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Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

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The World of Harlequin by Allardyce Nicoll. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963. Pp. xv + 243; 131 plates. $18.50.

The Italian commedia dell'arte has so far established itself among theatre historians that there would no longer seem to be any necessity of justifying a serious new study of it; in our search for a non-illusionistic theatre that would be direct in its impact and humane in its emphasis, we have found nothing else so appealing. The commedia has influenced such widely different practitioners as Molière and Meyerhold; it has inspired social realists and wide-eyed romantics: in short, we accept its importance. All the more surprising to find, then, that a major new study of the commedia should begin with a gratingly irrelevant self-justification on the grounds that the Italian improvised theatre and that of Shakespeare were comparable. Allardyce Nicoll, whose *Masks, Mimes and Miracles* covered the same subject thirty-odd years ago, has, in his new work, *The World of Harlequin*, sought to give the commedia dell'arte the intrinsic dramatic value of the great Elizabethans. Not surprisingly, he has been only partly successful; to equate the two theatres is to equate stout and good champagne—excellent potations both, but for markedly different occasions.

It is generally true of the theatre of a given period that the most vital quality for its own time is the one most quickly lost to the future, that fleeting experience called performance: the succession of discrete bits of the present that are past even as they are experienced, never to be recalled. We can grind the literary Hamlet to bits in the classroom mortar, but Burbage's creation is unreachable; similarly, the performance element of the commedia—its most important—is forever gone, and we have only a meagre residue of secondary evidence by which to judge it.

But if direct knowledge of the commedia dell'arte is difficult, inference about it from other sources is not: we can seek it in the Renaissance society that produced it; we can trace it back from the written drama we know it influenced (particularly that of Molière; Goldoni and Gozzi are more special cases). A comprehensive study, then, must use the available secondary evidence—iconography, scenarii, spectators' descriptions, actors' memoirs—*and* social and literary history.

Regrettably, Professor Nicoll's new book does not fully do the job. It is certainly a handsome book, but not so much so that it bears comparison with Duchartre's *La Commedia dell'Arte et Ses Enfants*; it is an interesting and scholarly study, but not a penetrating one. It is not unfair to say that while *The World of Harlequin* is an improvement on *Masks, Mimes and Miracles*, it is not the definitive work on the commedia that scholarship of the last thirty years has made possible.

If a single cause can be assigned for this partial failure it is probably that

Professor Nicoll seems to refuse to deal with social history. Certainly he is not ignorant of social interpretations of his subject; therefore, he apparently wills not to accept them. An irritating authoritarian tone—now Olympian, now petulant—mars the discussion of socially oriented critics. For example, he dismisses one Russian view of Pantalone's character as "sentimentalism," converting that useful, if overworked term into a kind of scholarly billingsgate. He is thus able to sidestep serious consideration of social interpretations on their own merits and turn instead to his own views. What these views give us, however, is the accurate and sometimes brilliant explication of characters and styles in isolation, without reference to their place in any other continuum than the theatrical. As a result, we find such statements as, ". . . no signs of satire are to be traced in the early commedia dell'arte" (p. 184). Perhaps we should expect such a statement from a work that includes no mention of such satirists as Beolco (Ruzzante). Professor Nicoll seems convinced, although for a reason he generally does not confide to us, that social forces played little role in the commedia's development, a conviction that is all well and good until we seek for some better explanation than an artistic one for drastic changes in characters and style. For example, it is simply not sufficient to explain the decline of the Capitano characters as a result of audience desire for more clowning; this is not an explanation, but a description. Certainly some sense of the historical matrix (in this case, the situations of the foreign or mercenary soldier) would indicate that audience reaction is not a cause, but an effect of some other cause that acts on humans in their roles as social beings and thus alters them in their roles as audience.

In the same way, it seems that *The World of Harlequin* is short on analysis of origins. That the commedia dell'arte flourished in certain places and in certain ways is well worth discussion; still, its elements had beginnings that Nicoll again seems unwilling to handle. If it somehow met the purpose of his book to skip such matters as the provenance of the masks or the link between the improvisational actors of the mid-sixteenth century and their predescessors, we should be able to accept the omission; however, the closest we get to a statement of purpose comes late (p. 159) and is vague: "What we are concerned with is the central spirit of the commedia dell'arte. . . ." An author may define his subjects as he likes, but in this case some indication of how this "spirit" grew out of that of an earlier theatre would be valuable. Of medieval theatre, however, we get nothing; when a playwright (Ben Jonson) who created character in a manner similar to that of the commedia creators is discussed, Nicoll merely says that "we are never led to view [his characters] as real men and women" (p. 20), and moves on, despite both the evident similarity between humours character and commedia mask-type, and the obvious resemblance of both to the allegorical characterization of late medieval drama. In the same way, the acting and staging practices that probably go back to Vitalis (by however crooked a route) find themselves outside the scope of this study of "spirit."

Perhaps at heart Professor Nicoll views the commedia rather as Lamb did Restoration comedy. Seeing it as fantasy would allow him to see it as isolated and not satiric, and to say, as he does of one scenario, that "the world of the

comedy is not a reflection of ordinary existence, rather it is a youthful gallant's Utopian dream" (p. 152). But it is a commonplace that every theatre lies beyond ordinary existence, heightened in intensity and compressed in time; what we must look for is not the point-for-point resemblance to life as we know it, but certain landmarks of human character. If we have those—and surely we do have them in such "real" characters as Pantalone, Dottore Gratiano, the Capitani—then we are not in a dream world but in the mainstream of experience. As Nicoll himself says of Gozzi, fantastic plots and devices can be used to convey the most telling satire of our own perceptible reality; what is at stake is not mode of presentation, but matter. To see the content of the commedia performances as fantastic or unreal is a grievous mistake.

For we have the literary evidence of Molière to show that the commedia dell'arte touched sensitive humanity at many points. Attinger and Moore and Fernandez have shown conclusively how indebted Molière's drama, as well as his theatre, was to the commedia, from the inanities of Sganarelle to the agonies of Arnolphe. As in the cases of literary and theatrical antecedents, however, Nicoll is mainly silent on its greatest heir, Molière, although he explicates Goldoni brilliantly. Surely, one great virtue of *The World of Harlequin* is its insight into the stageworthiness of the scenarii and the works of the playwrights who wrote for the Italian actors. Had that insight been turned to Molière as an example of the seventeenth century, and to Machiavelli as an example of the sixteenth, we might have got from the book some of the historical continuity we now miss.

Although he does not make a point of it, Professor Nicoll seems aware that the very dryness of some playscripts is explained by the stage business inserted by actors—for example, his analysis of Moretti's Milan production of Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters* is excellent. It is therefore the more puzzling that he should end that analysis by saying, "All this, of course, is not the commedia dell'arte." If it is not the commedia dell'arte, or a near relative of it, the author's point is fairly lost; Goldoni's Arlecchino was one end of the literary exploitation of commedia techniques; Machiavelli and Ruzzante lie at the other end, with Molière somewhere in the middle. All share the same dependence upon a superficial classicism; all wrote comedies that can seem infernally dull to the reader, brilliantly comic to the viewer. Surely a careful study of the relation of their texts to commedia staging would greatly have broadened *The World of Harlequin*'s historical chapters.

Lastly, despite the book's good design, one must admit that the illustrations are puzzling. The lack of color is unfortunate, as Nicoll himself shows. More importantly, the choice and order of the illustrations seem to reflect the infirm purpose that weakens some of the text. Only simple captions appear with the plates; dates, sources and critical comment appear in a separate section. As a result, only one already familiar with the materials could compare them as to reliability and period. The selection—five Watteaus to four Callots—avoids merely repeating standard (and overworked) illustrations. Professor Nicoll must be congratulated for many of his choices (fifteen plates from the Recueil Fossard, sixteen from the Corsini manuscripts, and eleven unusual feather portraits from the early seventeenth century). However—and this must be said

of all those who depend upon iconography in studying the commedia—an analysis of the illustrations as works of art must be made. We simply do not yet know what we are looking at in many paintings and drawings. Professor Nicoll may be right in rejecting the *Balli di Sfessania* on the grounds that Callot was creating, not recording, figures, but the point is unproven; similarly, he may be correct in thinking that Tiepolo painted a crowd of little Pulcinellas because the character had proliferated, but this aesthetic judgment is also unproven, and one might just as well suggest that what Tiepolo was showing was a moment of staging when little Pulcinellas really appeared. Iconography will not be dependable until the intentions and limitations of each example are defined, and it cannot become meaningful until dependable examples are placed in an order determined by the logic of the study itself.

The World of Harlequin is praiseworthy on many counts. As the work of one of our most able and prolific theatre scholars, it requires careful attention. Because, however, of a deficiency in the concept of the study itself, it is flawed. It is a good book where we might have hoped for an important one.

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Proust's Binoculars by Roger Shattuck. New York: Random House, 1963. Pp. vi + 153. $3.95.

André Malraux: Tragic Humanist by Charles D. Blend. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1963. Pp. xi + 255. $6.00.

Roger Shattuck is a dynamic and extremely gifted critic, though perhaps a trifle over-confident. In *Proust's Binoculars*, he is not the least bit intimidated, as he treads over well-known territory, apparently convinced of his ability to come up with a fresh perspective. His is, in a sense, an impressive claim: to cut to the very core of Proust's work, to reveal his meanings as well as his artistic achievement—and this is in an incisive, almost elliptic book that comes closer to the essay form than to a full-fledged study. If, moreover, he neglects other critics, it is not merely for lack of space, but because he feels that, with a few exceptions, they can all be dismissed, having failed to raise the really pertinent questions.

Such self-confidence and such a cavalier treatment of the many fine minds who studied Proust could easily be irritating. And yet Mr. Shattuck's enthusiasm and candor are so disarming, his insights are so suggestive, that one is half-convinced. It must be said that Mr. Shattuck's idea is very interesting, very fertile, and probably very true. He sees, at the center of Proust's work, manifested through a whole web of fascinating images, the optic metaphor, related not only to the problem of vision, but to man's processes of consciousness. The image-making faculty is shown to be intimately bound up with the principle of mutation as well as with the all-importance, in Proustian tragedy, of a "recognition." Such a recognition, which is the ultimate station on Marcel's pilgrimage toward his vocation, has of course also a comic potential. But it is primarily a

long-delayed resurrection achieved through the gradual, oblique approach to the truth. Mr. Shattuck succeeds, often brilliantly, in guiding the reader through a series of fulgurating shortcuts. His examples, his analyses, his conclusions are for the most part excellent.

One would like to dwell on the qualities of this short book. I have found the following passages particularly stimulating: on optics and the error of vision (p. 18); on the relationship between light and time (p. 143); on the value there is in discrepancies of vision (p. 145); on the principle of "montage" (p. 50); on stereoscopic vision (p. 58); on the importance of sleep as a miniature reproduction of the rhythm of life: oblivion, self-recognition, death and resurrection (p. 66); on the double sense of time and the *passé composé* (pp. 80-83). And there are many more. The least that must be said is that Mr. Shattuck truly feels and understands Proust.

Much in *Proust's Binoculars* is so good one doubly regrets those aspects that mar it, and that could so easily have been avoided. At times the style itself interferes with the enjoyment. Some questionable similes (what is the point in comparing the novel to a *pomme soufflée?*—p. 103) get into the way. Even more questionable, at times, is the method. Mr. Shattuck's approach is arbitrary: that is his privilege, and the strength of his argument depends in large part on his freedom of movement. But there are too many generalizations and gratuitous affirmations, such as the flat statement that Proust reveals a close kinship to Oriental thought and "the traditional Oriental mood of life" (p. 120). Elsewhere Mr. Shattuck indulges in truisms: "Literature, then, like all the arts, plays a formative or preparatory role in training our sensibilities" (p. 134). And there are some pretentious sentences, such as the one in which he postpones dealing with the problem in order to grant the reader more time to "ruminate over the question" (p. 118). Similarly, one wishes he had not found it indispensable to state that "most of Proust's commentators have gone astray" (p. 37).

As it stands, however, the book is most stimulating; it is alive, it is "bright," it will engage a dialogue with the reader. The basic idea is unquestionably ingenious—and sound. Let us hope that in his next studies, which we all await with much interest, Mr. Shattuck will be able to affirm himself again as the sensitive and very personal critic he is without finding it necessary to indulge in regrettable mannerisms.

Charles D. Blend's talents are of a different nature. His *André Malraux: Tragic Humanist* is a solid and thoughtful labor of love. Whereas Mr. Shattuck is, at his best, brilliant and artistic, Mr. Blend is dramatic, expository, and concerned with moral issues. In a series of well-developed chapters, he deals with the various aspects of Malraux's "tragic humanism"—an expression coined by Malraux himself. Mr. Blend is not interested in the polemics around the figure of Malraux; rather he sets out to survey and analyze his author's meanings. After a useful preliminary chapter which sums up Malraux's activities as man and writer, Mr. Blend deals respectively with the notion of "tragic poetry," the growing disillusionment with social and political formulas, art as an "anti-destiny," and with the tragic paradox of his most recent political involvement. Although much of this covers familiar ground, Mr. Blend's personal stresses

and illustrations will be of interest both to initiated readers and to those who seek a general introduction to Malraux's thinking.

Given the structure of the book, it was hard to avoid repetitions. More regrettable is a certain uncritical attitude: Mr. Blend's admiration for Malraux is so total that he never seems to question the validity, authenticity, or even depth of some of Malraux's lapidary and apocalyptic pronouncements. A little more probing into some of the histrionic or romantic poses of Malraux could only have added weight to Mr. Blend's sympathetic treatment of this author.

But this absence of irreverence in no way mars Mr. Blend's study. Many passages are extremely rewarding: on Malraux's anti-Spenglerian philosophy (Chapter II); on man's capacity for cruelty (Chapter III); on the importance of death and the concept of metamorphosis (Chapter IV); on the distrust of Absolutes (Chapter VI). And Mr. Blend very convincingly shows the importance of the prison-image as a personal obsession, as well as a key symbol in Malraux's work. Altogether, this is a measured, dignified and intelligent book.

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Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, 1580-1650 by Gretchen Lutke Finney. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962. Pp. xiii + 292. $7.50.

In this book are brought together essays in the history of ideas previously published in various learned journals. *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, 1580-1650* temporarily sends English poetry to the rear and brings to the fore a significant body of thought integral to its early examples. The ideas with which the book deals are dead except as metaphor; but Mrs. Finney gives them new life, partly by offering a great number of relevant quotations and partly by demonstrating that the ideas are important to our understanding of Elizabethan and seventeenth-century English poetry. If the poetry is to live today, the no-longer-alive and no-longer-accepted ideas which are an essential part of it must be resuscitated. The book supports arguments in favor of researches which are not squarely in a "field"—not dealing with poetic matters if they impinge on poetry and not dealing with literary ones even if they impinge on literature. Mrs. Finney's emphasis on music is not as irrelevant to literature as the skeptical may think, for she concentrates on "speculative" music, not on composition or performance, or on the history of music or its instruments. She deals, as did speculative music itself, "with the nature of sound, with the position and function of music in the entire system of human knowledge, and with music's usefulness to man" (p. ix). Mrs. Finney's subject is humanistic in scope, therefore, though the poetical substance she traces through the ages is speculation about cosmical "realities." The treatment is not critical, but the resulting understanding of the dark and mystical ideas she explores should prepare students of early English poetry for criticism. The word "backgrounds" is therefore almost the most important word in her title.

One finds in this book more than a mere series of glosses on a few isolated passages in English poetry. The basic material is a series of philosophical pre-

suppositions of metaphysical stature. The chapters treat: I. "The World of Instruments" (parallels between music "of the spheres," of man [soul and body], and of instruments, a universal "harmony" being common to all of them); II. "Music: A Book of Knowledge" (music as knowledge of the "harmony that existed in heaven, in the universe, and in the body and soul of man . . ." [p. 22]: beauty, peace, love, virtue, health, concord and proportion, and "knowledge of truth beyond that perceived by the senses" [p. 23]; music as emblem, as mathematics, as a reflection of human frailty and mutability); III. "Music and Ecstasy: A Religious Controversy"; IV. "Music and Neoplatonic Love" ("love *is* music, for love is harmony and harmony is music" [p. 77]); V. "Music: The Breath of Life" (music as animizing in its effect because of its ability to transmit "spirit"); VI. "Musical Humanism: An Anti-Pythagorean Cross-Current" (the undermining of the metaphysical interpretation of sound and the placing of music in a position subservient to poetry); VII. "Music and Air: Changing Definitions of Sound" (sound as air, air as affecting "spirits," and music as an emotional and ethical influence).

These are the contents of the first and longer section of the book. The second part has to do with Milton's poetical employment of music, a subject which has frequently been noted but less frequently treated. (The first major book on the subject was Sigmund Spaeth's Princeton thesis, published in 1913). The classical background which Mrs. Finney has described earlier is apparent in Milton. But she now introduces material more contemporary with the poet and raises the question of Milton's relationships to his contemporaries in Italy: *Comus*, she shows, is a musical drama in the Italian style, and "Lycidas" is a "monody," as Milton himself indicates– a musical composition in dramatic form. In *Samson Agonistes*, a later work, words take priority over music: Music and poetry, formerly going hand in hand, as it were, have in the course of Milton's life separated to go their separate ways.

Thus in these excellent essays in the history of ideas are traced certain aesthetic principles and formal innovations, as well as "speculative" music itself. One might compare Mrs. Finney's work with John Holland's *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500-1700* (1961). While the scope of Mrs. Finney's inquiry is narrower, her results are no less valuable to literary and music historians because of the illumination she brings to musical references in Shakespeare, the "metaphysicals," Milton, and others. Her book shows the international nature of certain influences in thought during and before the Renaissance and describes the mode of survival of opinions whose empirical validity has now for long been denied. Some of the sources she specifies are Plato, Plotinus, Cicero, Plutarch, Boethius, Cassiodorus, St. Augustine; aspects of the tradition of speculative music as they carried it on are found in Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, Henry Peacham, Andrew Marvell, Vaughan, and scores of others.

Mrs. Finney's treatment of her complex material seems impeccable, and her notes are specific and comprehensive. One misses a bibliography and illustrations. But the book is serviceable for scholars and for students of English poetry, and thus passes its primary test.

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The Vast Design: Patterns in W. B. Yeats's Aesthetic by Edward Engelberg. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964. Pp. xxxi + 224. $6.00.

There is so much in Professor Engelberg's study to stimulate that for this reason alone the book is a triumph. Certainly there are few more difficult subjects in modern poetry than Yeats's aesthetics. Thorny, diffuse, contradictory, often platitudinous and silly, Yeats's mass of prose bulks more formidably than that of any English poet since Swinburne, who, incidentally, anticipated some of Yeats's perversities of style and idea, but who possessed a sharper critical mind. There are, however, nuggets buried in Yeats's vast ore-hill which oblige us to know something of the prose, and these Mr. Engelberg has skillfully mined—including the value of "antinomies" fused into a creative tension, tradition as an unconscious source of symbol, and flux and stasis as the poles of imaginative experience.

One impression I have, however, after completing this critical study is that Yeats's prose is of modest significance in understanding the poetry. Like most excellent poems, Yeats's have their own vitality apart from the conjectures, assertions, and after-thoughts (Yeats was not above reporting for effect) constituting the poet's conscious and subconscious principles of art. Another impression is that Yeats's eclecticism is a greatly tangled matter, perhaps because of the plethora of influences, and perhaps because of his lack of a consistently true critical temper. The main sources are as varied as Dante, Shakespeare, Blake, Keats, Shelley, Lessing, Nietzsche, Bergson, Arthur Symons, the French *symbolistes*, and Wyndham Lewis; Byzantine, Renaissance, Pre-Raphaelite, and Vorticist art; the Noh theatre; sculpture and the dance. Add to these the impact of Irish faery and folk-lore and the various spiritualisms, and the picture seems compounded beyond any hope of synthesis.

Of course it is better for poet or man to borrow ideas than to have none at all. Nor should we complain when Yeats changes his mind, or when he reinvigorates his early zest for the Pre-Raphaelites. Breadth of interest may suggest tolerance, and changes of opinion flexibility. But I find Yeats as a theorist seldom convincing, apart from the pleasure I derive from reading the prose. He lacked the mental fiber essential to thinkers on aesthetic matters. His definitions of crucial terms, for example, are too often blurred. It is a truism that the actual practice of a poet may differ greatly from his theorizing, and Yeats was sufficiently aware that genius does not bend easily to design. Art is not so much the result of formal aesthetics as it is of a complex of the artist's emotion, intellect, and craftsmanship, meshed in a way that still eludes theorists and critics. Despite his efforts to systematize the unsystematizable (though he nearly succeeds), Mr. Engelberg acknowledges the fuzziness of many of Yeats's concepts and the subordinate nature of the prose to the poetry.

The Vast Design is admirably organized. Chapter I, "First Principles," develops Yeats's theory that a creative fire must inform the image before the latter can generate transcendent power. Chapter II, "Market Cart and Sky," describes Yeats's forging of an aesthetics from the antinomies of the earthy and the ethereal, from the concrete and the universal in tensile balance. "Picture and Gesture," Chapter III, explores Yeats's enthusiasms for drama and its influence on the general direction of his lyric poetry. Yeats had to reconcile picture, or

"the descriptive and spatial element of poetry," with gesture, or "drama set against its antithesis of stasis." "Emotion of Multitude and Still Intensity," Chapter IV, treats Yeats's attempts to define "symbol" and to relate poetic theories to those common to the other arts. Chapter V, "Passionate Reverie," shows Yeats the theorist at his best. Reverie checks and restrains passion, producing a complex, "almost mystical attainment of suspended passion and a feeling of release." The final chapter, "The Single Image," completes the first chapter and synthesizes the intervening ones, its theme being the "liberation" of the image and the achievement of aesthetic stillness. Eight finely reproduced plates enhance the book.

From this list of chapters one acquires the impression that Yeats's ideas were quite old-fashioned. Apart from modern restylings of labels and terms, to students of Blake, Shelley, Ruskin, Rossetti, and Swinburne they are largely refurbishments. This impression, I am sure, Mr. Engelberg did not wholly intend. Here are some of the important parallels with earlier figures (Mr. Engelberg acknowledges some, some he does not): Yeats's "still intensity" is similar to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "visible silence"; and the remarkable introductory sonnet to *The House of Life* is a fine instance of the short poem achieving Yeats's ideal of "long" power. Swinburne's "gathering form" (a concept from Blake) and his "singleness in diversity" predict Yeats's idea of multitude, as do various Victorian treatments of "expansion" as an aesthetic phenomenon. Shelley's variously expressed idea of the transcendent aesthetic effect, beautifully symbolized in "With a Guitar, to Jane," complements Yeats's notion of the miracle of aesthetic which transpires beyond "design." Yeats's contrast between "emotional" and "intellectual" symbols has roots in several earlier figures, among them Blake, Shelley, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Pater. The notion of "mind," analyzed by Mr. Engelberg in some detail, is quite like the important treatment in Pater's *Appreciations* and Swinburne's acute analysis in the Robert Browning section of *George Chapman*. Neither of these passages figures in *The Vast Design*. Yeats certainly knew these works; both were almost required reading for the Victorian aesthete, and Swinburne's *Blake* (1868) provided Yeats with insights which he found useful in a later collaboration with Ellis on Blake.

I have dwelt on these nineteenth century matters not to show Mr. Engelberg's omissions (for his book is excellent in nearly every way), but to stress the need for an even more detailed study in this area than he has provided. He writes well. His style is a pondering (not ponderous) one, seldom obfuscated, and never crude; he has thought long about his subject. Permeating the whole is an enthusiasm for his subject and a commitment to its importance. His work should remain among the valuable studies of Yeats. I should say a word, finally, about his treatment of Yeats and painting. Rare are literary critics qualified to probe the other arts with any real perception. Professor Engelberg has both sensitivity and skill. He is especially astute on the Pre-Raphaelites and on Whistler. There is also a brilliant but too brief passage on Byzantine art. He disappoints somewhat, however, when he writes of Blake; he seems to overlook the delicacy of the drawings for the sake of suiting his own taste to Yeats's dislike of Blake's "giantism." This is, however, a minor complaint about a work which achieves its difficult tasks so well.

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The Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin by Christopher Gray. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963. Pp. viii + 330; 19 color plates, 390 figures in black and white. $22.50.

With this publication Christopher Gray has made his second major contribution to the field of art history. His first, *Cubist Aesthetic Theories*, is now one of the classics on that subject. In the present book the author not only provides for the first time a *catalogue raisonné* of the material along with detailed analyses of major pieces but, as one might expect from his earlier work in philosophy and art theory, he places all this information in the broad context of Gauguin's aesthetics and nineteenth century culture. It is the latter aspect that should make this book particularly interesting for the general reader, especially if it is viewed against a background of reading in Rewald's *Post-Impressionism from Van Gogh to Gauguin* and Lövgren's important *Genesis of Modernism*.

Unquestionably Gauguin had exceptional technical facility not only in painting but also in sculpture. His earliest sculptures, conventional marble busts of his wife and son (1877), demonstrate a virtual mastery of the craft. From that point his powers developed rapidly. Influenced by Degas' work in wax he produced in 1882 his first sculptural masterpiece, a painted wax and wood portrait of his son. Though polychrome sculpture was a widespread phenomena at the end of the nineteenth century Gauguin was among the first to realize its possibilities. Thus by means of color, he gives to an impressionistically sensitive study of a child's face the splendor of some bygone age.

Gauguin's quick achievement in ceramic art is no less impressive. Before his departure from France in 1891, which essentially ended his career as a ceramicist, he produced scores of original pieces. Many of these rugged stoneware objects may seem "flabby," may look like bizarre pastiches of European, Oriental and Pre-Columbian pots, but others, even to the most critical eye, have a greatness that places them outside of any special set of craft criterea.[1] The Black Venus (c. 1889) is such a work. On the other hand, the strength of the Venus, based as it is upon an impressionist's sensitivity to nature's shapes, seems countered by the weakness of those pieces depending upon *invented* shapes. Gauguin himself was aware of this problem when he observed: "Sculpture . . . very easy when one looks at nature, very difficult when one wants to . . . find forms." Gauguin's search for forms ranged widely through space and time, it was in fact one of the driving forces in his life and art and here there was no quick achievement.

This search for forms should not be confused with a search for "style." It was rather a quest for what Klee called the "plastic means," a quest for visual symbols that would express inner realities, a quest for shapes and colors that would provoke wonder and create visions of the marvelous. In the last decades of the nineteenth century scores of thinkers, poets and painters reacted against the *Entzauberung* of life by science and business and their watchword was "symbol"–the *form* that would be either an agent of revelation, a vehicle of grace or a means to transfigure the world and derange reality. Gauguin's paint-

[1] It is unfortunate that Gray made no attempt to evaluate the aesthetic quality of Gauguin's ceramics. Many potters may have difficulty seeing anything but grotesque dilettantism in most of the French painter's ceramics.

ing of course is a part of this reaction. What is generally overlooked is the important role that sculpture plays in the French artist's realization of these ideals.

As early as 1884 Gauguin produced a wooden box with carved reliefs that Gray shows to have been his first attempt at symbolism, four years before the "official" inauguration of his symbolism in Brittany (1888). On the bottom of this box, which was probably intended for jewels, Gauguin carved a nude laid out like a corpse in a coffin. Here the important idea of death in life is modestly but effectively symbolized, and here too the artist has introduced us not only to his major mode of expression but also to his major theme. Indeed, is it an exaggeration to suggest that Gauguin's sculpture provides an all important key to the understanding of his art? After all, toward the end of his life the artist claimed that he wished to devote himself solely to sculpture!

One may well ask why sculpture was so important to Gauguin. Gray observes: "While Gauguin's painting may be considered his more or less public side—the part of himself that he exhibits freely—his sculpture is in a sense more private. While painting was regarded as his profession, sculpture was often done for his own amusement, and he expressed his inner ideas with less restraint." Certainly the nineteenth century was not a propitious age for sculpture, but then Gauguin was in revolt against everything the age seemed to stand for including easel painting which he considered commercial and decadent. Thus the possibility exists that he turned to sculpture for profounder reasons than uninhibited self-expression. Gauguin, yielding to cultural pessimism and rejecting popular faith in material progress, appears to have experienced an existential crisis of no small magnitude. In response he sought to establish contact with age-old sources of meaning and vitality. As sceptical and sophisticated as he was and even though he claimed that his art was purely cerebral, he was driven step by step (to use his own words) "beyond the horses of the Parthenon back to the dada of childhood," he was driven away from civilization back to a primitive world of superstition, magic and faith. His sculpture was an integral part of this process. It may have been as Gray suggests a private "amusement," but it was also a groping attempt at a public and even monumental art; art like an idol or fetish that does not primarily represent, that is not an illusion but a potency, a concrete, tangible presence—something that Malraux could say was a "god," a "monster" or a "hero" before it was a work of art. Now sculpture posseses an inherent facticity. Initially, at least, it *is* before it *represents* and therefore it readily becomes a god instead of merely representing one. Gauguin, I suggest, turned to sculpture because he instinctively wanted to make gods, not like primitive man to control a feared world filled with supernatural forces, but instead to create objects that could substitute for the dead gods and re-invest the world with magic. His *Idole a la cocquille*, *Hina*, *Leper* and stoneware *Oviri* (the last work, a savage goddess of death, Gauguin wished placed over his grave) are superb examples of such creations. Here one feels the artist was trying to do something more than discover a form and make a symbol. He was trying, perhaps only half aware of what he was really doing, to bring to life a race of mythic beings that could give to civilization its lost excitement and meaning. In the isolation of his self-imposed exile, sick and discouraged, Gauguin worked with incredible courage to invent as a surrealist would put it "a new type of miracle."

Certainly, Gray's evaluation of the historical importance of the artist's achievement in sculpture is fair: "He was the first to appreciate the sculpture of primitive peoples, but the influence of primitive art traces, not from the discoveries of Gauguin but from Picasso. . . . Though decorative sculpture was to see a rebirth of popularity under the influence of *Art Nouveau*, its saccharine forms stem from the tradition of Rossetti and Morris, and . . . show no influence of the barbaric power of Gauguin. As a potter, Gauguin's fate is even more obscure." Nonetheless, the legendary and chthonian creatures of Henry Moore, Brancusi, Noguchi and Lipchitz that today transfigure our own environment owe at least a friendly nod of acknowledgment to the French master.

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Modern American Criticism by Walter Sutton. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963. Pp. xiii + 298. $5.95.

"Has criticism advanced to a point of excess, perversity, and self-defeating ingenuity? Has 'a brilliant period in literary criticism in both Britain and America . . . come to seem in retrospect, too brilliant?'" These are two of the frequently repeated questions which Morton Dauwen Zabel considers in his recent foreword to the third edition of *Literary Opinion in America*. Zabel concludes that "criticism, whatever its excesses, abuses, or prejudices, is impossible to dismiss or get rid of; and it remains a major problem of our time to make the best of it instead of the worst, to apply it intelligently and without fanaticism or personal extravagance, and to keep it subjected to the test of the literary text and thus to the quality of the experience and intelligence that literature at its best embodies."

Walter Sutton agrees with Zabel, and in his book, the first volume in the new series of Princeton Studies of Humanistic Scholarship in America, surveys the development and movements of modern American literary criticism, its complexity, excesses, ingenuities, and brilliance. Sutton's book is not an anthology like Zabel's and other recently published collections such as *Visions and Revisions in Modern American Literary Criticism*, edited by Bernard S. Oldsey and Arthur O. Lewis, Jr., and Wilbur Scott's *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*. Instead, he has taken upon himself the impossible challenge of combining the historical and critical approach in surveying and evaluating almost six decades of literary criticism—all in less than three hundred pages!

Like his predecessors, Sutton has conveniently divided the criticism into five major categories and treated them more or less in a chronological order: "The New Humanism," "Liberal and Marxist Criticism," "The New Criticism," "The Neo-Aristotelians," and "Psychological and Myth Criticism." Added to these chapters are those on "Early Psychological Criticism," "Histories, Theories, and Critiques of Criticism," and Sutton's own manifesto, "Criticism as a Social Act," in which he calls for a synthesis of the best of all the schools of criticism to "advance the understanding of the aesthetic resources of literature." For such

an understanding, "All possible sources of illumination are needed." To accomplish this desirable objective, Sutton concludes, "it is necessary that criticism be inclusive rather than restrictive in its methods. What is needed is less an all-embracing *system* or *organon* of methods than a theory of form and of criticism that will be hospitable to all existing types of criticism and encourage the development of new viewpoints and new methods."

Assuming that Sutton was limited to three hundred pages, it seems unfair to criticize him for leaving out certain significant critics and scholars who did not fit into any of his useful categories, but these conspicuous omissions are disturbing and suggest something lacking in the traditional handling of this complex subject. It would be trivial to object to the omission of some relatively unknown critics with only a small but devoted following, but how can Sutton justify the exclusion of major figures like Perry Miller, Alfred Kazin, Nathalia Wright, Constance Rourke, Leon Edel and Philip Young? Others, like Malcolm Cowley, Francis Fergusson, and Richard Chase, are mentioned only in passing, while the relatively minor Floyd Dell gets more than two pages. Furthermore, it is hard to conceive of a survey of modern American literary criticism that makes no reference to the *Smart Set* or *American Mercury*. The fault is less that of Mr. Sutton than of his publishers, who do not understand the scope of the subject with which he is dealing.

There are also, unfortunately, some other weaknesses of *Modern American Criticism*. Supposedly limited to American criticism, Sutton's book refers often and at some length to English critics like I. A. Richards, William Empson, and Northrop Frye, without making it clear to an uninitiated reader (for whom the book is partly intended) that these influential scholars are not Americans. Sutton here misses a good opportunity to investigate, or at least comment on, the extent to which contemporary American literary criticism was influenced by English scholarship and the extent of the reverse relationship.

Occasionally Sutton contradicts himself unconsciously, as in the discussion on p. 27 of the New Humanists who were "militantly opposed to romanticism" and felt that "romantic intuition needed the corrective of reason and judgment." Yet, on p. 37, when discussing one of the leading New Humanists, Paul Elmer More, Sutton writes that his "closest ties" and "deepest responses are with the English and American romantics." And then, "More's distrust of reason is another link with the romantics." Of course the obvious contradiction here stems from the difficult problem of terminology, the looseness and vagueness of terms such as "humanism." Sutton deals with this problem of communication in one part of his final chapter, pointing out that "the peculiar weakness of critical vocabularies is the absence of a common foundation and a lack of agreement about the precise meaning of basic terms. . . . If the common faults of over-lapping and imprecision are to be lessened, critics must be encouraged to employ definable, mutually exclusive or at least distinguishable terms and to explain the application of doubtful or ambiguous words." Sutton then suggests that some foundation or university press sponsor "a dictionary of critical usage" which "might help toward a greater feeling of professional solidarity and the improvement of critical language."

In *Modern American Criticism*, Sutton has tried to avoid the "objective dull-

ness" which his general editor in the "Foreword" thinks is characteristic of surveys like this one, but despite the author's effort to interrupt his careful, painstaking summaries and analyses of sometimes vague and abstract theories with his own personal opinions and evaluations, the book remains generally dull. Sutton has to pack too much into too short a space; he has to move too quickly to the next scholar without being able to illustrate adequately the theories of the last one. Most readers would welcome more concrete application of the theory, wishing to see the critic at work with a given piece of literature. The thrill, the intellectual excitement, the pleasure of elucidation, when the critics are at their best, is lost somewhere in the maze of terminology and tenets.

Mr. Sutton is a well read critic and knows his subject expertly, but one cannot help wishing that some foundation or publisher would give him the freedom to treat this complex subject with the fullness that it needs.

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William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country by Cleanth Brooks. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963. Pp. xiv + 500. $8.50.

In *The Yoknapatawpha Country* Brooks develops a predominantly negative argument. He contends that too much criticism of Faulkner, taking "his fiction to be sociology," engages in an illegitimate "commerce between sociological-historical fact and fictional meaning." The result is that "Particular insights and moral judgments that the critic has derived from fictional contexts are smuggled across the frontier into the realm of historical fact and become generalizations about Southern culture. They are then cited as historical 'fact' to prove the accuracy of the sweeping judgments of the Southern scene that are attributed to Faulkner." Brooks has set out to correct these misinterpretations, and has tried to dispose, once for all, of the pernicious critical syndrome according to which Faulkner, as spokesman for the corrupt society of the South, has allowed himself to be corrupted in his own mind and art. This project richly deserves to succeed, and Brooks does succeed in straightening out a great number of misreadings. His own text is remarkably and commendably free of similar errors.

On the positive side, Brooks demands "a compensating stress upon symbolism—not facts but what they point to, not Faulkner as sociologist but Faulkner as symbolist poet." He proposes that Faulkner's "novels are neither case studies nor moral treatises. They are works of art and have to be read as such. It is as works of art that they will be treated in the pages that follow." But something has gone very wrong. Brooks the New Critic appears to have reverted to Brooks the Nashville Agrarian and to have produced a study that turns out in some ways to be the opposite of what he has promised and presumably intended to do. In the same way as the critics he criticizes, and for the same basic reason, he places too much emphasis on *The Unvanquished, Sartoris, Requiem for a Nun, The Town, The Mansion, Intruder in the Dust,* and *The Reivers,* and relatively too little on *Light in August, Sanctuary, As I Lay Dying,*

The Hamlet, Go Down, Moses, Absalom, Absalom!, and *The Sound and the Fury*. In trying to spring others out of the trap of sociological criticism, he has got his own leg into it. He has followed the same vicious circle in reverse, to prove that the South is not corrupt and that Faulkner has not been corrupted by it. The demonstration has led him into such byways as a proof that Percy Grimm's murder of Joe Christmas is not technically a lynching. A rather long footnote is devoted to an identification of Parsham with Grand Junction, Tennessee, which is useful to the extent that it may keep unwary critics from identifying Parsham with Collierville, Moscow, or Pocahontas. But the wary critic knows that Parsham is Parsham, that it is located in a book by William Faulkner called *The Reivers*, and that whatever resemblance it may have to any small town on the southern edge of the actual state of Tennessee is purely for the convenience of that book.

Faulkner's remarks on this issue (though I would be the first to admit that Faulkner is not much to be trusted) seem to me helpful. He has made it plain in a number of interviews that he does not regard sociology as his medium or his theme. "As I see it," he said in 1955,

> the writer has imagined a story of human beings that was so moving, so important to him, that he wants to make a record of it for his own satisfaction or, perhaps, for others to read, that story is a very old story, it's the story of human beings in conflict with their nature, their character, their souls, with others, or with their environment. He's got to tell that story in the only terms he knows, the familiar terms, which would be colored, shaped, by his environment. He's not really writing about his environment, he's simply telling a story about human beings in the terms of environment, and I agree that any work of art, any book, reflects its social background, but I doubt if that were the primary consideration of that writer. That that reflection or that background was simply the story told in the terms of its own environment. If he is merely telling a story to show a symptom of a sociological background then he is first a propagandist rather than a novelist. The novelist is talking about people, about man in conflict with himself, his fellows, or his environment.

On another occasion, speaking of the aristocratic tradition of the old South, he said "that that is a condition of environment. It's something that is handed to the writer . . . . it could have sociological implications, but he's not too interested in that. He's writing about people. He is using the material which he knows, the tools which are at hand, and so he uses the instinct or the desire or whatever you will call it of the old people to be reactionary and tory, to stick to the old ways. It's simply a condition, and since it is a condition it lives and breathes, and it is valid as material." Another time he said that he was not writing about the South at all: "I was trying to talk about people, using the only tool I knew, which was the country that I knew. No, I wasn't trying to—wasn't writing sociology at all. I was just trying to write about people, which to me are the important thing."

So it is not a question of the rightness or wrongness of particular sociological interpretations of Faulkner's work. The real trouble is that, no matter how

scrupulously they may be corrected, sociological interpretations are wrong simply because they are sociological. Brooks has spent immense labor doing something well which ought not to have been done at all.

It seems to me, moreover, that we need to carry the logic of Faulkner's comments a step farther than Faulkner does. He takes an author's privilege of talking about his characters as if they were actual living people, outside and independent of his mind. But I think it is very dangerous for a critic to talk in this way. For us, as readers, the characters are as fictional as the settings. Faulkner's people exist only in Faulkner's stories, and they are "seen" only as Faulkner chooses to let us see them. Brooks seems to ignore this fact, and the importance of the fictional point of view altogether, when, for example, he defends *Sanctuary* on the ground that, "However incredible the events narrated, Temple's reaction to them is compellingly credible, and the reader will acknowledge the veracity of Faulkner's searching look into her mind and heart." Unless I misread the book entirely, Faulkner as the narrator of that particular piece of fiction is not looking into Temple at all. He is looking into Horace Benbow's sterility, and using Temple's sordid little downfall, Popeye's melodramatic villainy, the pusillanimous adolescence of Gowan Stevens, and the sufferings of Lee and Ruby Goodwin only as matters to be assimilated into Horace's experience and view of the world—all of which, I would emphasize again, is fictional. The purpose is to evoke an esthetic awareness and response to the imagined experience, which occurs in the reader, and presumably occurred in Faulkner, but which cannot occur in Horace, who is in himself nothing more than a certain number of marks on a certain amount of paper.

The nature of this mistake becomes a little clearer when Brooks, speaking of the Compson children in *The Sound and the Fury*, turns his attack on critics who "insist upon the underlying patterns. The patterns are there," he admits, "but the knowledge that they are there is bought too dearly if it results in turning the three brothers into abstractions, mere stages in a dialectic. Quentin, for example, is a human being who, in spite of his anguished speculations upon the nature of time, is related to a culture; he is not a monstrous abstraction but a young man who has received a grievous psychic wound." The fact is that Quentin is a fictional character, not an actual human being, and that he is related to an imaginary situation in a fictional story, not to an actual culture. He is a good deal closer (in fact) to being "a monstrous abstraction" than he is to being "a young man who has received a grievous psychic wound."

A basic difficulty seems to be that Brooks is unduly anxious to avoid what he calls "symbol-mongering." If this care is due to a feeling that a symbolistic reading of Faulkner will require even more judicious handling than a good sociological reading, it is amply justified. However, I find it hard to see how we are going to talk about "Faulkner as symbolist poet," as Brooks says we should, without mongering a few symbols. The problem is illustrated when Brooks attacks a suggestion by Barbara M. Cross that the incident in which a pig is killed for the Compsons at the same Christmas season when Uncle Maury sends his note to Mrs. Patterson in *The Sound and the Fury* is significantly parallel to a passage in *The Golden Bough* in which Burmese adulterers are said to offer a pig as an atoning sacrifice for their crime. Brooks's protest ends with

the rhetorical question "Shall there be no more innocent consumption of pork chops and spareribs in Yoknapatawpha County because someone has read *The Golden Bough*?" I am inclined to take the question seriously and answer it by saying, No, there shall not, because Faulkner was himself almost certainly someone who read *The Golden Bough*, and had it freshly in mind when he wrote *The Sound and the Fury*. Cross, it may be, has pressed too hard. The bit about the Burmese adulterers is not in the 1922 single-volume edition of *The Golden Bough*, which is the one Faulkner is most likely to have read; moreover the particular analogy, as Brooks rightly says, is thin. Nevertheless, the reference to pigs is not likely to be innocent. In *The Sound and the Fury*, and also in *Sanctuary* and *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner makes important structural and symbolic use of the myth of Persephone, who is repeatedly and closely associated in *The Golden Bough* with pigs. In his fiction generally, Faulkner uses a great variety of myths, a vast amount of imagery derived from myths, and many symbolic meanings embodied in myths. If we are going to understand the fiction, we will have to pursue these meanings as best we can, in spite of risks.

In his Preface, Brooks tells us that he plans a second book, in which he will "concentrate on Faulkner's development as an artist," with some emphasis on "style and structure." I for one hope that in this coming volume he will adopt a more positive aim, forget the sins of the sociological critics, and focus all his formidable talent as a literary critic on the fiction, treated purely as fiction.

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