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Book Reviews

A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's Sonnets and Modern Poetics by Murray Krieger. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964. Pp. ix + 224. \$5.00.

The problem with which *A Window to Criticism* is concerned is one enunciated in Krieger's earlier book, *The Tragic Vision* (p. 231). It is how to communicate and indeed defend the idea of the poem as an aesthetic object, at the same time "insisting that, while remaining an aesthetic object, it has the capacity—and a unique capacity—to reveal life." To hold this view is to insist that the poem can reveal life "only by revealing itself as self-sufficiently aesthetic," that the degree of its meaningful accuracy lies not in its power of naïve imitation but in the complexity of its aesthetic organization. "Future theorists," Krieger asserted in *The Tragic Vision*, ". . . will have to find a way to keep poetry's contextual system closed," and yet assert its relevance to life. In the present book Krieger seeks to break through this paradox. The first strategy is to invent metaphors—thus the image of the window in the title. The poem, Krieger asserts, is not only a window upon experience, it is miraculously a window that is actually a mirror. And the mirror reflects only the inner being of the poem. It is through the aesthetic containment of the poem, seen as a system of mirrors reflecting each other's contents, that a new sense of reality is presented to us, not by the direct denotation of "Platonized" language but by the density of the aesthetic complex which is the poem. Is this true? If so, how does it happen? Is it a miracle of some kind?

But how does the demonstration that the work is a mirrorized glass house ensure the accuracy of its historical and anthropological vision? How can the aesthetic judgment be shown to have such rare cognitive consequences? Through what coincidence is aesthetic complexity somehow the accurate "reflection" of existential complexity so that aesthetic soundness automatically, as it were, involves historic authenticity? (p. 208)

It is quite unfortunate, I think, that Krieger chooses to adopt the term "miracle" to describe this paradoxical situation. In doing so, of course, he is following the very same new critics he hopes to step beyond. It is they who, he feels, closed off the poem but did not accurately enough open it up again. In fact, the term's use brings back upon him, to some extent, the very attack which he makes upon Philip Wheelwright for not adequately distinguishing between poetic discourse and religion. Krieger is wrapped too tightly at times in his own religious metaphors:

By recognizing that in primitive magic and religion the effigy could bear the immanent reality substantively within what from the sophisticated modern view *seems* but a copy, I can recognize also the similar indwelling god within a contextual poetry and see this poetry as a self-conscious equivalent of the effigy. (p. 196)

It is true that the analogy with myth and primitive religion is interesting and historically important, but since art has emancipated itself from myth and, as Cassirer has taught us, has become its own "universe of discourse," it certainly cannot be said to profit—in our age—from a pseudo-theological critical terminology, which can only suggest a certain softness or irrelevance. No, "miracle" simply will not do. Not only is the history of literary theory the story of attempt after attempt to escape from the terminology of imitation: the history of symbolist theory should become and has been to some extent an attempt to purge itself of the theological language of its late eighteenth-century beginnings. I would prefer to see Krieger take the lead of Cassirer's neo-Kantianism, rather than that of Brooks' and Wimsatt's high churchism. The paradox of contextualism's window is not miraculous. We are talking, rather, about a symbolic form which constitutes reality according to the unlogic of its own categories, which can, I believe, be logically deduced.

But I must admit that Cassirer's line is, also, not quite adequate, and that his own analysis of art never quite gets to the deduction of the categories. An historical perspective upon how symbolist theory—for this is the line in which the new critics and Krieger exist—got to where it is would be helpful. It would show that the new critics did make the great breakthrough on the level of practical criticism but that their theoretical stance was not sufficiently worked out. They did, however, rescue the aesthetic glass house from art for art's sake; they seem to have made it necessary, through their sensitivity to literature as an art, for someone to justify their practical approaches. Even though at times Krieger seems almost exasperated with the men whose attitudes he is seeking theoretically to exonerate, he is very much one with them—perhaps too chummy, as in his adoption of their "miraculism."

He is also with them—with Empson, with Brooks—when he turns to the sonnets, which are in this book his laboratory (a term too far to the other side of miracle, I know). The sonnets are, after all, to prove his point. They are to be revealed as aesthetically self-contained, yet they point outward—precisely because they *are* self-contained—to the world of existential reality, the very reality which discursive language does not touch. Indeed, the sonnets are finally seen to contain a sort of allegory of their own poetic function:

For Shakespeare the problem of unity and duality in love and in the metaphors of religion is one with the problem of unity and duality—of mirror and window—in the language of poetry. (p. 187)

This idea of poems which end up being, among other things, about poetry is something that symbolist theory is constantly turning up. In recent times—in James, in Yeats's *A Vision*, in Stevens, in Williams—it is even a self-conscious assertion. There is a reason for this, and Krieger more than hinted at it in *The Tragic Vision*:

Indeed, with the existential so opposed to philosophy, literature becomes the only possible form of existential philosophy . . . precisely because only within the liberal confines of literary casuistry can the existential be operated. (p. 247)

That is the point, well made. And since it appears in another book, it is well to remember that *A Window to Criticism*, *The Tragic Vision*, and the earlier

New Apologists for Poetry form a sort of trilogy, almost an exposition of the theoretical implications of the whole new critical movement. *A Window to Criticism* has much the same shape as *The Tragic Vision*: opening and closing sections of a theoretical nature which sandwich several chapters of close—often neo-Empsonian—reading. The aim is still to keep theory and practice intimate, in fact to show that the theory frames, or better contains, the practice, that indeed the sonnets themselves cry out for—insist upon, contain—by the “miracle” of poetic unlogic—the theory.

Krieger takes to task some theorists who also belong to the symbolist line. He mistrusts Northrop Frye's theory of poetry as a total body:

. . . it is not enough to see a literary work typologically, in the manner of Northrop Frye, to see it as part of a universal allegory, as borrowing or translating elements which are part of the grand mythic scheme that enters and controls all literature. Rather, the work must make its way to its own totality of system, so that if it uses typological materials, it creates them anew, always earning afresh its right to use them. (p. 202)

As in his somewhat vacillating treatment of the new critics, it is not quite certain what Krieger's disagreement with Frye actually is. In this case one should remind oneself of Elder Olson's warning that too often in critical practice logically independent statements are erroneously thought to be in disagreement. Well, of course “it is not enough to see a work typologically.” But it is *something* to see it so. Nor is to see it so necessarily to see it as “borrowing” or “translating” elements. As I understand Frye, his point is that a poet doesn't necessarily borrow or translate from some ideal realm or “grand mythic scheme,” but that analytical criticism, like any descriptive method, develops inductively patterns of similarity, and that these patterns are means by which we can talk about literature, much as we develop scientific patterns which enable us to talk about nature. There may be something wrong with this idea, but I don't think Krieger has hit upon the defects. It seems to me that at times he is struggling too hard and sometimes inconsistently to free himself from other critics, to assert the originality of his own position.

Nor do I think he has sufficiently recognized that Frye does not really eschew value judgments. Incidentally, there is an interesting area of similarity in Krieger's and Frye's critical methods. Working on Blake, Frye really discovered his own critical theory—indeed, he seems to have concluded, as has Krieger in respect to Shakespeare, that Blake's work is a sort of sublime allegory of the nature of poetic discourse.

One of the problems that Krieger's analysis of the sonnets raises has to do with what he ignores. At the very outset he dismisses the problem of the ordering of the sonnets and the question of to whom the various sonnets are addressed. But *are* these questions irrelevant to a critical judgment? I am not concerned about who in real life were the recipients of the sonnets, but if some are addressed to a man and others to a woman, and if there is an order, then certainly there may be an organization of the sonnets which has a bearing upon our evaluation of them as a total work or parts of a total work. Symbolist critics have too often underemphasized plot structure, though their theory does not need to do so.

I feel compelled to make two other criticisms of the book. There are two rather bothersome qualities in Krieger's writing. First, there is the style. It has

been, in all his books, often excessively convoluted, his long sentences often lacking grace and characterized by an unnecessary impenetrability. A whole page of such writing may be followed, however, by a wonderful crystallizing statement. I mention this because I so admire the quality of his mind that I wish it to be more accessible to readers. Second, there is a tendency, I feel, in this book to emphasize the work of some critics, significant and brilliant as they may be, out of proportion to their actual accomplishments. Most of these critics have at one time or another been associated with Krieger, mainly at Ohio State University; they are all distinguished people, and indeed it would be strange if he did not value their influence upon him, but Krieger's tendency is to turn to them almost inevitably for illustration or corroboration, when some other illustration might have been equally good or even preferable.

But after I have made these complaints, let me insist that Krieger's work is always characterized by complete intellectual responsibility and timeliness, that the book is well worth the difficulty its subject and occasionally its writing entails. Krieger shows again that he is perhaps our best analyst of contemporary critical problems. As a critic he has never been afraid of philosophy, and he has managed to avoid the stupidities of so much modern aesthetics.

There is a matter mentioned toward the end of *A Window to Criticism* which leads into a very dark forest:

If we assume our continuing need for the totally substantive, fully empowered effigy, our need to feel an immediacy in the word that can match the immediacy of our experience, in short our need to transcend the empty character of words as pointing tools, how can our Platonized language in its fallen dualism permit the need to be satisfied? (p. 195)

Here Krieger strikes to the root of a problem that needs another book, a book which we should not have expected Krieger to write here, but one we would welcome. It must be a hard-boiled defense of the human need of which he speaks above. It must not be the sort of defense to which we have become too sadly accustomed. It must break through the old practical-impractical impasse and show successfully just how practical for real human life the "impractical" is, that poetic barbarism and primitivism in the Wheelwrightean sense is sophistication, that certain sorts of expertise in the social sciences these days is the real barbarism. But, since "literature becomes the only possible form of existential philosophy," perhaps a poet must miraculously appear to complete the critical revolution Krieger has charted and, in his recent work, extended.

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The Persistence of Shakespeare Idolatry: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Babcock, ed. Herbert Schueller. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964. Pp. x + 181. \$5.00.

It was most appropriate that Wayne State University should have honored Professor Emeritus Robert W. Babcock last year with a series of lectures which complement his classic study of *The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry 1766-1799* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1931). The lectures of Professor Monk and Professor Wasserman bracketed the period of English criticism with which Professor Babcock dealt, while those of Professors Peyre and Weigand extended the view to criticism in France and Germany. Now that they have been published as edited by Professor Schueller they comprise a volume which demonstrates the widely different forms taken by critical response to Shakespeare.

Samuel Holt Monk treats "Dryden and the Beginnings of Shakespeare Criticism in the Augustan Age," showing that Dryden "touched on all the topics that were to engage the attention of critics between 1700 and 1766, the year that Professor Babcock chose for the beginning of his study of Shakespeare idolatry" (p. 75). The task of discussing Dryden's comments on Shakespeare is a difficult one for the very reason that it has been done so often. Inevitably, the material of this lecture will be well known to most readers; to those coming freshly to the subject it would be an excellent introduction. The chief sections deal with *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, the quarrel with Sir Robert Howard, and the preface to *Troilus and Cressida*. Like most people who write on Dryden, Professor Monk has nothing but scorn for "his rather muddle-headed brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard" (p. 57), though an impartial reading of all the essays in this controversy suggests that Howard was not muddle-headed all the time and that some of his points about the rules and about rhyme were never answered by Dryden. The most valuable part of the lecture is the demonstration that in the preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, "which many have considered an expression of Dryden's most conservative views, Shakespeare survives the implied and the promised criticism of the hostile Rymer, not, indeed, as a model to be closely followed, but as the greatest creative genius in our language" (p. 73).

In "Shakespeare and the English Romantic Movement" Earl R. Wasserman addresses himself to the interesting question of "whether, among the English romantics, Shakespeare's plays ever passed beyond idolatry to become the source of archetypes" (pp. 81-2)—whether, that is, people looked into the plays to find the truth about themselves and about life. William Richardson and Anna Jameson are early examples of those who did. Professor Wasserman makes an important distinction between the creative, and presumably conscious, use of Shakespearean material as myth, as in the library scene of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and a largely unconscious use, passing itself off as critical observation on the plays. Most of the examples fall in the second category. Coleridge, of course, saw himself in Hamlet, and Professor Wasserman suggests that both De Quincey and Shelley found in Shakespeare confirmation of their ideas. He speculates that "an interpretation of *King Lear* as an archetypal pattern of the origin of tyranny" is implicit in one of the speeches of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (p. 102). This approach to romantic criticism of Shakespeare is not only interesting in itself but somewhat unsettling. One cannot help thinking that, perhaps as part of our heritage from the romantic movement, we are still being given criticism of

Shakespeare which is a presentation of the critic's beliefs as seen in a Shakespearian mirror.

To the French romantics also Shakespeare was a kindred spirit. Berlioz wrote: "He alone among intelligent beings can understand me . . ." (p. 22). But above all he served them as the perfect example of the art without rules for which they were fighting. The discussion of this period is one of the best sections of Henri Peyre's witty and informative lecture, "Shakespeare and Modern French Criticism." In the latter part of it he stresses the ways in which French criticism "dissents from the orthodox opinions prevalent in English-speaking lands" (p. 37). For example he speaks of Claudel's "revulsion against Shakespeare's lack of a spiritual conception of the world" (p. 41). Such an interpretation is indeed surprising and, though useful as an antidote for the exaggerations of doctrinal Christian interpretation, seems finally even more wrong. Two other unorthodox points made by French critics are more likely to win at least modified assent from English-speaking critics: the absence of a thoroughly harmonious structure and the paucity of women who are fully portrayed. Professor Peyre sums up the French attitude on these matters by saying, "Few are the Frenchmen who do not, as they outgrow their romantic youth, end by closing their Shakespeare and amorously rereading their Racine" (p. 43).

Hermann J. Weigand's "Shakespeare in German Criticism" is the third of these lectures to deal at some length with the romantics. He has a most illuminating discussion of *Hamlet* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, distinguishing in detail between the opinions of Goethe and those of his character. There are briefer, but again instructive, comments on the philosophical interpretations of *Hamlet* of Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, and the political interpretations of others. *Hamlet* is for German critics *the* Shakespeare tragedy *par excellence*, and Professor Weigand has wisely confined his attention to the impact of this one play.

A word must be said about an essay by Professor Weigand entitled "Hamlet's Consistent Inconsistency" and printed as an appendix to this volume. It is an eccentric and, to this reviewer, unpersuasive interpretation, the gist of which is that Hamlet is "an adolescent who, burdened with a mandate that spells the ruination of his life regardless of whether he obeys or not, seeks escape from the storming of his brain in simulated madness, in a wilful flaunting of all standards of decent behavior, but who, in doing so, falls victim to forces within him that bring about the total disintegration of his moral personality" (p. 171). There is not space to argue against each point of this interpretation, but the whole tone of the final scene seems to deny a "total disintegration" of Hamlet's "moral personality." Furthermore Professor Weigand is rather cavalier about the evidence for his view. He states that there is "no hint" of an adulterous relation between Gertrude and Claudius before old Hamlet's death (p. 141) despite the Ghost's words in I.5 which Bradley, Dover Wilson and most other critics interpret as describing such a relation. He thinks "there is not a shred of evidence" to accuse Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of bad faith toward Hamlet (p. 169) despite their agreeing to spy on him. Claudius seems to him to be rather favorably portrayed (p. 165), while Hamlet is a morbidly negative, mentally unbalanced "adolescent." I submit that a verdict of "Not Proven" must be rendered.

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Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel by Robert Alter. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. Pp. xi + 148. \$3.75.

Mr. Alter's ambition here is to indicate something of the diffusion and dilution of a tradition from its origins in the sixteenth-century *Lazarillo de Tormes* to its latest reincarnations in *Felix Krull* and *The Horse's Mouth*. It is also to mediate between such historical and scholarly studies of picaresque fiction as F. W. Chandler's, Fonger de Haan's, and Claudio Guillén's, on the one hand, and, on the other, the critically bolder speculations of R. W. B. Lewis and Ihab Hassan. As Mr. Alter says: "There seems little point in using a term like 'picaresque' without a sense of serious responsibility to the definite historical phenomenon from which the term derives. And yet I think there is a sound intuition behind these broader applications of the term [i. e., those of Lewis and Hassan], for it seems reasonable to assume that the picaresque novel is not simply a long-finished episode in Western literature but rather a permanent addition to the storehouse of literary resources, capable of regenerating and transforming itself in a surprising variety of new environments" (p. ix). Mr. Alter thus begins by focusing on the "pure" Spanish picaresque novel; continues by considering picaresque elements in the fictions of Lesage, Defoe, Smollett, Fielding, Stendhal, and Thackeray; and ends by locating the survivals of the picaresque which haunt contemporary works by Mann, Saul Bellow, and Joyce Cary. If in the process he does not succeed in striking off anything very astonishing, he generally avoids the scandal of being boring.

But not entirely. This is a slightly rewritten doctoral thesis, and even though Mr. Alter writes well, he does not always avoid the solemnity, the platitudinousness, and the naïveté which attach to the sorry genre in which he himself is working. An excessive solemnity, for example, not merely darkens the whole proceedings needlessly but prevents his perceiving the full amount of sheer energetic comedy and farce—even, indeed, the Sick humor—in *Lazarillo* and in *Roderick Random*. Contemplating Lazaro, he is capable of this sort of humorlessness, which borders on the sanctimonious: "Lazaro's experience-hardened individualism can reach such a degree of self-centeredness that he blithely imagines God killing off parishioners so that he, the hungry servant of the parish priest, can enjoy the funeral feasts" (p. 10). This is to be earnest with a vengeance. And in *Roderick Random* Mr. Alter finds "sadism" where wiser people would discover only comedy, that special sort of violent, physical comedy fit for Plautine and Jonsonian contexts. Mr. Alter's solemnity permits him too often to forget that, if *Lazarillo de Tormes* is to be accepted as the prototype of the genre, then the picaresque novel is, above all things, funny. And if it is pre-eminently funny, why waste time, as Mr. Alter does in his third chapter, laboring to demonstrate that *Moll Flanders* is not really a picaresque novel?

An instinct for enunciating the obvious is likewise not always kept under control by Mr. Alter. Surely anyone bright enough to find himself reading a book about the picaresque novel and its tradition does not need to be told that irony is "an attitude of mind" in addition to being "a rhetorical device" (p. 18). Or that "The acquisition of wealth, when the individual has no real responsibility for anything beyond acquisition itself, can quickly become an activity of pure depredation" (p. 53). Or that, as we are informed on p. 60, each of us creates his own reality by viewing and interpreting phenomena differently.

And so on. Mr. Alters' very method, that which prides itself on being "comparative," is what perhaps tempts him to utter portentous generalities about life gleaned from "Western literature" when he should be refining precise distinctions about specific literary works and traditions.

Another weakness is the occasional but no less disheartening naïveté of Mr. Alter's critical posture. In his discussion of *Gil Blas*, for example, he says: "These two attitudes, then, which one might expect to be at odds with each other—the satirical perception of human absurdities and the sense of fellowship with humanity—coincide in the picaresque world of *Gil Blas*" (p. 24). Mr. Alter's *which one might expect* is a real shock, suggesting, as it does, that he has never attended closely to the character or writings of, say, Samuel Johnson, or, for that matter, of Shakespeare. The sort of instinct for simplification which lies behind Mr. Alter's understanding of the humanity of satire also seems to color his virtual equation of the "rough" in *Roderick Random* with the "unpleasant." The only justification that Mr. Alter can find for Smollett's plethora of chamberpots and pratfalls and stinks is that eighteenth-century life was in many ways *like* that. But literature is not photography, and Smollett is no more transcribing from experience than is the author of *Lazarillo*. Each is making up a violent comic world, and Lazaro's cruel and funny pranks on the blind man—no more an invitation to sanctimoniousness, surely, than Max and Moritz's—probably contribute more to the cunning cruelties of Roderick's schoolmaster than any peculiar quality inherent in either Tobias Smollett or eighteenth-century life.

A further disappointment in Mr. Alter's performance is that in his concern with relationships he has overlooked his obligation to be sufficiently critical. Nothing he tells us would lead us to imagine that the artistic achievement of *Huckleberry Finn* is in any way superior to that of *The Horse's Mouth*. He does not seem aware that because *Felix Krull* inhabits an entirely different world of value from that in which *Barry Lyndon* resides, it cannot be treated with the same critical rhetoric. And so fervent is Mr. Alter's enthusiasm for *The Horse's Mouth*, the analysis of which constitutes the historical climax of his whole survey, that we may suspect that he actually thinks it a good novel and assumes that we are instinctively going to share his obvious conviction that Gulley Jimson is an interesting character.

But it would be unfair to leave the impression that Mr. Alter's book is compact of nothing but doughy humorlessness, oversimplification, and insecure taste. He is very good in his occasional close analyses—the one in his fifth chapter which probes into the style of *Tom Jones* is especially ripe—and now and then he gets off a perception that really opens up his subject. One such is his observation (p. 33) about the structural problem which always attends the picaresque theme. As he says of the picaresque novelist, "he involves himself in a serious technical difficulty: there is no way of ending a picaresque novel." That is, unless the novelist resorts to what Mr. Alter calls the "post-picaresque," the sort of thing we find in the more serious second half of *Gil Blas*, in the sentimental ending of *Roderick Random*, or in the regaining of Paradise which brings *Tom Jones* full circle. It is a pity that, in his generally intelligent discussion of *Huckleberry Finn*, Mr. Alter does not recover his own earlier perception about the technical difficulty of ending a picaresque novel and apply it to the interesting structural problem of *Huckleberry Finn* and its disappointing ending. Indeed, Mr. Alter talks—and talks well—about almost everything in *Huckleberry Finn* except this very matter of its curiously unsatisfactory ending.

A happier perception of Mr. Alter's is his sense of the social and even political implications of sentimentalism, the sentimentalism, for example, which in *Roderick Random* sorts so ill with the comic picaresque theme of a social conspiracy battering its lonely but elastic victim. As Mr. Alter says, "Sentimentalism . . . is an aprioristic mode of response to the world." The rejection of empiricism implied in sentimentalism means that the sentimentalist is incapable of registering or accommodating changes in psychological or social reality. Thus "Sentimentalism is . . . a self-appointed protector of traditional values and traditional relationships" (p. 79). Sentimentalism is, in short, a reactionary enterprise, and Mr. Alter's interpretation of its collision with the original energy of the pure picaresque is intelligent and valuable. For as he points out, the picaresque novel—in its initial incarnation as *Lazarillo de Tormes*—"is a literary form characteristic of a period of disintegration, both social disintegration and the disintegration of belief" (p. 84). The eighteenth century sentimentalist metamorphosis of the picaresque constitutes an attempt to arrest or at least to disguise the persistence and the vigor of the process which begins in the Renaissance and which *Lazarillo* reflects.

Mr. Alter's book is a short one, an interpretation of selected moments in the course of the picaresque rather than a connected history, and his space does not allow him the luxury of leisurely speculation. A critic of the picaresque who wanted to render a fuller account would have to consider some additional matters.

One is the indebtedness of the whole tradition to classical literature: Mr. Alter speaks of the picaroon's "protean enterprise and quick-witted opportunism" (p. 29), and yet we are not invited to draw comparisons with the roadmanship of Odysseus. In the same way, the cunning and the satiric energy of Plautine servants surely contribute to the character of Lazaro. Since a pure picaresque requires a servant as protagonist and narrator, is there not some relation between the disappearance of a servant society and the disappearance of the pure picaresque novel? Another picaresque element which cries out for investigation is the anti-clerical theme, which provides the primary springboard for the satire in *Lazarillo*. Fielding's Parson Trulliber in *Joseph Andrews* would seem closely akin to Lazaro's farcically greedy bread-hoarding priest, and the implicit recommendation of Christian charity projected by both fictions would seem to invite Mr. Alter to reconsider or at least to refine his statement that "it is one of the essential characteristics of the picaroon's nature not to get involved in religious causes" (p. 56). Again, any thorough treatment of the picaresque would have to attend to the comic-pathetic motif of hunger which unites *Lazarillo* and later picaresque redactions like *Tom Jones*. And finally, one would like to ask any critic intent on locating picaresque elements in contemporary writing to pause over the author of *On the Road* and his friends, who seem engaged in a curious fusion of the picaresque with the pastoral, a fusion which is perhaps merely the latest expression of a tradition running from *Song of Myself* to *The Sun Also Rises*.

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The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron
by Edward E. Bostetter. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963.
Pp. xiii + 351. \$6.75.

In *The Romantic Ventriloquists* by Edward Bostetter we possess a study of the English Romantics which it is possible to praise whole-heartedly, and which it is to be hoped will initiate a more modern and more critical approach to the Romantics in our graduate schools. Bostetter attempts to point up both the weakness and the strength of English Romantic poetry with greater sharpness and clarity than has been done heretofore. Bostetter's study is masterly in its organization; it is, if anything, too tightly organized, too perfect in its parallels. But its clarity and control is breathtaking, like the view from a mountain.

The usual academic approach, exemplified best perhaps in the irreproachable scholarship of *The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium of Reappraisal* (C. D. Thorpe, Carlos Baker and Bennett Weaver, editors; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), sees the Romantic movement as "expressive of vitality, confidence, largeness of view" (p. 5). There is a determination to see the Romantic movement in its positive aspects, while the darker side of the Romantic spirit is passed over. Bostetter feels, and rightly, that this is an oversimplification. All too often, he thinks, the vitality and confidence of Romantic poetry were purchased at the expense of ignoring crucial areas of experience. To demonstrate his point, he chose a unique method. He shows the blocking of a poet in a cul-de-sac by dealing with unfinished poems: Wordsworth's *The Recluse*, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*, Keat's *Hyperion*, Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, Byron's *Don Juan*. He argues that each poet reaches an impasse because the gap between his ideal vision and actual experienced reality grew steadily: hence the Romantic schizophrenia.

There is a difference here, however, to be observed; given longer life, health and vigor Byron could probably have continued *Don Juan* indefinitely, just as Ezra Pound can continue his *Cantos* at an easy canter. In Byron's case the cause of cessation was not that he bogged down, but that he died at Missolonghi. Furthermore, the best criticism today tends to agree that *Kubla Khan* is finished, insofar as a poem ever is. True, Coleridge himself gave currency to the idea that he was unable to finish it. But as D. H. Lawrence said somewhere one must believe not the author but the tale; attending not to Coleridge's *apologia*, but to *Kubla Khan* itself, one finds it to be the concentrate of all of human experience in symbolic form, the poem as mandala.

Christabel, unlike *Kubla Khan*, is a major poem which Coleridge was unable to finish. Here the holy maiden Christabel is so cocooned within evil that it is difficult to see how Coleridge could have extricated her. It is in any case fascinating to speculate upon the reasons why he could never bring himself to finish the poem. Bostetter rightly suggests that those reasons are probably psychological. Geraldine, the beautiful witch-vampire, was, it is almost certain, connected in Coleridge's mind with prostitution, and it is Coleridge's Victorianism before the age of Victoria, his shrinking from the confrontation with evil which, except in his one masterpiece, *The Ancient Mariner*, blocks the way to his achieving the status of major poet.

Byron was more tough-minded than the other English Romantics and that is why in Bostetter's book he comes off much better than the others do. He alone

found in comedy a way of dealing with the age he lived in and in this he discovered a source of poetic power. His imagination could play maliciously with the world he knew and he was not hampered by an inflated rhetoric; he could deal with the real world, as Wordsworth seldom managed to, in the real language of men.

He felt intensely and constantly the terrible "isolation of the human situation," as I. A. Richards calls it (p. 261). Many of Byron's excesses may be attributed to an aggressive determination to force existence to declare itself. Bostetter speaks of "the deliberate aggravation of the sense of sin—it is better to believe in God as vengeful and oneself as damned, than in nothing" (p. 261). Byron found his own smallness and insignificance with respect to the universe and its emptiness of any discoverable human meaning intolerable; he tried to deny it, destroy it, or escape it. In the end, he was driven to the conviction that man had no one to turn to except himself, and was responsible solely to himself. Thus Bostetter says that to some degree Byron anticipates the atheistic existentialism of Sartre. The full extent of Byron's despair, of his *Angst*, is revealed in the poem *Darkness*, written in July, 1816. Here is a dream, not only of the extinction of human life, but of the death of the universe (p. 275). Byron's existentialism can be substantiated by the examination of attitudes expressed in *Manfred*, *Cain*, and *Don Juan*, as I have noted elsewhere.

In conclusion, this new approach to the English Romantics is not the kind of book which walks the tightrope between the scholarly and the popular; it is altogether scholarly, yet vigorous, refreshing and significant.

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Exploring James Joyce by Joseph Prescott (intro. Harry T. Moore). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964. Pp. xii + 182. \$4.50.

Anyone who is familiar with Joseph Prescott's long research on the evolution of Joyce's *Ulysses* immediately expects a great deal from any new publication by him, especially when it is his first book-length study. The inevitable disappointment in the present instance stems from the unevenness of the material, which itself arises from the fact that seven published articles have been collected here to make another title in an ambitious series edited by Harry T. Moore, *Crosscurrents: Modern Critiques*. It is convenient to have these widely-scattered studies reprinted in a single volume, but it is still a disappointment to those of us who have been waiting many years for Professor Prescott's monumental study of the development of *Ulysses*.

The best of the studies in this volume are those on Stephen and Molly, the first and fourth of four chapters on characterization to be included in the *Ulysses* study. These two and another on "Stylistic Realism in *Ulysses*" give a sample of what Prescott is planning to do with an enormous body of evidence "in now widely scattered manuscripts, typescripts, proof sheets, and other preliminary drafts." It is a prodigious task merely to assemble the revisions from manuscript sources in the libraries of Buffalo, Cornell, Harvard, Yale, and the Rosenbach Foundation, but assimilation and evaluation can result not only in

describing the evolution of a single novel but in helping to explain the creative process as well.

The chapter on Stephen is rich in documentation of Joyce's method but meager in the kind of literary criticism that would explain how the shy, anti-social Stephen of the *Portrait* becomes the mocking intellectual of *Ulysses*. The chapter on Molly, on the other hand, is lavish both in documentation and critical summary. Because of its subject, the chapter is also entertaining, as it evokes a wealth of unpublished material to produce the many facets that make up the full-bodied woman: her frank attitude toward all things, including sex; her exhibitionism and intellectual limitations; her irritable temper and hatred of fretting poverty; her buoyancy and pugnacity. Prescott sums up Molly well (p. 105): "Joyce lavishes effort, successfully, to produce a portrait of the eternal feminine. Her physique, her sexuality, her acceptance of the body, her ambivalent attitude toward the male, her technique of attraction, the femininity of her mind, her perceptiveness in sexual matters—all these are steadily built up."

The first and last chapters deal with Joyce's inventiveness in language, the verbal virtuosity that may well be his greatest contribution to literature. Since my own writing on Joyce began with the desire to explain the evolution of this side of his genius, I am naturally attracted to this section of the book. While the first ("James Joyce: a Study in Words") is too meager, the second ("Stylistic Realism in *Ulysses*") demonstrates amply how "in his quest for the perfect union of matter and manner, he [Joyce] evolves a variety of techniques for a variety of episodes." I cannot agree with Prescott that the parodies in the hospital episode are "a waste of effort" or that the logical conclusion of Joyce's word-technique is a blank page depicting a blank mind. The baffling richness of *Finnegans Wake* is far from a *tabula rasa*.

Other studies are included in this medley. "Stephen Hero," the most widely printed of them all, is a good review of Theodore Spencer's edition but meager as a critical essay. A meticulous study of the parallels between *Ulysses* and Homer's *Odyssey* covers the subject admirably; the impressive parade of correspondences was not designed for literary criticism but desperately needs some. "Local Allusions in *Ulysses*" furnishes a few interesting examples of this baffling side of Joyce, but its greatest value is to point up the necessity of rescuing from oblivion, before it is too late, "the peculiarly Irish milieu of *Ulysses*." It is inevitable that this stream-of-consciousness novel should be "shot through with memories, and memories of memories," but the fading past of Bloomsday is already sixty years behind us.

The meagerness of some of the chapters beside the richness of the three chapters from the "work in progress" emphasizes the uneven character of this book. It is a miscellaneous collection, a reprinting of valuable Joyce scholarship in convenient form but hardly an example of "modern critiques," crosscurrents or not. At any rate, it whets our appetite for the important book that is still to come.

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