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[THE CRITICAL FURIES OF EDWARD DAHLBERG]

Alms for Oblivion: Essays, by Edward Dahlberg. With a Foreword by Sir Herbert Read. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964. Pp. x + 166. $4.50.

Sir Herbert Read's foreword, defending the kind of critic Dahlberg is in *Alms For Oblivion*, is almost the only charitable act in this volume of essays. When in a final piece Dahlberg speaks up for Poe, and for Tate's work on Poe, the reader of the preceding sixteen pieces pinches himself in disbelief. Like Ahab's one tear, it falls rather late. Not that criticism should be an award, but just that it needs to be something more than punishment. Dahlberg's assumed role as public executioner is pretty wearing, and the fact that at moments he plays the flagellant fills out the syndrome more than it relieves it. In *Truth Is More Sacred* (1961?) he decapitated with obvious relish Joyce, Lawrence, James, Graves, Eliot, and Pound; on that happy occasion the gentle Sir Herbert, with a series of interposed "Dear Edward" letters, offered mild demurrers as he dutifully picked up the heads. Now Dahlberg is tidying things up back home by sending Melville to the scaffold ("*Moby-Dick*: A Hamitic Dream"), jailing William James ("Cutpurse Philosopher"), excommunicating Fitzgerald ("Peopleless Fiction"), and hospitalizing William Carlos Williams ("Word-Sick and Place-Crazy"). On the side he has time to ear-crop such rascals as Trilling, Rahv, Wilson, and Mark Van Doren, and to brand the "scatalogical atheist" Farrell and the "vulgar dollar scribbler" Hemingway. Then, just to make clear that it is not persons he hates but people, there are a few essays on the general rottenness of American civilization, with special attention to its miserable ingratitude for geniuses, not necessarily excluding Dahlberg ("No Love and No Thanks," "For Sale"), and for its letting "the big, paranoiac cities" destroy the "old bucolic ideals" ("Our Vanishing Cooperatives").

Now Dahlberg both is and isn't as bad as all this. His rancor is a real thing, and the green and yellow juices of it stain almost every ten lines he writes. Turning back over the essays one is surprised to see that from time to time someone escapes it. It helps to concede outright that denunciation is as much a part of his style as his allusiveness, use of archaisms, and contempt for sustained exposition. In a sense it is his manner rather than his meaning, inseparable though the two are. He chastizes those whom he loves along with the others. Carried very far the manner could destroy all distinctions, but within his general hatred of everybody Dahlberg offers a fairly wide spectrum of particulars, considerable change of dynamics, and coruscating invention. Except when blind fury overtakes him much of his rancor, once you get used to it—and only if you are willing to, has the force of comedy. By these terms he becomes more interesting when capering about as a lamed old satyr or broken Merlin than when the Delphic power is turned on full. The edged titles of his essays here are better

than the vaporously apocalyptic title he bestows on the book. Yet his manic circlings between the bestial and the archangelic omit much humanity. He seems not much interested in life until it has been absorbed into literature, and frankly admits that he has no idea whether books have hurt or helped him. "As for me," he writes in the last sentence of the book, quite as if a critical study of Tate should end in this fashion, "I can find little or no contentment [i. e., rage] save in the balsam [not balm] of poetry or criticism or belles lettres, . . . for I can lie dreaming with a boke, and imagine myself stretched upon that oxhide where Menelaus once slept." And then, as if dating his own tombstone: *Written in 1962-1963, Majorca, Spain.* This is a strange man.

Dahlberg's pose as unrecognized genius is harder to dismiss since the publication of *Because I Was Flesh: The Autobiography of Edward Dahlberg* (1963). Though uneven this book is not to be patronized. In his sixties Dahlberg has finally written the piece of good fiction that he has been trying for all his life. "Fiction" is right in spite of the sub-title because so much of the strength of this book lies in the memorably imagined portrait of his mother, which dominates the work, and far exceeds remembrance. The scene at Lizzie Dahlberg's STAR LADY BARBERSHOP beneath the street-car viaduct on 8th Street, Kansas City, is unforgettable. So is the sluttish innocence of the lady barbers and the wandering butter-and-egg men who regularly did them in. The child's back-alley misery there, his dawning recognition that he is a Jew and fatherless, his bitter days in the Cleveland orphanage—these are less moving only because when writing directly of himself Dahlberg often over-reaches. Always the story and the son come swirling back to Lizzie, with her henna-dyed hair, broken dreams, and indomitableness. "To the memory of my Mother, Elizabeth Dahlberg," the son wrote as dedication of *Can These Bones Live* (1941; 1960), "who, as sorrowing Hagar, taught me how to make Ishmael's Covenant with the Heart's Afflictions." Only Lizzie seems able to hold his writing, as she apparently held his life, together. Going back to Dahlberg's early career, which began so promisingly when D. H. Lawrence did the introduction to *Bottom Dogs* in 1929 (the novel under another title had already appeared in *This Quarter*, where Hemingway started), we find he was already at "the wild, ruttish Kansas City streets" and Lizzie's barbershop. *From Flushing to Calvary* (1932), though shifting to the New York subway area, was "another novel dealing with my mother, in part apocryphal, and the Cleveland orphanage memories" (he tells us in his 1955 statement for *Twentieth Century Authors*). Somehow Dahlberg seems to have had only one story, and it has taken him a lifetime to tell it. That his earlier novels should have been absorbed into a late work, and that he should choose to call that an "autobiography," says a good deal about his long, almost-futile struggle to find a form and find himself. Some of his venemous criticism surely rises out of the poverty, racism, and bastardy he lived out in the midst of the benign American myth. And some as clearly seems to be a novelist's frustration. Driven into literary backwaters—he is at least half sure that "one writes criticism when he is unable to be Menander or Orpheus"—Dahlberg cannot forgive himself or those in the main stream.

Alms for Oblivion is a miscellaneous gathering of old and new pieces, some of which appeared in magazines during the past decade or two. The most valuable essays are not criticism but reminiscences. In his early years Dahlberg

was close to the centers of American writing, and in his open-ended role as novelist, essayist, editor, publisher, literary vagrant, and "neglected man" (as Stieglitz said), knew or knew about almost everyone. These memories of old writing friends and mentors are full of bitter tributes and savored misfortunes. Though random in manner they contain stunning vignettes of the old gang that hung around An American Place ("My Friends Stieglitz, Anderson, and Dreiser"); vindictive recall of days at the Brevoort, the Strunsky apartments, Bleecker Street, Macdougal Alley, the Rhinelander, and 36 Grove Street ("No Love and No Thanks"); a touching tribute to the Paris publisher of Contact Editions, in which Joyce, Pound, and Stein appeared ("Robert McAlmon: A Memoir"); and recollections of minor expatriates plus a series of fine notes on encounters with Hart Crane at the Coupole and the Café de Deux Magots ("The Expatriates: A Memoir"). Walking the city streets with Sherwood Anderson, Dahlberg quoted Dante and urged on him: "'Think with what malice New York has been conceived.' He replied in that drawling midland voice, 'Naw, it just happened'" ("Midwestern Fable"). Another short piece dramatizes and over-estimates Bourne ("Randoloph Bourne"). Some of the best portraits are in the first essay; the one of Stieglitz—"the crazy art-autocrat"—"the little figure in black pancake hat and gypsy cape"—is sharp as one of the master's own photographs. "Once when he was wallowing in the role of Timon, hating everybody, Williams became very choleric and told him to go home and die, that his sniveling melancholia was murdering everyone at the Place." Around Stieglitz were Georgia O'Keefe, whom he married, and Paul Rosenfield, Waldo Frank, Marsden Hartley, and Ford Madox Ford. As to the latter: "I mistook Ford the first time for one of the pigs Circe had fed with acorns and masts. He had a large, loafy face, and he used to shamble fatly down Eighth Street, slowly fetching air. . . . Ford was insanely kind and his grey eyes were warm oracles. Ford lied about everything. . . ." And again Stieglitz, with "the crazy clumps of hair that grew out of his ears like satyr's horns." He talked "as D. H. Lawrence wrote: he kept on talking until he said something good. . . ." These reminiscences have intense immediacy. One has no doubts that we are seeing these people as Dahlberg saw them.

In contrast, the first half of "Allen Tate, The Forlorn Demon" keeps raising questions about some of Tate's more difficult essays, but questions that are over Dahlberg's head. The section on Poe is better. It is essentially a deserved tribute to Tate for bringing his poetic insight to bear on Poe. Sir Herbert is right on target this time when he says, quoting, that Dahlberg's "glimpse of Allen Tate's 'wry, Poesque face flensed by some teleological anguish' tells us more about Tate's genius" than do Dahlberg's efforts at analysis. Perhaps he learned the pictorial technique from Stieglitz. The verbal flair is his own, however, and his use of the word "flensed" is a fine example of his "goatish appetite for English"; it is a technical term meaning skinned down or, as used in whaling, stripped of blubber (*Moby-Dick*, Ch. 72).

It makes one sad that the longest and most ambitious essay among these bitter alms should be a virulent attack on Melville. Sad, not for Melville, but because *Moby-Dick* has so obviously permeated Dahlberg's imagination that his rancorous attack is virtually a public self-castigation. If he has finally put himself on the scaffold, he mounts it in darkeness, like Dimmesdale. His own writing reflects

Melville's reaching for epic themes, his strained poetic-pedantic style, his debt to the ancients and Elizabethans, his demonism and antiquarianism, his word lust, his sometimes hapless struggles with form. As willful pariah he has long called himself Ishmael, meaning both the Hagar's son of Genesis and the castaway of *Moby-Dick*. And now Ishmael is suddenly the scorned Hamitic one. Dahlberg's earlier attack, in *Can These Bones Live*, also exploited Melville's sexual and religious trials, following lines set in Lawrence's *Studies*; but there an avid relish for the books justified writing about them. This time there is little pleasure and no comedy.

"I have changed my mind about Herman Melville," Dahlberg solemnly announces, "for I once loved this Cyclops whose father is Oceanus." The attack begins and ends with a single theme: that Melville was a misogynist, that his imagination was homosexual, and therefore that *Moby-Dick* is perverted and false. Because of "scorifying deprivations" Melville lusted after men and beasts, but not women. It was Melville's affliction that "his vitals froze in all latitudes," and this is why *Moby-Dick* is a congealed and frigid tale. "After the blubber pots and the love scenes of these corrugated, mammoth Don Juans of the sea, what virile male reader does not yearn for the witty bouts between a smell-smock and a flirt, or a sweet bosom that would set Ilium on fire?" We need "the thighs of Aspasia or the rump of Lais of Corinth," but not whales. Melville "should have been an amorist," and he wasn't.

Sir Herbert's notion in the foreword that "this indignation is fundamentally moral" is almost as funny-sad as the indignation itself, which is clearly psychological. As for Dahlberg, what book was he reading before he fell out with it? The triumphant announcement that *Moby-Dick* is a book without women, that the whale is phallic, that Ishmael takes Queequeg as wife, that the chapter "A Squeeze of the Hand" is sexual, and so on—these things he has noticed now for the first time, at the age of sixty-two? They are all in Lawrence, some even in Dahlberg's own writings. All that is new here is Dahlberg's reaction; holy whiteness is suddenly a terror. One might hope for more from the author of *The Sorrow of Priapus* (1957), that bizarre, brilliant compendium of fables on the concupiscence and malice of men and beasts, for which Ben Shahn did such superb drawings. But Dahlberg may not be as interested in sex as he keeps saying he is. In any case he is in no mood in this essay to cope with the complexities of Melville's sexuality, either in his life or works. He can now see only a sodomite imagination in Ishmael, and a vast "Hamatic" (by which he means homosexual) dream in his narrative. Even then what fascinates him is not the dream but his own nausea before it.

In a kind of classic demonstration of how rage can choke insight Dahlberg keeps pointing at some of the flaws of *Moby-Dick* without being able to articulate his findings. The novel is without motion. Ahab's monomania is merely "picturesque" and static (the beginning of a good insight). Ishmael's narrative is dour and humorless (perhaps so, to a humorless reader). The characters are flat and the cetology is a bore because Melville "had almost no knowledge of people" and knew little about whaling. The book is "shabbily written"; Melville dashed it off in a year, "made no corrections, and never rewrote any moity of it." So it goes, insights, half truths, and misinformation tumbling over each other. What a shock, then, to note Read's abject capitulation in the foreword:

> I confess I had always shared the common admiration for Melville's allegorical epic, but never was an illusion of mine so immediately shattered. . . . Mr. Dahlberg takes his stand on what is most central to literature, the language, and he has no difficulty in showing that *Moby-Dick* is "shabbily written."

More accurately, Dahlberg has no difficulty in dealing with Melville's language because he acknowledges none. What kind of discrimination underlies a list of thirteen examples of "mock fury" (a good hard problem) that includes: "the last gasp of his earthquake life" (a fair instance); "the whale's head" (a simple naming, and all that he quotes); and "the delta of his forehead's veins" (an effective trope, unless he can show otherwise)? What are we to make of twelve other passages dumped out with absolutely no comment other than "Is this the 'honest manna of literature'? "—when to one innocent reader, at least, five of the twelve are perfectly straightforward English prose? Or six passages merely dubbed "canorous lines," in some kind of presumed contrast? Right or wrong he leaves everything undone. Having neither the head nor the patience for rational criticism, he should stick to his feral outbursts and disjointed grotesqueries, which now and then enliven the mind. In this essay, however, one is not given much choice. Either we read how Cotton Mather, "the father of the Christian homosexual," made women-haters of Melville, Poe, Whitman, and Thoreau, and so threatens us with perversion, "the black angel of our century." Or we watch exercises, described above, in what has to be called Gnu Criticism.

At one point in *Truth Is More Sacred*, during an exchange of letters on James, Read got up his courage:

> You are absolute for truth, and like a Grand Inquisitor, would send to the stake any author who in any respect offends your dogma. . . . I could not live so intolerantly. I am a relativist, grateful for any glance of beauty that I encounter as I read, and not anxious to erect monuments of granite on Parnassus. I am always for discrimination, which I would oppose to judgment.

No doubt Dahlberg is a difficult friend to have and for whom to write prefaces. Yet one wonders how Sir Herbert could forget himself so quickly as to draw the lance in benighted defense of this essay, and even go on to offer Dahlberg as one who above all applies "the test of style, and by always returning to this test, by insisting on very little else, . . . becomes a critic of a most salutary kind." To the contrary. Dahlberg prolongs into the twentieth century an eccentric remnant of what he himself calls "American radicalism, which is half Bible socialism, half sex cult." He is himself one of the "malcontents," one of the "truth-and-vision-cranks," whose loss he moans. Whatever may still be salutory for criticism in that tradition Dahlberg has twisted by his Ishmael-anguish. He refuses to study style. He insists only on himself.

Most of the virtue of *Alms for Oblivion* lies in the intensity of Dahlberg's reminiscences about writers he knew. The uses of the "criticism" are essentially autobiographical, as documents for the inner history of a tormented man. Seen from outside, Dahlberg belongs to the karate school of criticism. No matter if the heart is troubled; when the hand has been sufficiently hardened, one chop does it.

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Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony by Leo Spitzer. Ed. Anna Granville Hatcher, foreword René Wellek. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963. Pp. 232. $5.50.

Spitzer's astounding breadth of learning and his faith in the continuity and coherence of the history of ideas made him a scholar of a formidable but very special kind. The posthumous publication of the present volume offers a superb model of his manner, his convictions and his method: it is an expanded version of one of his most celebrated essays which appeared in *Traditio* in 1944/5 and which was then to represent 'Prolegomena to a study of the word *Stimmung*' and to lead to a survey of concepts and images conveying the idea of 'World Harmony.' Subsequent research on the same topic remained unpublished. Miss Hatcher has now joined the original substance and Spitzer's elaborations in a volume that remains a striking example of a somewhat unfashionable and highly personal critical procedure even though, in the proliferated form, it has lost some of the aphoristic immediacy of Spitzer's earlier essay.

What Spitzer proposed to do was to survey a semantic field and to write a '*Stimmungsgeschichte* of the word *Stimmung*.' Towards that end he unravels a vast texture of verbal and conceptual associations that stretches from Pythagoras and Plato to the seventeenth century. With extraordinary intellectual exuberance he demonstrates the accretions and transformations of a series of central terms such as *temperare*, *accordare* or *concertare* throughout Christian Latin literature, the Renaissance and the Baroque, shows the relationship between music (and musical terminology) and the *musica mundana* of the universe, and points to the presence of analogies in mediaeval rhetoric and hermeneutics. He is remarkably eloquent in his discussion of the gradual articulation of the concept of harmony in the musical forms of the Renaissance, in the 'concert of the stars' in Shakespeare, Milton and Cervantes, and of the development of 'music in praise of music' in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the seventeenth century. Spitzer's insistence upon inclusiveness and synthesis leads him at times to overwhelm us not merely with information but with extravagant flashes of speculation and deduction: in connection with his discussion of the tetrachord and the symbolism of the elements he suggests that the carillon or the chimes of the mediaeval belfry represent the four elements and thus the totality of the world. Milton's 'nature's chimes' and Schiller's bell 'Concordia' testify to the fusion of the idea of musical harmony with the idea of the 'well-tempered mixture.'

Analytical rationalism tends in the eighteenth century to disintegrate the idea of world harmony; the history of the disappearance of the field, Spitzer insists, is simply the history of modern civilization, of the Weberian *Entzauberung der Welt*, of de-Christianisation. The modern caesura in occidental history seems, indeed, for him made palpable by the destruction of the field under the impact of the Enlightenment. Here as elsewhere Spitzer dissociates himself not only from other semantic field-theories that would recognize modification where Spitzer sees a categorical end, but also, and vigorously, from what he might perhaps to-day no longer quite as bluntly call the 'anti-mentalist' school of modern linguistics. In a sympathetic and concise preface René Wellek characterizes the philosophical presuppositions of Spitzer's approach, his often excessive amassing of heterogeneous evidence, his dramatic, and perhaps melodramatic,

shifts of perspective. Some of these idiosyncracies undoubtedly make the expanded version less palatable than the earlier essay. But Spitzer's scholarship was always sustained by an enormous intellectual vitality. If in these pages it is overcast with an almost Gibbonesque melancholy at the breakdown of the old European belief in world harmony, it is well to be reminded by Mr. Wellek that in Spitzer's last pronouncements before his death this regret for the passing of the vision of harmony gave way to a reaffirmation of his sympathy for 'la belle lumière du monde.' His determination to show the survival of the traditional experience of unity in the secularized concept of *Stimmung* was not to be realized. If it were now to be undertaken it would provide, beyond Spitzer's masterly essay and with methods different from his, though in his spirit, an immensely rewarding key to the intellectual history of Europe during the past two centuries.

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The Courtly Maker: An Essay on the Poetry of Wyatt and His Contemporaries by Raymond Southall. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964. Pp. ix + 170. $6.00.

Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Background by Patricia Thomson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964. Pp. xiv + 298. $7.50.

Not long ago, Wyatt was considered to be a transitional poet. His verse seemed to hesitate between the old "broken-backed" line and iambic pentameter, and his manners to waver between Early-Tudor rudeness and Petrarchan elegance. His importance appeared to be merely historical, that of a harbinger of the more golden Elizabethan lyric.

When irregular rhythms and frank manners became fashionable, however, many critics followed Sir Edmund Chambers' *Sir Thomas Wyatt and Some Collected Studies* (London, 1933) in praising Wyatt's plain, manly, English note. And in "The Art of Sir Thomas Wyatt," *HLQ*, IX (1946), 325-55, Hallett Smith discovered that Wyatt is a master of Italianate artifice as well: of high rhetoric, clever conceits, and literary imitation. Today, Wyatt is accepted as a major poet.

Nevertheless, except for the English version of Sergio Baldi's excellent *La poesia di Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Florence, 1953), there has been no significant book about Wyatt's poetry since A. K. Foxwell's *A Study of Sir Thomas Wyatt's Poems* (London, 1911). Two new books on Wyatt, therefore, are most welcome.

Professor Southall responds passionately to Wyatt's hesitating rhythms, sharp desires, and somber fears. His appreciation is admirable; but it is developed in a set of suspect historical theories.

Presuming that good poetry reflects the tumults of life, Professor Southall links the Early-Tudor lyric to Henry VIII's conspiratorial court. He reads its amorous faith, service, and fear to reflect a dangerous dependency upon powerful patronage. Though his reading highlights certain emotional elements of the lyric, it is unconvincing: for it does not show any probability that the conventional

terms of love service had in England a sense different from that which they had in equally conspiratorial continental courts.

Furthermore, Professor Southall confusingly considers Wyatt's translations to be direct reflections of life. For example, he argues that Wyatt's love poetry can be distinguished by its psychological development, introspective insight, and divided will; yet these are the central qualities of Petrarch, and Professor Southall generally instances them by Petrarchan translations. In Chapter 3, he argues that Wyatt's sonnets are not translations at all, since Chaucer translated Petrarch before him, and so assimilated Petrarch to a purely English tradition. Furthermore, he reads the Psalms as though they had no origin other than Henry VIII's court and amorous introspection (which, on p. 98, is a "tendency to mysticism"); and, in discussing the satires, he thinks the Horatian mean estate to be the life of an English squire. His interpretations show him inadequately to understand literary imitation. Critics such a Hallett Smith and J. W. Lever have shown that translation affords Wyatt opportunities for self-expression and artistic originality. Professor Southall recognizes and appreciates the integrity of Wyatt's translations; but, unfortunately, he finds it necessary to deny that they are translations at all.

Professor Southall's major thesis is that Wyatt climaxes a great English tradition, and that the later Renaissance lyric is degenerate. He proves neither of these points. To show that Wyatt is surrounded by similar poets, Professor Southall reads the Devonshire MS. as an anthology by many hands. But, though Wyatt does have English forbears, no general poetic blossoming can be surmised from a collection of poems perhaps all by Wyatt. Furthermore, Professor Southall instances the shoddy elegance of the later Renaissance lyric by Surrey, Harrington, Vaux, Grimald, and Churchyard—men hardly central to a determination of the worth of the Elizabethan lyric.

Professor Southall is sensitive to Wyatt's poetry: to his frightened desire, emphatic phrases, and resonant uncertainty. He is cogent and stimulating in discussing the canon, the political context, and, especially, the meter of Wyatt's love poems. But much of his book is misdirected polemic. The general reader will not care for its academic debates, and scholars no longer need to be told that Wyatt's English poems and translations are good, that classical prosody has limitations, or that Wyatt is unlike Donne. In short, Professor Southall does not know exactly who his audience is: he neither makes the fruits of scholarship available to those civilized people who do not read the journals, nor redirects the current of research. He attacks straw men vigorously, and establishes several untenable redoubts. He would seem to be an exciting precursor of modern Wyatt scholarship, were he not its heir.

Professor Southall stresses Wyatt's English manliness and his direct response to life. Professor Thomson stresses his personal development of a host of traditional themes and images. Her book is an extensive, learned, and somewhat undirected discussion of Wyatt's poetry in relation to various backgrounds—literary, social, and political. It consists partly of judicious surveys of these background materials, and partly of sensitive comparisons of Wyatt's works with whatever Latin, Italian, or English pieces seem relevant.

Professor Thomson's subjects include Wyatt's political life; his amours; his translations from moralists; his English passages, aulic and plain; his Petrarchan

lyric; his quattrocentistic lyric; and his neoclassical satires. Her method is exhaustive. For example, in "The First English Petrarchans" she considers Petrarch's relation to Dante; Chaucer's Petrarchan translation and the identity of "Lollius"; a Petrarchan translation by Watson; Petrarch's seafaring image, its roots in Ovid, and its antecedents in the Middle Ages; Bemboism; anti-Petrarchism; the growth of the Petrarchan commentary; and, voluminously, Surrey. Throughout, her surveys are sound and her critical comparisons sensitive. But she insists upon discussing at length whatever is remotely relevant.

Furthermore, Professor Thomson's theses are often factitious. For example, in "English Lyrics" she traces the tradition of Chaucerian love poetry, instances Wyatt's similarities to the Chaucerians, and concludes that he is not a Chaucerian. Then she describes the plain style of the English lyric and, through close analysis, decides that though Wyatt's "English lyrics" follow this tradition, they are not dull. Her definition of fifteenth-century English lyric styles is admirable. But her hypothesis is frivolous, and she treats it with earnest science—judiciously weighing, page after page, the contention that Wyatt is dull.

In this long work, there are of course a few inaccuracies. Professor Thomson cites as an English poem one of Wyatt's translations (p. 133); she instances lascivious poets by Chariteo (p. 210), a professed Neoplatonist; and she says that Serafino insists upon his rights in love relationships (p. 220), though no poet is less interested in justice. After showing that Wyatt often imitates freely (pp. 187-88), she inconsistently assumes his departures from Horace to mean that Horace is not his model (pp. 263-64). And by consciously ignoring French influences, she weakens her definition of the English element in Wyatt's lyric. But in general Professor Thomson's surveys are well-considered, well-informed, and well illuminated by critical analyses.

Nonetheless, one must object to her centrifugal presentation of Wyatt. In Chapter 5 his love poems follow the plain English style, in Chapter 6 Petrarch, and in Chapter 1 Serafino: Professor Thomson notes only that he is a little more like Serafino than like Petrarch. In Chapter 4 Wyatt is a humanist, in Chapter 5 a medieval poet, in Chapter 7 a court wit, and in Chapter 8 a neo-classicist: Professor Thomson suggests only that he is a better poet of courtly wisdom than of courtly love. So long a book might have been expected to afford a more vital unifying conception.

Furthermore, Professor Thomson slurs the essential issues. For example, she properly notes Wyatt's "English lyrics" to be formed from the commonplaces of European Renaissance poetry (pp. 111-12)—and then proceeds to treat them as though they were purely English. She is concerned with Wyatt's sources, yet makes no significant generalization about his principles of literary imitation. And she pointlessly limits her consideration of Wyatt's thought to his translations from Latin. In short, Professor Thomson divides Wyatt's work into cues for her surveys of various traditions: she is concerned not to know whether his lyrics are English, but to describe English styles; not to know what he thinks, but to describe moralistic thought through the ages. And she therefore fails to face the more crucial literary questions.

Professor Thomson's book will prove delightful to those who appreciate a course of lectures by a judicious, learned, and sensitive professor: they will benefit from her wide knowledge, unfailing discrimination, and admirable clarity.

Those with the courage to attack the book from the rear, through its index, may use it as an encyclopedia. But it is not directed to those who love Wyatt; and literary historians will be instructed chiefly by its comments upon Italian Petrarchism and fifteenth-century English lyrical styles. Here, however, in areas where confusion and ignorance often reign, Professor Thomson's informed clarity is most valuable.

One general consideration is suggested here. In the more vociferous literary journals, scholars such as Professors Thomson and Southall are sometimes said to turn to history from a fear of poetry—to seek facts because they do not appreciate artifacts. But the opposite is true. What is most valid in these books is their critical sensitivity: it is that which their history illuminates. There are, after all, only three ways to show how the linguistic relics of a dead age should be read: by invoking a well-defined critical system; by employing historical procedures; and by talking about oneself while feigning to talk of literature. If, as Northrop Frye says in a polemical introduction, there is no science of criticism, then one may freely admit that there is not much science in literary history. But scientific criticism and history are the only valid approaches to literature we have—the only means of distinguishing literature from ourselves. Surely, neither the critic nor the literary historian should be blamed for turning to them.

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William Dean Howells and Art in His Time by Clara Marburg Kirk. New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965. Pp. xvi + 336. $7.50.

In this study of William Dean Howells Mrs. Kirk, who has been one of the prime movers in the revival of his reputation, collects a great deal of interesting material concerning his relation to the arts and artists of his day. She sees a close relationship between his technique as a writer and that of the painters, who, she believes, influenced the realism of his novels and critical writings. From his study of painting, she says, Howells learned to see beauty in the slums of New York, "and this he no doubt helped to teach the Ashcan school of painters such as Henri, Luks, and Sloan." It is a challenging theme which cannot be established by confident generalizing. No connection is shown between Howells and Henri, for example, nor is any close parallel demonstrated in their techniques. Such superficial resemblance as there is appears in similarity of subject. Despite his four years as consul at Venice during the Civil War Howells never understood the Italian painters; the tone of his comments on them is sometimes reminiscent of *Innocents Abroad*. He never overcame an "instinctive repugnance" to the nude in art, which made him always prefer "the decent amenities of our American life." The English painters attracted him most:

> the Gainsboroughs, Reynoldses, Wests, and Lawrences, but also the works of the great modern painters, Landseer, Leighton, Millais, Alma Tadema, and the rest. . . . These great Englishmen have not merely painted well, but they have painted about something; their pictures tell stories, and suggest stories when they do not tell them.

This honest opinion delivered in 1876 never changed much. Howells tried to like the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists, whom his children admired. In the 1890s after lunching once or twice with Whistler in Paris he felt "the poison of Europe" getting into his soul. "When I think of the Whistler garden!—But Saratoga amuses somewhat." His real taste was not for the Impressionists, but for artists like Frith and "that great German painter" Overbeck; for J. Q. A. Ward, "the greatest of American sculptors," and the now quite forgotten Bessie Potter, "who gets into sculpture the things I am always trying to get into fiction." He was always looking for the "literary quality" in works of art. In this respect he gladly admitted himself a Philistine.

Mrs. Kirk sometimes tends to gloss over the provincial limits of Howells' taste by linking his name with those of artists and writers with whom his acquaintance may have been slight. "Among the charter members" of the American Art Association, we read, "were John La Farge, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Helena Gilder, Francis Lathrop, Julian A. Weir—all friends and associates of Howells' and James's." Yet Howells knew La Farge only in his last years, seeing him across the table at the Century Club; James had been intimate with him from boyhood, painting with him in the open at Newport and in William Morris Hunt's studio. Charles Eliot Norton's efforts to combat the mediocrity of American taste struck Howells as undemocratic. To him "the here and the now—not to mention the mediocre and the common—held an irresistible attraction, especially since he had achieved a measure of success by exploiting just such material in his novels, which were soon recognized as examples of the new 'realism.'" Ruskin too he scorned for his "aristocratic attitudes," though George Eliot in reviewing *Modern Painters* in 1856 had declared:

> The truth of infinite value that he teaches is *realism*—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality.

There is the idea Howells was to discuss in *Criticism and Fiction* thirty-five years later. From Ruskin came also the relation he drew between art and socialism, though the immediate source was William Morris. In comparison with the revolution of *News from Nowhere*, the "evolution" sketched in *A Traveler from Altruria* looks like a timid compromise. Though the low and the common were ideals for fiction, Howells did not care for them in other works of art. For him the greatest achievement of the century was the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. This triumph of Beaux-Arts Renaissance in stucco evoked his Altrurian's highest praise as a model of what cooperation could achieve, cooperation of the "gifted" and the "wealthy—the Morgans, the Vanderbilts, and the Astors—who had contributed to the undertaking designed to raise the American public to a new level of taste." Cooperation was very different in Ruskin's Guild of St. George or Morris's classless community, where art (or "work-pleasure") had replaced competition.

Speculation is a dangerous resource for a biographer. In the absence of evidence one should use with caution such phrases as "must have seemed," "must have felt," "surely read with a pang," and "no doubt shared in the discussion." Con-

cerning "An East-Side Ramble": "We may surmise further that the 'friend' who accompanied Howells on this ramble was Stephen Crane; no doubt they were inspired to make this plunge into the East side because of Howells' interest in the manuscript of *Maggie*, for which he had at last succeeded in finding a publisher." A few pages later the surmise has become a fact; we are referred to his "'East-Side Ramble' with Stephen Crane." But used sparingly this device gives Mrs. Kirk good service in connecting scattered parts of the story.

Her book has been carefully proof-read except for some unfortunate lapses in proper names: Sara Orne Jewett, Justine McCarthy, Lillian Whiting, Cremone Gardens, Bourne-Jones, Benjamin Constance, J. A. Wier, Gainesborough, *The Newcombs, The Defense of Guinevere,* and *Le Révue des Deux Mondes.*

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Seurat and the Science of Painting by William Innes Homer. Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1964. Pp. xvi + 327; Pl. 71 + 4 color plates. $12.50.

Mr. Homer's intent in *Seurat and the Science of Painting* is clearly stated in the Preface, p. viii: "Therefore, it is hoped that the conclusions reached in the following pages will bring about a better comprehension of Seurat's art and theory and will contribute to an understanding of his position in the history of modern painting." In order to achieve his intent, the author has researched all the available documentary sources as evidenced in the wealth of footnoted material. Needless to say, this work represents the culmination of many years of thorough investigation into all the sources concerning Seurat's theory of art.

Mr. Homer's analyses of the major works of Seurat are highly surgical in which have surrounded Seurat since the publication of Paul Signac's *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme* in 1899. His methodology is clear enough. After dispensing with all the scientific and theoretical sources (from Chevreul to Henry), the author turns to the paintings. Seurat's major paintings (*Une Baignade, Un Dimanche à la Grande Jatte, Les Poseuses, La Parade, Le Chahut* and *Le Cirque*) are examined and analyzed in the light of not only the pictorial sources, but also in the light of the scientific and theoretical writings that the artist was known to have consulted. At times, the author reverses the procedure and examines the paintings in order to discover whether the relevance of the theories is evident.

Mr. Homer's analysis of the major works of Seurat are highly surgical in his tendency to dissect every portion of the paintings. One excerpt from the author's discussion of *Une Baignade* will illustrate the technique employed: "In painting the grass in *Une Baignade*, Seurat separated the orange and yellow-orange strokes, representing sunlight, from the underlying local color. The application of this method, which Fénéon and Signac referred to as the 'separation of the elements,' can be detected throughout the painting. It is most pronounced, however, in the river, where a multitude of different colors are reflected from the rippling surface of the water. The local color of the water

is blue-green, but this, in turn, is influenced by two other hues: the pale yellow-orange of the sunlight, already mentioned, and the reflection from the blue sky" (p. 68).

The above highly-surgical technique, however, is admitted by the author who later stated that he had purposely stressed the scientific and mathematical aspects of Seurat's thought (p. 234). And, in order to compensate for this imbalance, the author (starting on page 235) tries to emphasize the less clinical and more instinctive aspects of Seurat in the remaining 22 pages. At this point, the author argues (and with supporting documents) that Seurat never subordinated his art to "science," but that ". . . Seurat's 'science' involved the application of general guiding principles, not elaborate formulae governing the total creative process" (p. 241). The author's conclusion is, ". . . that instinct and intuition, on one hand, and a highly rationalized theory of art on the other, were balanced in his [Seurat's] creative process from 1886 to 1891, the year of his death" (p. 243).

In the Epilogue, the author reasserts Seurat's position in the whole of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century painting—that Seurat was indeed *the* great single figure who influenced universally the directions taken in painting. "By virtue of the magnitude of his contribution, Seurat may rightfully be regarded as a major progenitor of twentieth-century art. Almost every important movement owes something, directly or indirectly, to his achievement. It should be obvious that he is an ancestor of many varieties of abstract art. Yet in his concern for the expression of interior states of feeling, along with his departure from naturalistic representation, he also foreshadows several varieties of twentieth-century Expressionism" (p. 256).

This book, I would add, is not intended for the casual reader. The scholar in search of the documents on Seurat's theory would profit greatly in turning to the abundance of footnotes and to the twelve pages of "Selected Bibliography." Whether one agrees with Mr. Homer's conclusions regarding Seurat's position may be of lesser significance than the fact that the author has adequately presented his own personal conviction concerning art history—his belief in the necessity of "a solid foundation in more specialized studies on the basis of which (if we are fortunate) meaningful surveys [of the nineteenth century?] may one day be written" (Preface, p. viii). Mr. Homer is to be highly commended for his thoroughness in scholarship. The use of four color plates is extremely helpful, while the black and white reproductions (71 total, including diagrams), sometimes of questionable quality (e.g., fig. 48), leave something to be desired in a book discussing color theories and color application.

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