Book Reviews

1965

Criticism Editors
Book Reviews


This latest study by the Sir William Osler Professor of English Literature at the John Hopkins University is, like the long list of books that have preceded it, immensely erudite and yet lively and colorful in its presentation of its materials. As Professor Allen says in his preface: “I hope to display the profiles of some of these atheists and record the beliefs of the unbelievers. For the Renaissance, in general, an atheist was one who could not accept any religious principle shared by all Christian creeds . . . None of the men in my present study called himself an atheist, none denied the existence of God.” (p. vi) He adds, “The dike of faith was going down as the sea of rationalism burst through . . . The trepidation of the orthodox is, I suppose, the theme of my book . . .” (p. x) But Professor Allen is, also, interested in providing “a background for students of literature.” (p. x)

In his first chapter, “Atheism and Atheists in the Renaissance,” the author begins by pointing out: “The word ‘atheist,’ almost unknown to the Middle Ages, was rediscovered by the Renaissance as a majestic term of reproach and condemnation.” (p. 1) The Renaissance authorities on the subject recognized two kinds of atheists: “practical atheists, who lived intemperately and were careless of salvation”; and “speculative atheists . . . who tested every religious notion and were, consequently, very much to be feared.” (p. 4) The popular belief was that Athenian atheism had come to Rome, but slept during the Middle Ages only to come to life again in Renaissance Italy. (p. 6) The bellwether of the antiatheists was Gisbertus Voetius, Professor at Utrecht, active in the first half of the seventeenth century, who “wrote many books ornamented with prejudice and annotated with contumely.” He found the main cause of atheism, next to Satan, “skepticism, a rigid intellectual attitude common to men who ‘hate the other kind of knowledge’ and who reject all wisdom not approved by their reason.” (pp. 8-9) Voetius, also, noticed that “atheists are especially plentiful in those loosely run democracies that permit ‘liberty of conscience.’” (p. 11)

An English clergyman, Jenkins Thomas Philipps, published “the first modern history of atheism” in 1716. (p. 14) Interestingly enough, he calls Hobbes an atheist, but not Herbert of Cherbury. (p. 16) Philipps was superseded by a Jena professor, Johannes Budeus, who distinguished “between several pre-atheist conditions of the mind such as materialism, pantheism, indifferentism, skepticism, and Epicureanism.” (p. 17) But the major eighteenth-century work was J. F. Reimann’s account of “the atheism of all peoples in all times.” “Reimann, like his predecessors, trembled before rationalism, but he should be congratulated because he attempted to exculpate many men continually accused of godlessness,” among them, it should be added, Dr. Thomas Browne! (pp. 18-19) Among other writers, who attempted the refutation of atheism, was the
Catholic Campanella, who “got the reputation of a cryptoatheist who attractively spread the atheists’ doubts about religion and stumbled in his refutation.” So did the Protestant Franciscus Cuperus. “Both apologists were too reasonable in their defences of orthodox Christianity.” (pp. 22-27)

The second chapter Professor Allen devotes to “Three Italian Atheists: Pomponazzi, Cardano, Vanini,” whose names “appear in almost every Renais­sance polemic against the atheists and their beliefs.” (p. 28) Pomponazzi ended his life as philosophy professor at Bologna, “the most distinguished of Italian Aristotelians,” who, Professor Allen suggests, “may have invented fidelism.” (pp. 29-36) Pomponazzi thought that all religions know a period of rise and of fall, and that Christianity must eventually bow to this law. It is hardly surprising that the work in which he explained all this ended up on the Index. (pp. 44-45)

In spite of the range of fields of learning to which Cardano contributed, “he was often confused and contradictory.” His “philosophical indiscretions” led to his being imprisoned by the Inquisition in 1570. “The books of Cardano are filled with pious utterance and religious veneration, but his real feelings are hard to ascertain . . . Actually, he was a Christian skeptic with no great confidence in men’s reason or emotions.” (pp. 45-52) The third of the trio, the unfortunate Vanini, was to be burned at Toulouse in 1619. His major work, four sets of dialogues between Alexander and Julius Caesar, illustrates his technique. “These reiterated phrases—‘if I were not a Christian,’ ‘if I were not instructed by the Church,’ or ‘if I were a believer’—that so often precede an attractive but highly non-Christian proposition are clear marks on Vanini’s attitude.” Vanini was witty, “but even theologians could understand Vanini’s humor.” (pp. 58-74)

In the third chapter Professor Allen discusses “Three French Atheists: Montaigne, Charron, Bodin.” It was the “haunting sense of the relativity of both experience and knowledge” which arose from the Academic skepticism of Sanchez (a young Portuguese philosopher) that was “partially responsible for the conversion of Montaigne from the agitated perplexity of Christian Stoicism to the calm perplexity of Christian Pyrrhonism.” Again, the fideists have claimed Montaigne. (pp. 79-88) Pierre Charron, a fervent disciple of Montaigne, was even more than his master the target of the antitheists. He undertook to meet the atheists on their own ground of reason and prove the existence of God. Some scholars have been inclined to see in Charron “a kind of philosophical mystic following his own road to God. This may not be true, but it is plain enough that he was no atheist.” (pp. 89-96) As for Bodin, whom Montaigne admired, his most impressive work, the Heptaplomeres, was not published until long after his death in 1841. Professor Allen says that “it is really the first attempt at what is later called ‘higher criticism.’” Even though not printed, it was well known to various writers of the next two hundred years, and certainly earned him the reputation of an atheist among many of the faithful. (pp. 97-99) He is certainly no atheist, Professor Allen concludes; “He does not scorn the convictions of the orthodox; but they, in turn, must not scorn the contrary views of learned rationalists, who live according to reason, or what Toralba calls ‘the divine light,’ which shines in every mind ‘to see, to sense, to judge what is right, what is wrong, what is true, what is false.’” (p. 110)

The fourth chapter treats of “Rational Theology against Atheism.” Calvin
had declared that for man to know God at all took an “act of divine Grace.” (p. 113) Pascal, recognizing with Montaigne the relativity of philosophical opinion, declared for “the knowing heart.” (p. 115) For Donne the “way is not through Nature or reason but through revelation.” For Hooker, reason was, as for Donne, “important but far beneath revelation.” (p. 117) “The Anglicans used reason against Rome’s authoritarianism and Geneva’s Biblicism . . . Nonetheless, they half open the door to a rational theology as a preparation to Christianity, as a faith in itself, and as an introduction to the scientific study of the universe.” (p. 123) Particularly is this true of the Cambridge Platonists. (pp. 123-24) As for the Calvinists, “who were the hard center of British dissent,” they “did not share the confidence of the Anglicans in reason, even in ‘right reason.’” (p. 132) But “Richard Hooker maintained that man always had an inborn idea of God, and that this innate fact was fixed by the vote of ‘the general and perpetual voice.’” (p. 134) Walter Charleton, on the other hand, contended that the “real brief of the atheists against Christianity . . . rests on the apparent inequality of divine justice.” “Milton’s Samson Agonistes, which asserts eternal Providence in a more particularized fashion than Paradise Lost, is a poetical commentary on all of this.” (pp. 147-49)

The fifth chapter is devoted to “Reason and Immortality,” “because for the opponents of atheism, the proof of God’s existence was inseparably bound with the proof of the soul’s immortality.” (p. 150) Various theologians undertook to establish this: Raimond de Sebonde, Ficino, Vives, Viret, Woolton, Hills, Silhon, Digby, among others. In particular, the author notices Digby’s book and Charleton’s, but “neither work is as original or as tightly woven as Henry More’s vast study of the soul which was printed in 1659 and provides us with a climax.” (pp. 151-68) In his poem of 1647, the Psychozoia, More had already described “the cosmos in which the soul lives.” Everywhere he found in the elements the “Atom-lives”; and the “inextinguishability of these atom-lives is the basis of More’s case for immortality, for the human soul is not unlike them.” “For More, the soul is substance, but it is an active substance.” (pp. 174-77) The Immortality of the Soul was written rapidly in about two years. In this work More establishes that the “soul, ‘architect of the body,’ diffuses itself through its creation and, as the body ‘dilates,’ possesses it . . . At true death, however, the soul collects herself together with a small residue of vital and animal spirits ‘that may haply serve her in the inchoation of her new vehicle.’” (pp. 178-84)

The sixth and last chapter treats of “The Atheist Redeemed: Blount, Oldham, Rochester.” This is not only a lively but a highly dramatic chapter, retelling the story of the struggle between a dark angel and a good angel, Charles Blount, a disciple of Herbert of Cherbury and of Hobbes, (pp. 192-200) and Gilbert Burnett. (pp. 211-15) “No man ever tried harder to believe something,” says Professor Allen of Rochester. (p. 200) “Rochester’s religious speculations begin, perhaps, with his amused contempt for man and all the fictions man had invented to keep himself safe and warm in his world.” (pp. 200-201) They ended with the dying man making a model end in the best Anglican manner, as is retailed in Gilbert Burnet’s Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Honourable John, Earl of Rochester (pp. 211-21). “There is no doubt that atheist Rochester, like atheist Oldham, reached Christian conviction.” But Blount, frustrated in his design to marry his wife’s sister, took his own life. (pp. 222-23)
In a lively and witty appendix Professor Allen examines the mystery of *De Tribus Impostoribus*, a book purporting to represent Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed all as impostors, and religion not as divine in its origins but as man-made. Supposed to have gone back to the middle ages, and ascribed to one or another worthy from the Emperor Frederick down, the book was much discussed without too much evidence of its existence. (pp. 225-32) Professor Allen’s nominee for the authorship of this work is a certain J. L. R. L. who published in 1716 a Réponse à la Dissertation de Monsieur de la Monnoie sur le Traité de Tribus Impostoribus. (p. 231-32) The “story of the manuscript’s provenience is so fictional one can assume it was invented to cover up its teller’s composition of an atheist manuscript of his own.” (p. 222) “It is clear that this book has nothing to do with the *De Tribus Impostoribus*” now available in print. Again, it was claimed that the Latin text of this work was published in 1598, but Professor Allen is sure from typographical evidence that it “was published east of the Rhine during the eighteenth century.” (p. 240) So ends a very lively and a very illuminating book.

Here is, also, an admirably full bibliography of both primary and secondary sources, and a helpful analytical index.

**Helen C. White**

---


Mee thinkes I see him in the pulpit standing,  
Not eares, or eyes, but all mens hearts commanding,  
Where wee that heard him, to our selves did faine  
Golden Chrysostome was alive againe;  
And never were we weari’d, till we saw  
His houre (and but an houre) to end did draw.

Several elegies testify to Donne’s fame as a preacher. Certainly at the time of his death, the great Dean of St. Paul’s was remembered by his largest audience for his sermons, although he had then, as now, another audience and another fame. Donne, Miss Webber says in her first paragraph, expected to be remembered “by his prose.” I don’t know what evidence supports that claim, but in a letter written apparently in his last years Donne sounds not quite so sure. He has “digested some meditations” and “apparelled them (as I use) in the form of a Sermon”:

for since I have not yet utterly delivered my self from this intemperance of scribbling (though I thank God my accesses are lesse and lesse vehement) I make account that to spend all my little stock of knowledge upon matter of delight, were the same error, as to spend a fortune upon Masks and Banqueting houses: I chose rather to build in this poor fashion, some Spittles and Hospitals, where the poor and impotent sinner may finde some relief, or at least understanding of his infirmity. And if they be too weak to serve posterity, yet for the present by contemplation, &...
This may be, as the trailing off suggests, coy modesty. But one thing is clear, whatever Donne’s expectations about posterity, Donne worked very hard; his sermons cost him great anxiety and labor, both in the composition and in the delivery, as so many times his letters show. And upon these sermons he built indeed one of the monuments to his fame.

This delightful book surveys the whole body of Donne’s prose except his letters. (“His letters,” Miss Webber says by way of explanation, “show good control of language from the beginning. But besides being personal and brief, they have a stylistic tradition of their own, and for these reasons I have chosen not to discuss them here.”) The first chapter discusses the *Iuvenalia*, the *Biathanatos*, and the *Essays in Divinity*. Five central chapters are devoted to the sermons, and the final chapter is given to *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*.

The central concern is with the sermons. And it must be said at once that Miss Webber’s achievement is to exhibit, not to define Donne’s style. In her final paragraph she is herself very clear about what she has accomplished:

None of the styles that form the *Devotions* is the exact equivalent of Donne’s sermon style, although his sermon style is certainly more various than I have been able to demonstrate in five chapters.

In five chapters, though, she has been able to demonstrate a lot, including several patterns that guided Donne’s sentences, his paragraphs, and his images. And best of all, for each of these Miss Webber has exhibited first rate examples. Ranging as she does through the ten volumes of the handsome California edition, she must have found it sometimes as hard to reject as to select; and no doubt if she had another five chapters to work in, she could have framed equally splendid patterns. But those she offers are fine. Time after time, they have been picked with obvious authority and taste, and for that Miss Webber demands our admiration.

The method is subjective, and so are the judgments. For though Miss Webber starts off, as she says, “substantially indebted to the work of Morris Croll,” it rapidly becomes apparent that terms like *stile coupé* and *Senecan* and *curs* are not adequate—and indeed are frustrating—in dealing with a great stylist like Donne (much in the way that it is frustrating or meaningless to attempt an analysis of a good poem in terms of “iambic pentameter” and the rest. These may be the best tools we have, but they are nevertheless clumsy, and sometimes worse.) Donne’s prose is especially difficult to discuss in terms like “anti-Ciceronian” or “Senecan thought figure.”

And so it is not surprising to find that by page 58, these terms prove to be utterly frustrating both to Miss Webber and her reader: “In general, however, the brief period is not as good a key to an understanding of his writing as the loose period is ... Donne’s medium is the paragraph and even when it is partly composed of short sentences, the paragraph is what ought to receive most of our attention.” And three pages later (61), after an example of a “circular sentence”: “This pattern seems to coincide almost exactly with the ‘circuit’ which we ordinarily think of as Ciceronian, but the signature of Donne is written large.” Yes, it is Donne’s sentence, not Cicero’s, but what is Donne’s “signature”? And a few pages later, the circular sentence is suddenly not circular at all: “I have called it circular because it begins and
ends on the same note, but a circle does not really describe its effect, which can better be diagrammed as that of a diagonal line moving from lower left to upper right, met by a vertical line that carries the eye downward again to the lower right, where a shorter diagonal takes it into the next sentence” (p. 64). Fortunately there are not many sentences like that in Miss Webber's book, but it illustrates how clumsy these currently popular terms of rhetoric can be. Like Croll, Miss Webber easily found some splendid examples to illustrate—let us say—a curt sentence, or a “run.” But there are, after all, ten volumes of Donne's sermons, and they are extremely various in their techniques. “Senecan” hardly helps.

Now Miss Webber is perfectly aware of the dangers here, and in one note warns of the “extreme oversimplification” of her labels: “There is no such thing as a really Ciceronian style in English, and some varieties of Senecanism were more studied and polished than what their authors claimed to be trying to avoid.” But until more precise tools are fashioned for this kind of stylistic analysis, these will have to serve, and we can be grateful that Miss Webber handles them sensitively and thus is constantly delighting her reader with the finest examples of Donne's periods, curt or loose. Her pages on “runs” are especially brilliant.

And surely fuzzy as these rhetorical terms are, they are at least an advance beyond mere private instinct. Sometimes, in her excitement to reveal the charm of a passage, Miss Webber asks her readers to assent to a good many assumptions. Here are a few examples from just two pages (49-50): “The building up of the series upon this grammatically off-center pivot gives it both a freedom from grammatical constraint, and an ability seemingly to rock the sentence to one side, until whatever follows shifts the emphasis again.” (What is grammatically central?) The next sentence points to Donne’s massing “most of the period in what seems to be the wrong place.” (But what would seem to be right?) Immediately following are comments about “Donne's disregard for grammar” and an “oddly made sentence.” These suggest a naive notion of grammar, but that cannot be since most of the book shows considerable sophistication and taste. The trouble is that we simply do not have tools precise enough for the job.

In a book so richly stored with examples of Donne's images and periods, it may seem ungrateful and wrongheaded to ask for more. Miss Webber packed her pages well; and it was clearly not within the scope of her design to say much about the growth of some of these sermons, or of passages in sermons, that have survived in several versions, in manuscript or printed text. And since she ruled out a consideration of Donne's letters, she almost necessarily set aside a good deal of autobiographical information they give us about Donne the preacher, how seriously he took his sermons, how hard he worked:

one writ unto me, that some (and he said of my friends) conceived, that I was not so ill, as I pretended, but withdrew my self, to save charges, and to live at ease, discharged of preaching. It is an unfriendly, and God knows, an ill grounded interpretation: for in these times of necessity, and multitudes of poor there is no possibility of saving to him that hath any tenderness in him, and for affecting my ease, I have been always more sorry, when I could not preach, then any could be, that they could not hear me. It hath been my desire (and God may be pleased to grant it me) that I might die in the Pulpit; if not that, yet that I might take my death in the Pulpit, that is, die the sooner by occasion of my former labours.
BOOK REVIEWS

It would be good to know more about the way Donne labored at his sermons. So there are several books about the sermons yet to be written (Donne's themes and texts, for example), and this book, which will surely create a great deal of interest in Donne's prose, sets a high standard for other books to follow.

JOHN YOKLAVICH
Georgetown University

To the Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and Energy From Dryden to Blake

The subtitle fairly suggests the ambitious, even heroic, scope of Mr. Price's study. We are given chapters on Dryden, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Pope, Swift, "tragic" irony in the early Augustans, "necessity" in Dryden, Congreve, Butler, and Gay, Defoe and Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, the esthetics of mid-century poetry, and finally Blake (excellently handled). But such a list fails to convey the fullness of the treatment; figures like Addison, Johnson, and Burke, while not dealt with extensively in their own right, appear whenever they can illuminate a point, and the presences of Milton and Wordsworth at either end of the period are amply recognized. (The manner of the book is in fact so allusive as to make the two passing references to Hume and the absence of Gibbon seem puzzling.)

Mr. Price studies "the way in which movements of ideas interact with literary form," and his key analogy is Pascal's three "orders," of flesh, mind, and charity; this model of a moral reality separated into disjunct levels "all but subverts the more traditional idea of Order" and defines for us the problem which Mr. Price's authors confronted in their various ways, some trying to "establish a continuity among all three orders," others to "reconcile two in order to overthrow the third" (p. 27). Above all, the doctrine of the three orders is "a brilliant rhetorical device for making us see false orders replacing true, disorder itself exhibiting a formal pattern that is a parody of what man might achieve or even thinks he has achieved" (pp. 26-7).

Like any good book, this one is better than its thesis; but the thesis is genuinely useful if we take it less as a contribution to "the history of ideas" (its method is perhaps not detailed enough for that) than as a critical perspective, a way of reading the Augustans and their successors that helps to define the troubled complexity below the surface of an age of prose and reason. One sometimes loses track of the thesis, as such, but this matters less than the individual perceptions about works and modes it leads to—the excellent discussion of satire as the Augustan version of tragedy (pp. 233-34), for example, the recognition that the "mock-forms" of Fielding and Gay celebrate "the life that lies below high intention, with little power for choice but an overwhelming power of survival" (p. 261), or the clear perception of "repression" at the heart of Blake's moral lyrics (p. 397). Whenever Mr. Price has an opportunity to generalize, to bring together works with common concerns, we can expect clear, graceful, and enlightening formulations.

The book is in fact so good that one feels particular disappointment in its flaws. Some of these stem from Mr. Price's concern for being fair to all his authors; he tries so strenuously to like Night Thoughts, for example, that he...
dismisses George Eliot's sensible objections to Young's grandiloquence out of hand (pp. 346-47), and his very interesting case for Shaftesbury as a "divided mind" risks exaggeration. Exaggeration is an occasional problem elsewhere—All For Love comes to sound virtually indistinguishable from Antony and Cleopatra (pp. 236-41), and when Mr. Price says of a passage from Night Thoughts that "the verbs have become fiercely kinetic and the paradoxical self has become a center of titanic struggle" (p. 346), one wonders where one is. (The verbs in question are "snatch" and "confine") Indeed, the gap between formulation and text sometimes yawns rather wide. It is significant, I suspect, that his comments on verse are usually limited to the "weighting of syllables," the placement of verbs, and the like—not much detailed treatment of metaphor, tone, metrics. He can take Moll Flanders' conversion awfully seriously without asking whether Defoe has rendered that experience convincingly, though he elsewhere admits that Defoe had "a sensibility that admits more than it can fully articulate"; he can define Blake's resemblance to the Augustans by citing a passage from Jerusalem that shows Blake "acutely aware of how deeply all attitudes are rooted in systems of belief" (what moral artist was ever unaware of this? how does Blake express Albion's moral madness?); he can argue that in the Dunciad Pope treats Order and Light as the primal condition which Dulness subverts, without noting and accounting for such language as "the Restoration of Night and Chaos" (Argument to Bk. IV) or "of Night Primaeval, and of Chaos old" (IV, 630). Fielding is treated almost as if he were a moral theoretician and not a novelist: "Fielding wants to show that man is naturally prepared to live a Christian life" (p. 287), "Fielding is ... trying to define an ideal order of mind" (p. 290), etc. Mr. Price seems to sense this when he remarks that "Fielding the novelist is consistent with Fielding the moralist" (p. 292), but when he deals with the novelist he risks distorting the work to squeeze it into his theories, as when, in pursuit of a point about "symmetrical" characterization, he seems to miss the irony in Fielding's remark about "the different operations of this passion of love in the gentle and cultivated mind of the Lady Booby, from those it effected in the less polished and coarser disposition of Mrs. Slipslop" (p. 298). (In context, I take it, the joke is that there's virtually no difference.) Such malpractice is thankfully infrequent; but one had hoped for more, and more careful, analysis from the author of Swift's Rhetorical Art.

There are several misprints in quotations (especially in Chapter II); but these can be forgiven for the sake of two charming slips: in Tom Thumb Doodle's "inane delight in his verbal wit" is made more inane by having him say "The sun himself, on this auspicious day / Shines like a bean in a new birthday suit"; and when one hears that "In the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, Pope rises to self-definition through a series of 'dialogues' with three adversaries, Atticus, Bufo, and Bolingbroke," one gleefully imagines St. John's response to so novel an identification of Sporus.

But to rattle a few loose bricks is hardly to disturb a sound structure, and Mr. Price's achievement is solid. (My only substantive quarrel is with his treatment of Mandeville, which for all its subtlety follows received—and I think erroneous—opinion.) It takes some courage, in a day of overspecialization, to venture a broad and compendious study of a whole century, especially one that is civilized and well-written; if Mr. Price achieves his scope at some cost, he
nevertheless makes us see a difficult body of literature in a whole perspective, and this without falsifying or simplifying its difficulty. It is a good and needed kind of book, and a fine, often brilliant, book of its kind, one that will be read and used when more timid works have dwindled into other people's footnotes.

Rutgers University

THOMAS R. EDWARDS, JR.


"If Books . . . continue to increase as they have done for fifty years past," Swift wrote in his Thoughts on Various Subjects, "I am in some Concern for future Ages, how any Man will be learned . . . ." Two centuries later one wonders whether Swift would be pleased or appalled to learn of the recent proliferation of books concerning his own writings and personality. As one of those literary figures "rediscovered" by the twentieth century, Swift has engendered a formidable and growing body of books, monographs, and articles—all of which, presumably, the aspiring Swift scholar must master. Mr. Voigt's book, by offering a survey of major twentieth-century Swift criticism, will make that task a somewhat easier one. In essence, what Mr. Voigt has produced is a species of selected annotated bibliography. He makes no pretense to completeness, explaining in his preface that, "while the treatment of . . . twentieth-century emphases is intended to be exhaustive, the treatment of Swift generally is not." Accordingly, after a brief summary of nineteenth-century opinion and a useful description of textual criticism, Mr. Voigt devotes the bulk of his study to a discussion of specific twentieth-century responses to A Tale of a Tub, to Gulliver's Travels, and to Swift the man—subjects which represent, in Mr. Voigt's phrase, "Swift at his most pure and complex."

As in the case of so many other Augustan literary figures, the history of modern Swift scholarship is the history of a rescue operation wherein, hopefully, Swift, the man and the author, is delivered from the distortions and misunderstandings which had threatened to all but bury him. Though each succeeding age has added its own characteristic embellishments, the major elements of the popular tradition of the "Mad Dean of St. Patrick's" already existed in Swift's lifetime. Thackeray, in his famous pronouncements, codified rather than originated the view (more recently embraced and elaborated on by Freudian critics) that Swift's writings are to be understood primarily as clinical documents in a fascinating, albeit repellent, case history. A figure at once so colorful and so reassuring as the Swift of popular legend is not likely to be surrendered easily, but modern scholars, as Mr. Voigt shows, have worked patiently and with good effect toward restoring to visibility the painted-over features of this complex and important artist.

Insofar as Swift and the Twentieth Century is a descriptive guide to significant trends and issues in modern Swift criticism, it is a valuable and instructive bibliographical aid. The author has considerable skill at the difficult art of precis. Though inevitably he is sometimes guilty of over-simplifying complicated arguments and lines of reasoning, on the whole his summaries of books and articles
seem well-designed to fulfill his declared intent of “giving the beginning student of Swift an indication of the scope of, and a guide to, the world of Swift scholarship, and giving the accomplished Swift scholar a fresh look at the victories and vagaries of his colleagues, past and present.” But Mr. Voigt’s book is something more than a chronicle of what others have said; he also undertakes the ambitious task of evaluating the quality and cogency of his materials, and in this role he is rather less successful. Swift scholarship in this century has been marked by more than the usual amount of controversy and disagreement. In such circumstances, anyone who takes sides as firmly and insistently as Mr. Voigt does can expect to antagonize partisans of the opposing camp. Even for one who can in most cases agree with his assessments, it is possible to take exception to his manner, which sometimes resembles that of a teacher crisply handing out final grades to undergraduates. It is not so much that Mr. Voigt is a tough grader as that he has a penchant for expressing subjective judgments in terms of categorical absolutes. Certain views and approaches are confidently labelled “correct”; others are just as confidently dismissed as “incorrect” or “unsound.” Swift and the Twentieth Century would be a less provocative book (in both the good and bad sense) had Mr. Voigt modestly chosen to refrain from offering evaluations, but his readers—who, after all, will consist largely of specialists and would-be specialists in Swift studies—may prefer to withhold final acceptance of any given verdict until they have examined the evidence personally.

The history of developing attitudes and approaches toward Swift in our century is broadly representative of the overall direction which academic literary criticism has been travelling in the past two or three generations. The heavily historical, biographical, and belletristic emphases of the nineteenth century have been challenged (though far from replaced) by more rhetorical and closely analytic techniques—what Mr. Voigt calls “the more rigorous formalistic approach.” In his introductory sampling of nineteenth-century critics Mr. Voigt quotes amusingly from some of the more egregiously insensitive and prudish responses to Swift. Perhaps most amusing of all are those self-congratulatory passages in which the Victorians complacently ascribe the decline of Swift's reputation to the effects of a progressive refinement in literary taste. As we smile at the nineteenth century’s smug assumption of superiority, however, we would do well to realize that our amusement is at least partially predicated on the flattering supposition that the current high estimate of Swift is a reflection of our own century’s superior powers of discrimination. Or, as Mr. Voigt puts it (p. 163): “Each age will . . . define itself in its apprehension of the genius. Our age, by objecting less than the Victorians to Swift’s ‘brutality,’ outspokenness, and pessimism, defines itself as tough-minded, sophisticated, and disillusioned.” For the definitive word on our own pretensions, we may have to wait until someone writes Swift and the Twenty-first Century.

University of Washington

Richard I. Cook

Professor Adams' view of Blake might be described as a sort of Platonic one. He argues that Blake's "system" (which is quite properly here said to be a coherent structure of images rather than of propositions) "has only an ideal existence" which all of Blake's work strives to express; and that therefore one can move confidently back from the later works, where the system is most fully expressed, to the earlier ones to show what underlies them. Such a summary as this may be a little too reductive to be fair, but Adams' presupposition would seem to imply, without stretching things too much, that the real development in Blake's work throughout the half-century or so of his productive life is a development in expression and that there was relatively little development in his thought except in the sense that he gained a clearer and fuller insight into the meaning of the structure of images comprising the system he was trying to express.

There is no question that someone who has read the prophecies is a better reader of the lyrics, even the early ones, than someone who hasn't, not because any one of the early lyrics assimilates "the whole of Blake's great system" (p. 57), as The Tyger is said to do, but because an awareness of the direction in which Blake is moving affords some guidance to help one grasp the enormous complexity of even some of the apparently simpler lyrics. But the lyrics do not assimilate Blake's "great system"; they anticipate it, prefigure it. And one of the reasons for the complexity of Songs of Innocence and of Experience is that the system of images which was later to be put into narrative motion in the myth of the fall and redemption of man existed only in fragmentary form, not as a real system at all but as certain key images: bits and pieces, not clearly related, of what was later to become a coherent (or reasonably so) "allegory addressed to the intellectual powers." Rather than saying that any of the lyrics assimilates the system, it would be more accurate to say that the system, as developed in the myth, assimilates the images of some—though not all—of the lyrics.

Adams' conception of Blake's system minimizes the distinction between the lyrics and the prophecies, since both in his view are attempts to express the same thing. I believe the prophecies show a development of the system and a change of emphasis in the working of Blake's imagination, a change from symbol to myth. To be sure, myth could be thought of as a coherent structure of symbols, and it could be argued that the creation of a myth involves no essential change in mode but rather an extension or an organization of symbolic thinking. Nevertheless, we approach the prophecies differently than we do the lyrics. Because the elements in the prophecies function in a narrative structure, we grasp their meaning in part at least in relation to other elements in the narrative, and the complexity of some of the symbols operating in the myth can be attacked by unravelling some of the complications of the myth. In the prophecies it is more readily possible to distinguish levels of meaning and even different kinds of references than it is in the lyrics. Milton, for instance, can be read autobiographically, politically, and so on. But how does one read "The Tyger"? The dread but symmetrical beast is there to be contemplated in itself. It does not form a part of a narrative; indeed, it represents even a departure from the
prevailing imagery of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, so even context does not provide much help. Its essence is its complexity, as is suggested by the beast’s "symmetry," and any attempt to explain the poem that seeks in any way to decrease its complexity is suspect. Adams tries not to do this, but in applying the perspective of Blake’s fully developed system to this poem he is led to make distinctions that have this effect.

Since his reading of “The Tyger” is crucial in developing his argument, it deserves special comment. Starting out with discussions of Blake’s poetic, he moves on to consider selected Blakean archetypes (the tree, the human body, the city), and then states the rationale of his method. From here he goes on to take up “The Tyger” as illustrating the assimilation of the system in the lyrics. The result, it seems to me, is not entirely satisfactory. Adams seems to feel that he must discover the perspective of the prophecies in the poem, and to do this he attempts to distinguish two speakers or at least two points of view, one “visionary” and the other “Urizenic.” In a sense there are two points of view in the poem: the tiger is merely fearful from a limited point of view but from a more comprehensive point of view can be seen to possess a complex symmetry of which his fearfulness forms a part. But it seems to me that Adams attempts to distinguish the points of view too sharply in order to show the “visionary” one clearly, and, as a result, instead of demonstrating the source of the poem’s powerful complexity, he comes close to explaining it away. He even says at one point that the visionary speaker forms the questions of the poem rhetorically (p. 62). Indeed, because the distinction between the two points of view is made so sharply, he is obliged to be too selective and associative in using passages from Blake’s later works to illuminate the poem, avoiding, for instance, most later references to tigers and other animals. It is hard to object too confidently to many readings of this enigmatic lyric, but Adams’ statement that “From the point of view of the visionary, the tiger, fearful though he may be, is created form, error solidified and metamorphosed into a vision of the last judgment” seems to me to be only approximately true.

Adams is on solider ground in his readings of the later lyrics in the Pickering Manuscript, which have not been given a great deal of attention. These lyrics, written after Blake had formulated the essential features of his myth, do indeed arise out of the system as compressed expressions of an encyclopedic form. This is especially true of “The Mental Traveller,” and Adams’ reading of this paradigm of the Orc cycle is very good—though I believe he lays too much stress on the “Female Babe” in the poem. The readings of “My spectre around me...” and of “The Crystal Cabinet” are also good. His connecting the latter poem with “The Mental Traveller” is especially helpful. The section of the book dealing with the Pickering Manuscript poems is, in my opinion, by far the best part of the book.

From here the study returns to the earlier lyrics to apply to them some of the ideas gained in reading the later poems. There is a good chapter dealing with the image of the garden in the *Songs*, but most of the discussions of individual poems in this last section of the book are too brief to give much more than a passing commentary, the poem in the letter to Butts of Oct. 2, 1800, for instance, getting a little over a page. This part of the book, which should have clinched Adams’ argument, does not really get into enough detail to do so, partly because Robert F. Gleckner has already, in *The Piper and the Bard*
(1959), studied the early poems in great detail and in a way that also takes into account the prophetic perspective. As a result, Adams finds his critical strategy rather thwarted because it is "useful and indeed necessary to repeat at times points... [Gleckner] has made " and to emphasize poems that Gleckner has "passed over with a minimum of comment."

The approach of the two critics is similar in that both stress point of view in the lyrics. At times Adams, in an effort to display a point of view more clearly than it can be displayed, by focusing attention on the personae of the poems, is led to some curiously literal observations, such as this one in the middle of a very sophisticated discussion of "The Sick Rose":

In "The Sick Rose" the rose is in danger of falling into the state of diabolical or inverted marriage and being satisfied. That is why the speaker tries to make the rose aware of its own condition (p. 246).

And because he tries rather too sharply to divide the complexity of some lyrics into distinct points of view he is led to make of the angel's admonition to Tom Dacre in "The Chimney Sweeper" of Innocence an imperative, from the visionary point of view, to make "a willing descent into experience, preparation of the golden bow and arrows of desire, and engagement in mental war" (p. 262). Tom Dacre is a symbol but he is also a chimney sweeper, and this fact seems to be too lightly passed over in this visionary view of him. The great wonder of this poem is that he can be and remain both at once.

The objections I have given to some of Adams' readings should not be construed as indicating great dissatisfaction with the book. It is a good introduction to Blake, especially for the reader who would like to learn to read his lyrics with insight but who is not ready to undertake a complete study of the prophecies in order to do so. Adams mentions his students in the acknowledgments and at various times in the text; quite possibly he wrote with them partly in mind. It is because most of his readings are good that it is disappointing when some of them fail to come up to the general standard.

The book is printed, for no reason that I can see, in a large format and priced at $10. There are two line engravings reproducing Blake plates as frontispieces and some illustrative diagrams.

Kent State University

Martin K. Nurmi


Like any poetic work which has the range, complexity, originality and power to be called major, the oeuvre of Wallace Stevens can be looked at in many interesting and profitable ways. Book-length studies have been written, or are being written, on such subjects as Stevens' general philosophy, or more specifically his aesthetics, his sources, his influence, his rhetoric, his versification—and of course, on the relationships among these elements, as well as special refinements of them. And it is a solid tribute to Stevens' variety and power that, whatever
our interest in or approach to his poems, we encounter at once the *magister verborum*, the almost contemptuous juggler of tones, the profoundly serious ironist, the imperturbable tester of truths, the devisor and critic of fictions, the grand anatomist of the ordinary and celebrant of the quotidian, the self-mocking metaphysician, whose most learned laughter is ultimately sanative.

In this brief and excellent book, Daniel Fuchs of the University of Chicago has chosen to treat the comic element in Stevens, but he manages to touch on, if not cover, most of the other elements before he is through—and he is through before very long. The book's excellence basically rests on Mr. Fuchs's abilities as a reader of poetry, and he reads with all the senses of his intellect alert; he is both erudite and intelligent, articulate and sensitive. My only quibbles are that Mr. Fuchs seems to me not quite far enough away from his scholarship to have combed the last nits of research from his prose, to have shed some embarrassments of reference and an occasional anxiety of explication. For Mr. Fuchs is at least as good as most of those writers whom he quotes to shore up or certify his opinions—indeed, he politely, but firmly, exposes some of the misreadings or near-fatuities of such better-known of his predecessors as Winters, Brinnin, Burnshaw, Blackmur and Lionel Abel.

Mr. Fuchs begins by placing Stevens in several traditions: the general stream of comedy and comedic theory (Molière, Sterne and Meredith), and the more restricted and formal fluencies of *dandysme* (the relevant French poets of the last century or so, especially, of course, Baudelaire and Laforgue). But Mr. Fuchs has the tact and insight to relate Stevens to these traditions, and not to drown him in their courses; he presents the poet as a man resourceful in his wit, as in other aspects of his work, not just as a European dandy fled to Hartford and masquerading in rich business suits.

Discussion of "The Comedian as the Letter C"—a crucial poem—is itself crucial to this book. The precision and perceptiveness of Mr. Fuchs's comments here guarantee the whole. My only quibble here is inconsistent with my earlier demurrers: that, once in a while, he either overlooks—or assumes our recognition of—a pun such as that in "the banjo's categorical gut." But here I may be simply acknowledging the richness of Stevens, as well as the conciseness of Fuchs. And clear points are made regarding Stevens' "sacred irreverence," or what we might call the deeply religious motivation beneath his brilliant, even flashy iconoclasm.

As for Stevens' elaborations upon and penetrations into that life-long affair in the human mind, the relationship between what we call "imagination" and what we think is "reality," Mr. Fuchs is as well-grounded and sure-footed as any critic I have read: wisely accumulating description, rather than trying to adjust all of Stevens' pronouncements made over a period of thirty years to a system either pre-ordained or logically evolved. Most poets don't work, or work out, in that way. Stevens emerges as an anti-Romantic, insofar as "Romantic" implies a suspension of pantheism, aestheticism and religiosity (or theopathy, to borrow a more accurate word from Mr. Fuchs); Stevens insists on the need which reality and imagination have for each other. His is a level-headed, but still exciting awareness, which enables him to be the best and strongest, and only still viable kind of Romantic, who is neither a rationalist nor a "floribund ascetic."

Mr. Fuchs's sense of the term "comic spirit" enlarges from pun, paradox, mask, "wit," etc., to embrace a concept which might be called intelligence or
perceptiveness or inclusive consciousness—and thus he has drawn a great part of Stevens' accomplishment into his scope and survey:

Stevens, of course, has a myth of his own to make, a plain myth of human existence, an anti-mythological myth. . . . As one of the apostles of existence he must make arrogant assertions for humility. He finds infinite possibilities in man's admission of his finite capabilities. He sees imaginative riches in the recognition of man's essential poverty. (pp. 155-56)

Or, as Stevens himself says:

Natives of poverty, children of malheur,
The gaiety of language is our seigneur. (quoted on p. 182)

* * *

If I may be permitted a personal conclusion, I should like to assert that Mr. Fuch's admirable book reinforces an opinion I have held for at least ten years: that, of the American poets who belong to his generation and who speak to mine, Stevens is one of the true tall beacons, along with Jeffers and Aiken, compared with whom Miss Moore lights candles in a windless room, and Mr. Eliot has borne richly smoking torches into the darkening recesses of cathedrals which have long been monuments. Opposites sometimes meet, as I like to think that Frost and Stevens may already have met—at least in our pantheon, if not in their skeptical heavens.

Brown University

Charles Philbrick