality of the artist. A brief preliminary essay about his "Material-Bild," "Musik" (1934/35), was published by this reviewer in German in Bruckmann's magazine *Die Kunst* (Munich, 1952).

That recognition and fame (in 1958 the Lichtwark Prize of the City of Hamburg, in 1959 the Honorary Professorship, bestowed by the "Land" Württemberg) came late to Nesch was the result of the peculiar circumstances of his life, those of a wanderer. Born the son of an artisan's family (1893 in Ober-Esslingen, Württemberg), he was at the age of fourteen apprenticed to a house-painter and later "tramped" in the true fashion of the guild through Germany until in 1912 he was admitted to the Art Academy of Dresden, where the Expressionist revolt of the "Brücke" group had started seven years earlier. Then came the First World War, in which he was wounded five times and finally taken prisoner. He came home late and a new period of struggle and "Wanderjahre" began. In 1920 he gained temporary shelter a second time at the Dresden Art Academy, where Kokoschka then taught. He was there awarded the use of a "Meister-Atelier." In 1924 he worked for six weeks with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, one of the leading figures of the "Brücke" group, in Davos, Switzerland. This stay directed his art still more strongly towards the graphic media and laid the foundation for his expert knowledge of printing and the execution of the graphic arts. He intended to settle in Hamburg, where he lived from 1929-33, but Hitler's barbarism made him voluntarily leave Germany. In Hamburg he had found understanding friends

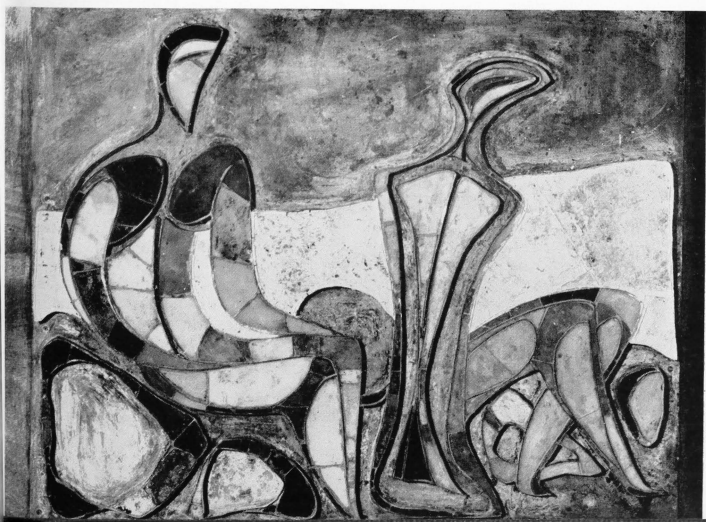


SNORING MAN

Red and black painted wooden panel. Old planks, rope, cork and metal. 1942/43.

COUPLE AT THE BEACH

Etched zinc-plate, strips of zinc, inlay of colored glass. 1935.



*Morning.*  
Copper with green patina  
copper-strips, inlaid with  
bohemian colored glass and  
burnt wood. 1939.



*Harold.*  
Collage of paper, textiles,  
feathers. 1948.

among the collectors, museum people and critics, and it was there that he came to know and to admire the art of Edvard Munch, especially his graphic work. Later, after he had left Nazi Germany behind, he was asked why he had decided to start life and art all over again in a foreign country. He answered simply: "A country which has an Edvard Munch must be a good place." In Norway he met Munch, who was then almost inaccessible to people, especially fellow-artists from abroad, but generally speaking rocky Norway proved to be a hard land. The treacherous occupation of Northern Scandinavia added to his difficulties; a very serious accident, possibly not quite accidental, saved him from the worst but damaged him physically. But his strength of artistic purpose, his creativity, remained unbroken. After the end of the Second World War Nesch was one of the first former Germans to become a naturalized Norwegian citizen (1946). And then, around 1950, when he approached in life and art the fullest maturity, his rise as an internationally recognized artist started almost meteor-like. Through the "Documenta" shows in Cassel, most successful exhibits in Italy, the above-mentioned show in New York, and most of all through the great retrospective one-man show from September 1958 to May 1959 in Hamburg, Bremen, Düsseldorf and Stuttgart, he emerged as one of the leading European artists. The "Preface" to this show's catalogue was written by Alfred Hentzen and became, shortly after, the nucleus of the "introduction" to the wonderful book under review. An "oeuvre catalogue," compiled by Dr. Gisela Schilling with the help of the artist, is in preparation and is eagerly expected as the scholarly guide to the artist's work, which in the different techniques of the graphic arts and sculpture is of such a complex character that it needs the specialized knowledge of an expert to do it full justice beyond esthetic appreciation.

Now this eternal wanderer has also found his true home in his simple farmstead of Aal in the mountains close to the Oslo-Bergen railroad; he has become an almost legendary figure, mountain king and sage, in his own realm. Here he has all the equipment necessary for his art, which when one attempts to describe it, even superficially, defies all hitherto known categories and classifications. It is, rather, a combination, often a synthesis, of the graphic arts, sculpture, mosaic, molten glass cloisonné, the "objets trouvés" of the Surrealists all put together with engineering skill.

One can rightly say that his work can be organized into three groups, which also mark three subsequent phases of his development: 1) Graphic arts, 2) "Material-Bild," 3) Sculpture (by that traditional term is meant here only fully three-dimensional work surrounded on all sides by space).

The intermediary second phase, that of the "Material-Bild" (a term defying precise translation as we shall try to explain later), is the one during which the most decisive step was taken by Nesch. He discovered that the metal plate of the graphic artist, which he had already enriched through all kinds of additions (such as wire soldered to it, wire gauze, molten nails, etc.), deductions (such as "the biting through of the acid," sawing into pieces, drilling of perforations), and many varieties of textual treatment (by acid, artificial patina, coloring and "surface roughing" through tools), the foundation material of the traditional graphic procedures, so treated, had its own attractive beauty and was clamoring for independent existence. When he began, furthermore, to add burnt wood in a scale from light brown to coal-black, cork, rope and other textiles, colored

bohemian glass, mica, mirror fragments, stone (natural and artificial) and minerals (precious and semi-precious), the "Material-Bild" (a picture made of different materials and destined to decorate walls) was born.

Though Nesch had stopped painting in the traditional-technical way altogether after he had left Germany, his sublime sense of the effects of brilliant as well as muted colors and their interrelations had been fully preserved, had possibly even become stronger. Yet his choice of physical materials, their colors, textures and grains, was never left to chance. It became exactly dictated by his never failing feeling for their integration with the design and, even more, with the inner or symbolical expressive meaning of his subjects. He often interrupted the completion of a specific "Material-Bild" for a long span of time until he had found the material which was alone and uniquely fitting.

Nesch is never fully abstract in any of his works, but extracts essences from reality. There is always a "message," though often in a grotesque, ironic or droll-humorous disguise. His humor might be called metaphysical. It plays around the most profound problems of existence, resembling that which Miro, Max Ernst and Paul Klee expressed in their works. He shares especially with the two last named artists his respect and love for "The Voice of the Object," as it was always understood by Far-Eastern artists and only lately discovered and stressed by those of the West. Formerly Western artists thought of matter as being "dead" and therefore to be conquered or at least to be concealed, as mere *means* toward the higher goal of content. The "*Dinghaftigkeit*" (material quality), as Hentzen calls it in his "Preface," that is the material technical element, which plays such a decisive rôle in all "Primitive" art and also in the art of the early Middle Ages, has therefore a function in the creative process equal to that of subject matter and design. Hentzen rightly stresses this rediscovery of "*Dinghaftigkeit*" in the later work of Nesch and mentions Picasso-Braque's collages, the assemblages by Schwitters and Arp, besides the works by Max Ernst and Paul Klee, as in this respect closely related to the "Material-Bilder" by Nesch. This feeling for the *physical* in contrast to the purely or mainly *illusionary* function of the art object (as had been customary since the Renaissance) has led Nesch in his unorthodox "Pictures" to a consistently increasing "relief" character in this part of his work which still needs a "plane" and has moved him ever closer to sculpture standing free in space.

Like the American sculptor Flanagan he releases from the material the form or final shape, which he divines as slumbering in the stone or any other physical object (it might even be a wooden milking stool or a tea tray), picked up anywhere during a stroll or in the house, in such a way that it becomes art. He may entitle it then "The Greek," "King," "Janus," "Green Negro," "Mino-taur" (mounted on a decorated tea tray) or even "Bull" (transformation of a milking stool without legs). One guesses already from the titles that memory-snatches from classical and nordic mythology and influences from primitive Negro and Scandinavian folk art have assisted him in this process of whimsical transformation.

In his constructed metal sculpture "John the Baptist" (1942/43), which he still calls "Material-Bild"—but the boundary line between that category and sculpture is often impossible to determine—he gives us a spiky-shaggy image of the anchorite made of zinc, copper-wire and colored glass—inlays emulating the frightening religious sincerity of the Middle Ages. Similar in spirit are other

"Material-Bilder," for instance "God the Father" and "St. Sebastian," the latter a large triptych dedicated to Picasso when the fortunately false rumor reached him in 1942 that the great artist had been sent to a concentration camp.

Nesch always remains a humanist, that is, he is always concerned with the fate of man and human values. It is his love for mankind and human life which inspires him to the image of "The great God Pan," half man, half goat, whose "bleating" cosmic laughter he suggests through purely visual means (Colored Print, 1949). We also hear in Nesch's work Klee's "fine hi, hi of the goblins," the chuckles of metaphysical humor. This gift of Nesch, the ability to combine the fantastic-grotesque with the humorous, the serious with the playful, which makes caricature great and meaningful, was nourished anew by the world of the "Wander Theater" after his marriage to the great character actress Ragnhild Hald. We find caricature-like features in such works as "Theatre-Dressing-Room" (1947/8), "Night-Bird" (1949), "Mad Woman of Chaillot" (1950/51), "Klatsch" (Gossip) (1954/55).

The here reproduced "Material-Bild" "Morning" (1939) might stand as an example of the "message" in Nesch's art. Created in the year during which Hitler sent his cohorts marching into Poland, it symbolises the sinister forces of darkness in the punning sense of a "night-mare" (spook with grinning, toothy death-skull wearing a helmet and black ghostly mare), while radiantly white snow-geese fly beyond the blood-red disk of the moon higher and higher "Towards a New Morning"!

As Hentzen has put it so well in his introduction to the magnificent "picture-book," a "biblia" of our time, of our fears and hopes, Nesch's work "rouses in us our instincts for life."

This large-sized book, containing 48 excellent color plates and 34 black and whites, marks a highpoint in the great craft of "art-book-making." The international importance of the artist Nesch and Hentzen's clear and informative preface make an edition in the English language imperative.

ERNST SCHEYER

Wayne State University

*Benedetto Croce, Philosopher of Art and Literary Critic* by Gian N. G. Orsini.

Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961. Pp. x + 379. \$10.

Professor Orsini's book is not a biography, but rather an exposition and defense of Croce's thought as a philosopher and man of letters from the late 80's to his death in 1952. The book tends to be rather dry, heavily written, laborious. But the labor is so much a labor of love that the effect outstrips the cause and the subject is transformed. An image of Croce is released from Orsini's book, finally, that has upon it the touch of greatness.

Orsini convinces us at the outset of the inadequacy of our knowledge of Croce by showing how little of his work has been translated into English, and how very incomplete our knowledge of him is when the early apologetics of Joel Spingarn and the early *Aesthetic* remain the standards by which we interpret and judge him. Our present standard English translation of the *Aesthetic*,

for example, which Croce revised through nine editions during his lifetime, is based on the third edition of 1908. And furthermore, Croce apparently regarded this work, along with *The Essence of Aesthetic* (1912), which is perhaps his second best known work in English translation, as so unrepresentative of his mature aesthetic thinking that he excluded them from the thousand page chrestomathy of his life work which he edited and published just before his death.

To know more of Croce, as we may do by reading Professor Orsini's encyclopedic study, is to learn that Croce had a remarkable capacity to change and grow by means of his own flexibility of insight as well as his ability to grasp and absorb the criticisms of others. As his theory of art evolves over the years, he continues to reaffirm his conviction that the provenance of art is never sufficiently described or compassed, and never proscribed, by his theory or anyone else's. At one juncture he abandons "idealism" as the proper epithet for his view, and chooses instead the term "historicism," which suggests his abiding conviction that his job is to labor in the service of the arts as a thinker, rather than that the arts are in the service of his thought as an end in itself.

The importance of Croce seems to me to lie not in his specialist's contribution to aesthetics or literary theory, but rather in the wholeness of his supplely articulated viewpoint. If he is one of the most important of modern aestheticians, I think it is because of the very fact that his thought about the arts so manifestly transcends the technical limits of aesthetics as such. He makes of the arts the beachhead of a continuing humanistic counterattack upon all forms of amoral positivism. Or to put the matter with more appropriate positiveness, Croce is one of the great affirmers of the mystery and miracle of human creativity. His concepts and catchwords are the weapons of counterattack, the techniques of affirmation. *Image*, for example: this is the essence of art, the formed manifestation of an intuitive knowing of the particular, as opposed to the rational knowing of universals. *Expression* (which is a Crocean concept, as Orsini shows, that is usually misunderstood) is the individually articulated response to an image. *Lyrical intuition* (Croce says that "all art is lyrical") refers to the way in which art is distinctively the formed "expression of emotion, of feeling, of 'a state of mind'"—a concept which should comfortingly remind us of Wordsworth and Coleridge's interest in the creative interaction of subject and object. And there are more; but the point is that Croce's aesthetics is a major contribution to the great tradition of modern romantic humanism (as W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. also shows in his excellent chapter on Croce in *Literary Criticism, a Short History*). It is an aesthetics that strengthens artists and critics against the temptations of both didacticism and autotelism, that supports the doctrine of organicism, that supplies a needed metaphysic, even an ethic, to the necessarily contextualistic criticism of recent years.

These are some of the good and viable Crocean affirmations. But his denials, which as Orsini shows were as vulnerable to misunderstanding as were his affirmations, also deserve attention. He consistently opposed all critical abstractionisms, all *apriori* machineries and formulas of criticism that threatened to convert the life of art to the dead data of theory. Though he recognized the genres, for example, as part of the vocabulary of the history of criticism, he opposed genre theory when it assumed the status of critical or creative principle. He attacked historical scholarship, as in his essays on Dante and Shakespeare, when the passion of its quest for the minutiae of fact and convention began to compete with the



primacy of the poetry for which it existed. His late concern over the influence of Freudianism on the modern writer, and his skepticism about Futurism and other irrationalisms in the arts, were expressions of the liberal humanism which had characterized his thought from the beginning. Toward the end of his life Croce saw that a number of skeptical tendencies of the modern mind, when elevated to the position of dicta or principles of art, functioned to deny what he regarded as the naturally aspirative quality of the imagination, and he set himself all the more firmly in opposition to any influence that tended to sap the already dwindling ideal of the freedom of man's mind, or to contribute to the already mounting threat of universal, anti-humane totalitarianism. The terms and concepts of his own aesthetics, as we have seen, were heuristic and liberating in nature. And as Orsini's description of the organic growth of his thought shows, Croce would be the first to disown the particulars of his own scheme—scrap them, modify them or enlarge them—if he found them too rigid or limited to accommodate the changeful life of art.

Late in his book Orsini writes these sentences:

Croce did not believe in the eighteenth-century idea of Reason nor in automatic progress, but he believed in the reason of history and in the spirituality of man. This means that for him history was a perpetual struggle for the realization of an ideal which can never be finally achieved but must always be fought for again.

In their preparatory context these observations possess a truth that goes beyond their author's apparent intention. One must conclude, after reading this book, that Croce belongs in the company of Mann, Schweitzer, Russell, Frank Lloyd Wright, members of that nearly extinct generation of great liberal humanists who made the best part of recent intellectual history. Croce is unmistakably this kind of man in the depth, breadth, flexibility, and sheer good will of his intelligence. When we read that Croce believed in "the reason of history," we should remember Orsini's account of Croce's own early training in traditional literary history, his own contributions to it, his eventual rejection of it as an art-subordinating machinery, his final conception of literary history as the humane history that literature itself made—a history constituted by the full realization of *persons* in art.

Orsini's book is an important book because it is such a thorough and dedicated defense and exposition of the life work of a man we cannot afford to forget. It is an important book because it introduces us to a thinker and a man whose precept and example constitute a needful paradigm of humanistic sensitivity, intelligence, and freedom for our time.

RICHARD FOSTER

*University of Minnesota*

*Sartre, the Origins of a Style* by Frederic Jameson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961. Pp. xii + 228. \$5.00.

Mr. Jameson's book, the reworking of a doctoral thesis, is by no means an easy one to read. On the whole, this is not because of any complexity in the ideas it deals with. The book simply suffers from certain mannerisms of style and an apparent inability to handle abstractions with clarity. This is rather unfortunate, for Mr. Jameson has been deeply influenced by the more abstract among contemporary French critics, Maurice Blanchot and Roland Barthes for example, whom he quotes in his conclusion along with a goodly dose of Malraux. The reader is all too often stopped short by sentences like the following: "The level on which such problems are posed is in appearance much more primitive than the kinds of consciousness registered by earlier modern writers" (p. 4); or again, "the act is merely performed in a new focus that without changing it, turns it into the *Gesture*, the imaginary" (p. 36). Since these vagaries tend to accumulate, the meaning of the book is continually blurred, a major difficulty for the reader.

Nor is it the only one. Mr. Jameson's vagueness in regard to the meaning of the terms he uses is another. His very thesis depends upon the word "modern": a "modern" style, a "modern" writer. He speaks of "new forms" and "older forms," of "old-fashioned" and "new structures." Yet he not only never even attempts to state whom or what these terms designate but he attaches them to a "modern consciousness," whatever that may be, which he attributes to "us," whoever we may be.

The use Mr. Jameson makes of the first person plural throughout the book is just as confused: "we," the editor; "we," the reader; "we," human beings in general as Sartre sees us; "we" as Mr. Jameson sees us. The blurring is complete. For example, Mr. Jameson has been discussing Sartre's analysis of act and gesture: "We go through the motions they (our social personalities) seem to require . . . but the moment we stop . . ." (p. 178); here he is discussing a "we" according to Sartre. Suddenly, without so much as a paragraph to warn us, Mr. Jameson continues, "We have seen earlier. . . ." For several pages the reader weaves back and forth, among three "we's," never quite sure whether he is dealing with an exposition of Sartre's ideas or a statement of Mr. Jameson's own. "What interests *us* here is that, just as *we* have seen in narration, the philosophical work uses a kind of inherited structure through which to present its new perceptions, so that it would be possible to imagine a new philosophical development . . . in *which we recognize ourselves more adequately* than in any other modern system" (p. 183, italics mine). Several times the reader must stop to consider whether he is inside or outside Sartre's world, and whether the announced topic of the book "The Origins of Sartre's Style" is merely a pretext for the indirect development of Mr. Jameson's own never clearly presented literary and philosophical points of view.

And since I have started with some of the shortcomings of the book, I might add the didactic tone of several long passages in which Mr. Jameson rather unnecessarily explains some of the by now all too familiar Sartrean themes. He accompanies them with such remarks as "What this means is simply that. . ." These announce a substitution of Mr. Jameson's prose for Sartre's. Such substitutions, even in the literary analyses, are too often nothing short of what

used to be called "paraphrasing." For example Mr. Jameson quotes a brief episode from *The Age of Reason*:

He remembered the gesture of a man he once saw in the rue Mouffetard. . . . The man had walked up to a food stand, he had stared for a long time at a slice of cold meat on a plate in the display, then he had stretched out his hand and taken the piece of meat; he seemed to think it was all very simple, he must have felt free too. The owner had shouted, a policeman had led away this man who looked astonished. (p. 173)

After a page of interpretation this is what we read:

The shopkeeper's face turning toward him slowly, interrogative and with at the same time the indifference of the vendor and the rapid sizing up of social status based on the quality of the clothing and the condition of the man's personal hygiene—this face has nothing whatsoever to do with the stale meat lying before him, no logical relationship to it, the two are merely pictures, separate things visible at the same moment. The meat being there, he picks it up; he is not insane but merely in a state of nature, and his astonishment is a kind of waking up to social realities long forgotten.

One wonders what is gained by this kind of distortive amplification of Sartre's description.

These are regrettable defects in a book that has many solid qualities, among them a real sensitivity to Sartre's literary style, which has not received a great deal of attention. In his "Foreword," Mr. Jameson starts with a rather Proustian definition of style, though Proust would have eschewed the word "modern": "It has always seemed to me that a modern style is somehow ["somehow" is a favorite with Mr. Jameson, appearing on almost every page of his book] in itself intelligible, above and beyond the limited meaning of the book written in it, and beyond even those precise meanings which the individual sentences that make it up are designed to convey" (p. vii). Quite properly, he distinguishes "style" from current "rhetorical standards of elegance." And, approaching his own topic, Jameson states the generally accepted idea that in "moments of crisis in the history of the development of writing, one can detect a blending of accepted forms of writing with new structures." This is the case with Sartre, as Mr. Jameson sees it, and it is linked to the nature of Sartre's thought. He undertakes the difficult task of uncovering basically new patterns in Sartre's writing that subsist side by side with the old and reaches the conclusion that "all more progressive content springs" from Sartre's vision of the world as "split between being and consciousness" (p. 204). All Jameson's explications lead to the view that the specific organic unity of Sartre's style stems from this inner tension.

Mr. Jameson's method of approach is commendably cautious. Every time he deals with definite passages, with the texture of situation, description, rhythm, he brings out quite convincingly a number of interesting points. To be sure, sometimes he tends to generalize from rather scant data. This is the case with his quite novel and highly suggestive presentation of certain characteristics of Sartre's punctuation in its relation to rhythm and eventual meaning. One wonders how often the patterns he cites recur in Sartre's work and whether or not they occur in other works, even perhaps among those "older writers" from which he is distinguishing Sartre.

The book is carefully planned, moving from the study of "events" to that of "things" to that of "human reality." The first part, briskly written, and the most clearly presented of the three, leads to a study of the "rhythm of time" which is, or so it seems to me, a most important and new contribution. Less original but nonetheless conducive to thought are Mr. Jameson's chapters on "Things" and his perceptive and persuasive presentation of the manner in which Sartre de-humanizes them, then re-introduces them into language in a kind of devious circular movement. "Only in a world where language is an inevitable humanization of brute facticity would that facticity have to come to light deviously behind a too human expression of it" (pp. 109-10), concludes Mr. Jameson. He certainly brings to light some of the "formal inventions" and processes of language by which Sartre shows how consciously he has adopted that point of view.

The third portion of the book, dealing with "human reality," is more complex, more confused too by the stylistic defects discussed at the beginning of this review. Nonetheless it leads up to the final synthesis in which Mr. Jameson, through an interpretation of the over-all structure of Sartre's novels, discusses the personal literary solutions Sartre brings to problems he shares with many others. "It is therefore apparent that Sartre's works face the same situation, the same cluster of aesthetic problems, that the older generation of moderns attempted to solve in a different way: the place of chance and of facticity in the work of art, the collapse of a single literary language, a period style, the expression of a relatively homogeneous class, into a host of private styles and isolated points in a fragmented society" (p. 201). The effort to reach out beyond Sartre's world is praiseworthy, and all in all, the book is rich in suggestions. It is a contribution to the study of the ways in which literary structures and modes of expression reflect the changing mental patterns in a given society, a relatively new field combining literary criticism and intellectual history.

GERMAINE BRÉE

*University of Wisconsin*

*The Hero in French Decadent Literature* by George Ross Ridge. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1961. Pp. ix + 195. \$3.75.

One of the merits of this work lies in its attempt to reach a fairly clear definition of what decadence meant for a number of French writers and artists in the second half of the last century. An English speaking critic or cultural historian no longer has to be apologetic about decadence, aestheticism, sex-deviations, sadomasochism, necrophily, men's terror of vampire-women sucking their feeble energy and enslaving them through frustrating their desires. He reads every day in the European press that those attractive features of over-ripe civilization are taken as representative of the England of John Osborne, Angus Wilson, *et al* and of the countrymen of Carson McCullers, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Alan Ginsberg. The Montparnasse circles are today amusedly fascinated by the West Coast beatniks, the Chicago and Harlem drug addicts, the Southern portrayals of decrepitude as Henry James, James T. Huneker, George Moore, Ernest Dowson could at once be repelled yet attracted by the immoralists of Art for

Art's sake, the violence of Zola's hippopotamic heroes wallowing in their slime, the trampling of the barbarians at the doors of Mallarmé's and Stefan George's towers of mystical isolation. In the eighteen-eighties and nineties, western man could still pin his faith upon an infusion of vigorous blood from the Western Hemisphere or of mystical wisdom from the East to restore it to health. Today, neither Africa nor Bali nor Tahiti seem to have been spared our weariness, our corruption and our greed. Russia has long ago ceased to be a land of promise, and no literature basked in decadence with the same delight as hers did at the dawn of this century.

But we have learned how to separate literature from life. The Germany which had read Stefan George and Gundolf, Thomas Mann's tales of incest, Wedekind's stories of Lulu, the modern Baccha, is the same which fought at Verdum and at Stalingrad. The France of Proust and Gide was also that of Péguy and Claudel; that of Sartre and of Samuel Beckett is also that of De Gaulle, of an industrial revolution and of a demographic *élan vital* which had not been witnessed in that country for a hundred years. In the conclusion of his book, not without some naïvety, Mr. Ridge paves the hell of his decadent era with kind intentions and takes elaborate pains to argue that a decadent literature does not necessarily imply a decadent country behind it. A Southerner himself, he points to the analogy with the American South today, alive with energy, prosperous to the point of vulgarity, proud that the adventure of life in the United States has taken refuge in Alabama, Louisiana, Texas and Georgia; but no reader of Southern tales of decadence, homosexuality, incest, poor whites and ferocious blacks would ever suspect the vitality of the South from reading their fiction or their plays. Let us leave once and for all the generalizations on literature as a mirror of the lives of the average people to apprentices in sociological research. Juvenal, Martial, Tacitus and Suetonius were no more reliable as portrayers of the fortunate centuries of *pax romana* under the Emperors than William Faulkner is of the Harding era or Ernst Jünger of Adenauer's Germany. The whole conclusion of Mr. Ridge's book is disappointingly weak. He failed to do hard enough or significantly original thinking on the subject of decadent literature. He offers no theory of his own, no comprehensive view of the subject. A. E. Carter's volume, published at Toronto in 1958, was more intelligent and more alive.

The suspicion, aroused by the introductory pages to the book, that the author has more good will and more erudition than philosophical grasp is confirmed by the artificiality of the categories which he imposes upon his subject and by the prodigality of the quotations behind which he seeks refuge. Historians and critics are too generously brought in without really assisting the author to establish his points. In Chapter V, "A Cerebral Hero," Verlaine's "Art Poétique," Mallarmé's "Brise Marine," "L'Azur," "Le Vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui" are given, whole or in part, without any analysis of what relevance those poems have to decadence. In the following chapter, "An Aesthete," Verlaine's "Art Poétique" is given a second time, plus Théophile Gautier's "L'Art," two poems or fragments by Leconte de Lisle, a sonnet by Heredia, two by Baudelaire, two by Rimbaud. The same passage from *Aphrodite* is given twice, on pages 37 and 149; so is a dialogue from *Là-bas*, by Huysmans, on pages 85 and 153. It is modest of the author to absent himself from his work so often and to yield precedence to an anthology of French texts of striking beauty, or even to the pompous and frail theorizing on the decay of cultures by Oswald Spengler and Brooks Adams.

But many readers would have preferred being presented with his own view of the many subjects broached in the book.

His plan is to sketch a definition of the decadent hero in the first chapter: he portrays him as carrying a fundamentally religious message, hating modern life, Epicurean enjoyments, love itself, and seeking death even in love and generally damnation and annihilation. More should have been made of the links between Catholicism and the notion of decadence, the "taedium vitae" of many a Christian yearning for another world and disgust with the flesh and the unsatisfying pleasures of this life. The sympathy evinced by many a religious writer for Baudelaire "le trop chrétien," Verlaine, Huysmans, Barrès, even for Flaubert who imprudently exclaimed, in his identification with Saint Anthony and in his ardent pursuit of an absolute in style, that he, too, was a Catholic, is a curious phenomenon. For Catholics as for perverts among the decadents, woman can be the snare in which we become waylaid and caught while we should pursue the other love and only one worthy of the name: the love for God.

Several chapters then group together a number of features, illustrated by quotations, of the decadent as he appears as a hero in literature (chiefly fictional) of the second half of the century. He is a metaphysical hero, deficient in energy and in will to revolt or to act, turned against nature and self-centered. He is a cosmopolitan, aghast at the complexity of the modern Babylon in which he is submerged and incapable of espousing the group and communing with the megalopolis, as the Unanimist anti-decadent of 1905-1910 will endeavor to do. He scorns action and cherishes his own cerebrality, yet is convinced that thought dissolves all urge to act. He cultivates the selfish and solitary enjoyment of art as a sign of election which sets him away from the vulgar herd. He dreams of strange departures from normalcy: ambiguous sexes, travesties, Lesbians, androgynes, nymphets, black masses as preludes to sex orgies for impotents. Finally, he curses modern woman as the sucker of his blood, the sieve through which the nectar of his intellect and imagination is poured to no profit, a masculine female who preys upon the gifted man in order to hold him captive through his exasperated senses.

The scheme thus adopted was ambitious; but under each title of chapter, the author does little more than juxtapose a number of examples and a few uncoordinated features. The absence of an organic and masterful conception of the subject is everywhere keenly felt. The very scattering of the reader's attention entailed by the plan prevented Mr. Ridge from granting enough to the evolution of decadent literature. Flaubert's *Education sentimentale* is placed on the same line as novels of the eighteen-nineties; Leconte de Lisle inveighing against the decadence of the modern world and attempting to cure it through a return to the Greeks and the study of barbarians is not distinguished from later poets who complacently yielded to the myth of decadence. There is an abyss between Gautier's zest and robust vigor in his portrayal of ambidextrous Maupin and the vampiric debaucheries conjured up by his son-in-law, Catulle Mendès. The cult of art and of beauty for its own sake, unspoiled by religion, morality and politics, may have concealed germs of decadentism in it even in 1840-60; but it is a far cry from the profanation of all beauty and the abdications of all artistic integrity which mark the later literature of decadence: that of Catulle Mendès, of Sar Péladan, of Jean Lorrain, of Rachilde. Each of those four writers, and a fifth one, Pierre Louys, who occasionally wrote first rate poetry, especially on

Lesbians ("Psyché, ma soeur, écoute immobile et frissonne") would deserve a monograph, preferably by a sturdy pioneer from the American West or from Canada, whom the contagion of decadentism would leave unsullied. The merit of Mr. Ridge is to have dutifully read many of the hair raising stories of drug addiction, of vampirism, flagellation, Alexandrian orgies, and the like luridly told in lush style by those French decadents. Christiane Rochefort and Françoise Sagan seem nothing but female choir boys when set beside Rachilde, the grand old lady of the *Mercure de France*; Henry Miller is a belated romantic, idealizing prostitutes in comparison with Catulle Mendès and Octave Mirbeau. Tennessee Williams has added cannibalism to the orgies of his predecessors and turned the bed, into which every actor felt an urge to jump with the "wrong" lady in French comedies, into a feared and hated trap, from which husbands and would-be lovers flee in disgust, preferring to nurture their school and college tender memories and remain "one of the boys."

Much zeal, wide knowledge, a genuine love for literature, a lovely job of printing commend this work. It is a bold and noble attempt. Still, the result is disappointing.

HENRI PEYRE

*Yale University*

*Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground* by Leonard Casper.  
Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960. Pp. xix + 212. \$4.75.

Literally, the "dark and bloody ground" is Kentucky, the battleground of Robert Penn Warren's heritage. Professor Casper astutely traces the Southern roots of Warren's heritage while adroitly avoiding the pitfall of overemphasizing the biographical (though Kentucky as a border state remained in the Union, Warren's favorite grandfather was an ex-Confederate officer). However, Warren used the Southern experience not for purposes of parochial regionalism, but as an available symbol "to test his personal vision: the dialectic course of man's compulsion to be known" (p. 10). For though violent action is the immediate narrative sense of the "dark and bloody ground," the conflict of ideas within the individual as he seeks self-identity is the thematic sense: "Violence in the world of Robert Penn Warren's fiction is token for the individual's laboring emergence from and through his circumstances, the struggle of each man for self-consciousness. All life becomes a striving to be born" (p. 3).

This full-length study is a much needed perspective on Warren's writing, not only because of the conflicting critical interpretations of his novels (summarized in the "Foreword"), not only because a major contemporary American writer has been up until now largely neglected by the critics, but more importantly because while Warren has been discussed separately as a poet, as a critic, or as a novelist, he has not been seen whole. Though these three major aspects of Warren's literary works are treated in separate chapters, the interrelationship between the formalistic critical creed and the creative achievement and the interrelationship between the major themes in the poetry and the novels are shown so that the poetry and criticism help illuminate the novels, the form Warren came to late in his career.

As a critic Warren is seen in relation to the three critics he is most closely associated with, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks, and with New Criticism as a whole. Warren shares with other New Critics a formalistic approach to literature by which art is separated from utility, for literary "meanings do not exist except as theme is tempered by a confluence of formal relations" (p. 36). However, Warren's early "attempt to disengage the social and esthetic concerns was doomed to failure, given his conviction that in the soil of society literature is nourished" (p. 54). Tempered by his own creative experience as a philosophic poet and novelist, Warren's later criticism requires of a piece of literature that it "intensify our awareness of the world . . . in terms of an idea, a 'view.'" It is toward a coherent "view" of the world that Warren's poetry and fiction have evolved, using his critical faculties to explore his own vision. Mr. Casper seems to be on questionable ground when he seeks evidence for Warren's philosophic and esthetic development in the kind of readings included in the Brooks and Warren textbooks; the selection of readings in a textbook of modern readings is sometimes limited by the practicalities of permission costs and by the need to be "representative" or "up-to-date" (and even by the need to be rhetorical, as in *Modern Rhetoric*) which might very well modify any theoretical *rationale* of selection. However, this is a minor flaw in Mr. Casper's thorough analysis of the gradually broadened view of literature Warren arrived at.

As a poet Warren's development is seen as "a journey from the physical to the metaphysical" (p. 84). Physical violence (and history as violence) in the early poems, such as "Crusade" and "Kentucky Mountain Farm," is used for melodramatic effects and wasteland imagery. *Proud Flesh* (1939), the prose-verse dramatic version of *All the King's Men*, and "The Ballad of Billie Potts" (1944) illustrate Warren's attempt to illuminate history and experience through chorus and commentary (a technique used in his first two novels published during this period). It is *Brother to Dragons* (1953) which completes the development: "The importance of *Brother to Dragons* in Warren's canon lies in the clarity of its comment on those terms of the human paradox which need redefining—complicity and innocence, necessity and freedom" (p. 79). These are redefined by the paradoxes:

The recognition of complicity is the beginning of innocence.  
 The recognition of necessity is the beginning of freedom.  
 The recognition of the direction of fulfillment is the death of the self  
 And the death of the self is the beginning of selfhood.

The close relationship between the development of thought in Warren's poetry and in his fiction is shown: the early fiction through *World Enough and Time* (1950) shows the gradual apprehension of the ideas presented in *Brother to Dragons*. In *All the King's Men* (1946) the epigraph from Dante underscores Warren's theme: "The curse of man is his identity, which is his separateness and therefore his incompleteness" (p. 128). However, the birth trauma (of the self) celebrated in the nursery rhyme of the title is irrevocable: Humpty-Dumpty can not be put together again. *World Enough and Time* looks forward to the redefinition of the human paradox in *Brother to Dragons*: Jerry Beaumont says, "There must be a way whereby the flesh becomes word. Whereby loneliness becomes communion without contamination. Whereby contamination becomes



purity without exile." The answer is hidden in the double irony of this "historical" novel: there is never world enough and time for factual proof of faith; yet all that is needed is the simple act of faith that comes from understanding of facts, but facts in themselves become a trap by which the "historian" (and the reader) becomes blind to the truth. *Band of Angels* (1955) extends the definition of the human paradox: "Man inherits the conditions of evil [necessity], yet is capable of choosing otherwise [freedom]. . . . Without choice there is no identity" (p. 160). Manty Starr achieves self-realization and the peace of understanding as she reviews her life and its significance.

To Warren action, whether personal or historical, becomes the metaphor of human guilt, for action inevitably causes evil and suffering; yet life without experience is ignorance, not innocence, for complicity is the beginning of innocence. Professor Casper has achieved a major redefinition of Robert Penn Warren's development as a poet and novelist. Of course the danger of any such perspective while the author is still alive is that his next novel may necessitate a qualification of that perspective (even as I write this review Warren's latest novel, *Wilderness*, is being reviewed). *The Cave* (1959), published while Mr. Casper's book was in preparation for publication, is only briefly noted in the "Foreword," but *The Cave* reinforces Mr. Casper's contention that Warren's basic theme is the search for self-identity. *The Cave* illustrates the second part of the human paradox that the recognition of the direction of fulfillment is the death of the self and that the death of the self is the beginning of selfhood: as Mr. Bingham says near the end of the novel of the crowd that gathered at the mouth of the cave, they had sought "to break out of the dark mystery which was themselves."

CHARLES G. HOFFMANN

University of Rhode Island

*A Troubled Eden: Nature and Society in the Works of George Meredith* by Norman Kelvin. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961. Pp. ix + 250. \$5.50.

Mr. Kelvin's ambitious attempt to synthesize George Meredith's philosophical, artistic, and social thought is, despite its virtues, something less than successful. There are flashes of insight and a fine general awareness of Meredith's place in his own time and in his relation to the twentieth century. Mr. Kelvin has a knack for compartmentalizing aspects of his subject, conveying an illusion of critical competency if not of profundity. There is no doubt of his enthusiasm for Meredith. Meredith, however, was one of the most elusive writers of his time. His ideas were often ill-shaped, contradictory, and fostered on the surface of his flashy brain. One has the impression at times that this mind, although linked to a brilliant wit and expressed in a brilliant style, was surprisingly sophomoric. Certainly a writer so fond of paradox and irony (Mr. Kelvin is at his best when he analyzes these elements) and so alternately serious and comic requires the brisk touch of Mr. Jack Lindsay's more readable and ampler *George Meredith*, a study Mr. Kelvin slights.

Mr. Kelvin is himself too often superficial when he should be profound, and

thorough when there is no need to be. His discussions of egoism and freedom, for example, are accurate so far as they go. Egoism he outlines well; but since this element is so central to Meredith's work, we expect more than a half page analysis of it. *The Egoist* itself, which Mr. Kelvin declares the finest of all Meredith's novels, is given surprisingly short treatment. More disappointing is his background description of *freedom*, which he disposes of in two brief paragraphs as he relates the concept to the writers of the nineties. These men, he observes, shared "freedom" as their "one central concern." In proof he quotes the third rate Le Gallienne and ignores what some more impressive figures: Morris, Wilde, Shaw, and Yeats, for example, had to say on the subject. We are tempted to ask, in passing, whether or not any group of English writers from any period might not have had the same "central concern"; at any rate, certainly more than two paragraphs are needed here. He is equally summary with the problems of Victorian doubt and the attitude towards "nature." In addition, some of his allusions to the twentieth century are incompletely drawn. In the discussion of "The Woods of Westermain," for one, he overlooks obvious parallels with Robert Frost, whose philosophy he refers to in a less significant connection a few pages later on. All of these issues Mr. Kelvin confronts with great assurance; but while he enters the forest with aplomb he seldom penetrates beyond the outergrowth. On the other hand, he is too exhaustive in his recapitulation of some of the poems and novels.

On the whole, Kelvin is a better judge of Meredith's prose than of his poetry. Despite his obvious sensitivity to verse, he fails to recognize sufficiently the barbarisms of tone and diction Meredith perpetrated in "Love in the Valley," in some of the passages of *Modern Love*, and in some of the other lyrics. One of the finest poems, the monologue "Juggling Jerry," so revealing of Meredith's ethical position, is not discussed at all. Finally, Mr. Kelvin's style is inclined to be wooden and rife with academic clichés. One long example of a turgid sentence, at the bottom of p. 115, features Meredith posed "with one foot in the eighteenth century and the other in the twentieth." His references to critics are usually introduced by clichés: "Brooks and Warren have the following to say," "Wright's observation is instructive," etc.

I regret that I cannot be more enthusiastic about Mr. Kelvin's effort; there is a real need, certainly, for ambitious appraisals of the intellectual and artistic achievements of many Victorian writers, Meredith among them. And Mr. Kelvin, industrious and intelligent, moves most of his judgments in the right direction. Time and further thought would perhaps have given him the discernment necessary to make this book truly first rate.

ROBERT L. PETERS

Wayne State University

*The Poems of Edward Taylor* ed. Donald E. Stanford with a Foreword by Louis L. Martz. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960. Pp. 543. \$10.00.

*The Poems of Edward Taylor* is a definitive and meticulous edition of seventeenth-century America's most representative and competent writer of verse. Donald E. Stanford prints for the first time the 217 parts of *Preparatory Meditations* (1682-1725). Thomas H. Johnson in his pioneer edition (1939) of Taylor's poems omitted 128 of the *Meditations* and following the error of Taylor's grandson, Dr. Ezra Stiles, titled the work *Sacramental Meditations*. (Stanford offers presumptive evidence that it was Stiles who mislabeled the collection.)

Beyond printing the corpus of Taylor's major works (only fragments of his *Metrical History of Christianity* are included), this edition has scholarly splendor in its notes to the text, its bibliographic matter, and its glossary. Add to these a compact biographical sketch. The footnotes—modestly reclining below the verses—are careful, necessary, and perceptive as glosses and as cross-references to seventeenth-century British poetry, especially that of George Herbert. With the assistance of Helge Kökeritz, Stanford has made a glossary, truly needed since Edward Taylor often violated the "doctrine of correctness" as understood by a Ben Jonson and George Herbert! But the glossary is more than an effort to understand what words have meant. It embraces ideas, religious issues, which our non-theological modern readers may need to be told about. And they are told clearly—and abundantly. Other aspects of editorial machinery include lists and observations on editions, the MSS, and the scholarship on Edward Taylor.

Although this is a notice of an edition, not a study of the poet's imagination and mind, it would be churlish to ignore the fair deal of critical comment which while not adding to the insight of other Taylor scholars underscores and intensifies what this "baroque," "metaphysical" poet was.

One may question Stanford's belief that *Gods Determinations* (which Johnson had printed entire) is little more than "versified doctrine" clothed in the "devices of medieval allegory." Or one may wonder if Louis L. Martz (who writes a foreword) has not overdone Richard Baxter as a parallel to the mind of Edward Taylor. Nor is it a critical issue of prime value if Taylor created on a lower altitude than did Herbert.

If not a major poet, Taylor is an "heir of the great tradition of English meditative poetry that arose in the latter part of the sixteenth century. . . ." Even though his verses are roughened,<sup>1</sup> incorrect, and uncouthly colloquial, he belongs in the good company of Donne, Hopkins, and Herbert. Whatever his lapses from supernal eloquence, he is among those who regard beauty as the rightful companion of the contemplative, the spiritual life.

CHESTER E. JORGENSON

Wayne State University

<sup>1</sup> A later New England poet who knew the art of Herbert and other seventeenth-century makers of verse also "roughened" his metre and idiom in an effort to escape easy and complacent fluidity. This poet was Ralph Waldo Emerson.