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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews


A review of this book has a place in a journal not devoted to technical subjects because though the demonstration of the thesis is quite technical, the thesis itself is not. The basic assumption of the author is commonly held and might be described thus: When a composer of music creates musical forms, he is under the sway of emotions which determine the configurations he produces and which those configurations in turn arouse in properly disposed hearers. Mr. Deryck Cooke defines musicality as a “sympathetic emotional response to a work” (p. 205). Thus he champions a basic theory which is denied by present day purist-constructivists but which most musical amateurs and devotees accept as self-evident.

Though he might admit that musicality is the ability to grasp tonal wholes organized under the governance of rhythm and tempo in terms of pitch-elements occurring simultaneously or in succession, he would say that this definition does not go far enough: it omits the emotional cause-and-effect of the contemplated whole. What Cooke of course is attempting is a closing of the theoretical split between content and form which is a phenomenon not only in contemporary aesthetics, but also in contemporary literary, music, and art criticism. He seems therefore to be combatting the “purism” usually attributed to Eduard Hanslick (though Hanslick denied, not the emotional powers of music, but its ability to imitate or delineate) and found also, as Cooke shows, in Stravinsky and Hindemith.

That music is an expressive medium they take pains to deny; that it can be nothing else Cooke attempts to show by referring to the specific effects of what he calls musical “terms,” though these effects cannot be labelled linguistically except in vague and approximative ways. Musical form, he thinks, is the means of achieving “the dispositions of various terms of emotional expression in a significant order” (p. 212). For Cooke it is therefore a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Like everyone who accepts his basic principle, Cooke is in august company. The assumption of Plato and Aristotle that music (and indeed the very scales of which it is composed) in arousing emotions can produce certain educative and ethical effects is well known to scholars. There is wide acceptance among educated readers of the rather loose doctrines found in J. W. N. Sullivan’s book on Beethoven (1927), in which music is treated as an expression of valuable spiritual states, and also (though here the reasons may be extra-musical ones) in Albert Schweitzer’s book on Bach (1905), in which heavy emphasis is placed on a literary kind of symbolism. Susanne K. Langer in Philosophy in a New Key (1942) has interpreted music as emotion expressed morphologically and as an unconsummated symbol. The laboratory psychologists with varying degrees of unsuccess have investigated the emotional power of music and its specific emotional referents. Mr. Cooke belongs to the tradition, not of literary, philosophical, or aesthetic speculation, however, but to a technical one found in the baroque...
period in European art: I am referring to the *Affektenlehre* (theory of affects), which was an attempt to codify the relation between musical "figures" and the emotions. "Affections" were thought of as stereotyped into an extensive number of musical figures. The basis of this endeavor was the supposed parallel between music and speech (rhetoric). Cooke's position is close also to that of J. P. Rameau, who in his *Traité de l'harmonie* (1722) held that harmony can arouse different passions depending on the tonal combinations which are employed. Among the passions he included sadness, languor, tenderness, agreeability, gaiety, despair, anger, and others. In a similar fashion, Cooke attempts not only to define melody, harmony, rhythm, and tempo, but also to show how they work emotionally. Referring always to the tonal system of the western world, he quotes voluminously from composers from 1400 to the present day. Like Wilson Knight, whom he mentions as elucidating the "content" of literary works through an interpretation of the psychological and emotional connotations of the images analyzed (p. xii), he tries to identify idioms and arrange a list of meanings. Though his book is called *The Language of Music* (and thus he has tentative connections with the tradition of Hegel), he admits that music has no conceptual capacities. He resorts to an essentially gestaltist view that all aspects of the emotional complex which melody, harmony, rhythm, and tempo produce are in a relation of mutual interdependence to one another. Thus he argues for the indivisibility of form (the music) and content (the emotion), his ideal being to show that formal and emotional impacts are the same thing (p. 32). His attempt at demonstrating this indivisibility through analyses of Mozart's fortieth and Vaughan Williams' sixth symphonies is frustrated chiefly by the magnitude of his task, which is impossible of realization in less than several comprehensive volumes. What confronts him is the problem of any gestaltist who attempts to grasp wholes by means of the analytical method.

When Cooke grapples with the matter of music as a language of the emotions, one is reminded of Yeats' assertion in his essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" that all sounds "either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions..." Cooke would agree (as did Mendelssohn when he said that the thoughts expressed to him by music were too definite, not too indefinite, to be put into words) that music is therefore a more precise feeling-language than is language itself when it names feelings. For him a language-theory is not far distant from an emotion-theory: music is a language of the emotions. Yet when he tries to equate patterns with emotions, Cooke unwittingly through the use of quotation marks shows his distrust of his own linguistic labels: "yearning," "defeatist," "hopeful," "lively," and so forth. But the fact is that there are not enough linguistic labels for human emotions, which must be named in terms of ranges and classes; and there is even a more fundamental question of what constitutes an emotion: Is "resignation" one, for instance?

The weakness of this book is in its aesthetic and psychological supports, therefore. Cooke is right to insist that music is an expressive medium, to interpret musical symbolism in terms of well-known forms of the conventional tonal system, and to adopt an empirical approach to his subject. He occasionally runs into trouble because of the metaphorical character of all attempts to describe music. (The trouble he has with his own style is of course his own.) And he allows
himself to be carried away in his enthusiasm for his subject: He thinks music is “the most articulate language of the unconscious . . .” (p. x), and his use of the word “must” betrays his own uncertainty. A certain complex of emotions, he says, must have been seeking an outlet as the composer writes: of this the composer may be aware, or only somewhat aware, or completely unaware (p. 169). As tricky a concept as the unconscious is inspiration; but again the word must occurs: Inspiration must be “an unconscious creative re-shaping of already existing materials in the tradition” (p. 171; italics deleted).

But his ground is even more insecure when he tells us what Beethoven must have felt when he wrote the Eroica and how the necessities of his composing must have crystallized (p. 17). At the same time, even this is quite different from saying that the tentative fugato which Schubert wrote for the second subject of his Ninth felt wrong to him (p. 218). Two different orders of emotion are involved, the first being that of the emotion expressed in the music and the second being that of a satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the tonal structure in its tonal context. Here Cooke confuses the emotions involved, their sources, and their relevancies—not, by the way, an unusual failing in music criticism, or aesthetics either. Can one really say that Beethoven felt "joy" when he wrote the Ninth (p. 218)? Cooke clearly does not give enough credit to the objectivizing imagination of the composer, who, as symphonist or writer of operas, often resembles merely a technician, and often a dramatist.

In any case, Cooke's chief subject is not aesthetics, but, as I have suggested, a kind of musical-emotive rhetoric. He works out the details of that rhetoric by discussing musical "terms" and their emotive effects. What is a term? One example is a series of tones which as part of the conventional system of tonal organization of the western world produces a well-defined though only an approximately describable impression. Take the first five tones of the major scale played in succession, for instance. The emotion here expressed is outgoing, assertive, affirmative (pp. 115-119). The first five notes of the minor scale, on the other hand, when they are played in succession assert "sorrow, a complaint, a protest against misfortune" (p. 122). If one considers the number of possibilities if successive tones are treated as units or "terms," the number of units to be characterized is appalling; and if one were to add to these "terms" made of tones in succession those made of tones occurring simultaneously (intervals and chords) and then add also the infinite possibilities of rhythm, timbre, and tempo, one grasps in a nutshell the difficulties of a total analysis of musical expression. But to this total analysis Cooke makes an outstanding contribution, and one might almost call him a pioneer for these days.

Yet I should like to mention two errors—as it seems to me—which illustrate the pitfalls of the rhetorical-emotive analysis of music. There can be mistakes in observation which call for revision—always a possibility in empirical-scientific investigations. One such mistake occurs in connection with Cooke's observation that the augmented fourth and the diminished fifth are the same note (pp. 84 and 88). They are not: "spelling" has nothing to do with the matter; but the very kind of effect Cooke is analyzing does. Anyone who plays c and f sharp simultaneously on the piano and then touches a d in the base hears an augmented fourth; if he touches an a flat instead of the d, he hears a diminished fifth. The augmented fourth "strives" upwards; the diminished fifth "pulls" downwards.
These are elementary facts of the western harmonic system, and Cooke's description of the augmented fourth as expressing "devilish and inimical forces" (p. 90) cannot apply to the diminished fifth at all. Another mistake—or at least difficulty—in observation involves the identification of keys. The complexities of harmonic-expressive analysis come to the fore when Cooke speaks about the famous opening phrase of Tristan and Isolde (pp. 190 ff.). He quite confidently thinks of it as opening in d minor (a "tragic" minor sixth and "anguish" are involved); but it is not irrelevant to indicate that other people are just as confident that the key is a minor or even f major. Each interpretation is defensible and each has a delightful logic of its own. If the phrase is in d minor, it probably is a "passionate outburst of painful emotion, which does not protest further, but falls back into acceptance" (pp. 137-138); if it is in a minor, it probably expresses "Semitonal tension downward . . .: active anguish in a context of flux"; if it is in f major, the rise from the sixth of the scale to the tonic (though unexplained by Cooke) must be "optimistic," while the descent from the tonic to the seventh is possibly expressive of "an incoming emotion of joy" (p. 159). Though this last description is mere conjecture, it is not impossible to suppose that the difficulty of such analysis as this suggests that the "expression" of the phrase is multiple and contradictory: optimism and joy are possibly in a sharp uncomfortable blend with pain accepted as a part of life's flux, all of these intense emotions being modified and mitigated in the fashion which is characteristic of art. When one first hears the phrase, one cannot possibly know what the key is, however, and under the pressure of the tonal ambiguity his ears are forced to search avidly for a precise tonal location. (I am speaking of the beginning of the phrase, not of the end.) While I am sure that Cooke is in error here or that at least he simplifies his case, I am more interested in agreeing with his own contention that his kind of investigation demands much supplementation.

Mr. Cooke has done a service to both theorizers and practical musicians: because of his efforts the former are a little closer to the realization of their dream that musical expression can be explained, though the end is still far from sight; and the latter can apply to his book for suggestions about performance. At the same time, his forthrightness and frankness have enabled Cooke not to claim too much—except in the realm of aesthetic theory—and he has been able to recognize many ambiguities (for instance that of the minor "system," pp. 90 ff.) which plague the researcher in his field. At the same time he has been courageous enough to make observations similar to those of Wölfflin, who distinguishes between the linear and the painterly for the field of the visual arts. I mean his attribution of technical preferences to certain historical periods: the major triad, he says, is a secular, pleasure-revealing principle which the medieval church tried to suppress, and its replacement since 1850 by chromaticism reveals a growing doubt about the possibility or even the desirability of personal happiness (p. 109). If one can accept his basic premises, then Cooke's tentative sociological and philosophical explanations of technical practices take on a certain cultural relevancy. Faulty as Cooke's book may be as aesthetics and as a psychology of creativity, it contains speculations and suggestions which point not only to the vastness of the problems which must be examined but also to the directions in which such examinations must go.

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Herbert M. Schueller

During the course of the eighteenth century, a good many Englishmen wrote about the art of painting, but only the fifteen discourses that Sir Joshua Reynolds, President of the Royal Academy, delivered periodically between 1769 and 1790 are widely known today. They have often been reprinted and have therefore always been available to students of the period, who have found in them a superb statement of those critical principles which we call "classical" or "neo-classical" or "academic." Although addressed to students of the plastic arts, the Discourses are also valuable to students of literary theory, for, since the Renaissance, the notion that painting and poetry are "sisters" had assured a close and parallel development in the theories of both those arts.

Reynolds spoke to his fellow Academicians and their pupils not only as a successful and brilliant practitioner of his own art, but also as a life-long student of European painting, its theory and its history. Indeed, he is a late instance of the Renaissance ideal of the learned painter—learned in other arts, in the techniques of his craft, and in the theory of art which had been developed in the Renaissance largely out of the antique and the sixteenth-century Roman school of painting, of which Raphael and Michelangelo were the most influential representatives. The Discourses were listened to with respect and rightly so, for they reveal the humanistic and liberal mind of a man free of pedantry and deeply concerned for the good estate of painting in Britain.

We have long needed a critical edition of the Discourses. This need has at last been met by Robert R. Wark, who is Curator of Art Collections at the Huntington Library and Art Gallery, and who has edited this volume, which will certainly remain the standard edition for a very long time. The annotated and illustrated edition published by Roger Fry in 1905 is out of print and was long since outmoded. During the last twenty-five years, a good deal of important scholarship—notably by Frederick W. Hilles, Rensselaer W. Lee, Walter Jackson Bate, Ellis Waterhouse, and Walter J. Hipple—has been devoted to Reynolds, to his own theories, and to the critical tradition from which those theories derive. Wark has relied on this more recent work, both in his informative explanatory notes and in his introductory essay.

Wark provides us, moreover, with the first critically edited text of the Discourses. He has, properly, based his own text on that of Edmond Malone's edition of Reynolds' Works, 1797, which contains the painter's "last corrections and additions"; and a careful collation of this text with earlier ones has produced textual notes that record all of Reynolds' revisions, excisions, and additions. Twenty-eight plates in black and white (selected, it seems to me, more judiciously than were many of Fry's thirty-three plates) are offered as illustrations of various ideas expressed in the Discourses and add to the splendor as well as the usefulness of this admirably made book. There are also three useful bibliographies: a list of early and important later editions of Reynolds' writings; a list of books that Reynolds read or might have read while preparing the Discourses; and a select list of important critical and historical studies of Reynolds and of the critical traditions for which he spoke. Clearly this is the edition to which serious students must go in the future.
In his introduction Mr. Wark examines briefly some of Reynolds' principal topics, all familiar in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises on painting: the role of ideal beauty or of the general as opposed to the minutely particular in great and serious art; the hierarchy of the genres, from history painting down to still life; the necessity of discipline and of a knowledge of the great masters of the past in the training of a painter, and the idea that such discipline eventually frees the mature painter from rigorous obedience to the rules; the moral end of art, etc. These ideas were commonplaces in the humanistic theory of painting and were the common property of artists and connoisseurs from the sixteenth century onward. They were grounded in the antique and in the practice of such painters as Raphael, Michelangelo, the Caracci, and Nicholas Poussin, and they reached their ultimate formulation in the doctrine of the Académie Royale toward the end of the seventeenth century.

Mr. Wark is aware of a more modern, a British element in Reynolds' thought, but it seems to me that he inadvertently misinterprets its significance. Reynolds taught not only what he considered the enduring wisdom of the ancients and the Roman and Venetian masters of the High Renaissance, but also certain ideas that had been developed during the eighteenth century by British empirical aestheticians. It is this empirical bent of Reynolds' mind that infuriated William Blake and provoked many of the well-known marginal comments in his copy of the Works of Reynolds. And it is because of the presence of these modern notions that the Discourses differ from most earlier writings on painting, for instance, from Charles Du Fresnoy's De Arte Graphica, a characteristic treatise of the seventeenth century, which Dryden had translated in 1695 and which Reynolds himself annotated for William Mason's translation, published in 1783.

Mr. Wark isolates three of these ideas: the notion that the association of ideas plays an important role in aesthetic response; the importance of "imagination" both to the painter and to the viewer of his work; and the conviction that the disciplined genius attains finally the freedom to paint as an individual, not as an imitator or as a slave to rules. Regarding Reynolds as a "rationalist" (was he, in fact?) Mr. Wark associates these principles with "romanticism," and is thus led to find in the Discourses a carefully maintained compromise between "reason" and "imagination and feeling," between the "classic" and the "romantic." But it is plain from the introduction that Mr. Wark is aware that these ideas were constants in earlier eighteenth-century critical theory: they would not have disturbed Dryden or Pope or Johnson, and they had been expressed over and again by scores of writers. The "compromise" that Mr. Wark observes in the Discourses was as basic to eighteenth-century aesthetic theory as the idea of the social contract was to eighteenth-century political theory. Reynolds, as Mr. Wark points out, was aware of important changes that were taking place in European painting during the last half of the century, and in his own painting he showed himself sympathetic to contemporary art. But it is not clear that his insistence on associationism or his conviction that art must strike the imagination or that rules are of secondary importance to the mature artist indicate an element of "romanticism" in the Discourses.

Mr. Wark is on firmer ground when he denies that the later Discourses reveal any considerable change in Reynolds' basic critical ideas. In the main, Reynolds was as conservative in 1790 as he had been in 1769; as liberal in 1769 as he was
in 1790. Mr. Wark argues partly from a close reading of the text and in part from the nature of Reynolds' revisions, made in some cases years after the original version of a discourse had been completed. He points out, for example, the addition in the final version of Discourse III of two important paragraphs, in which Reynolds re-emphasized his conviction of the importance of "rules" or principles in creating a work of art; and he did so by quoting and denying Bacon's assertion that "felicity" and not rules determines the success of a painter.

If he means that beauty has nothing to do with rule, he is mistaken. There is a rule, obtained out of general nature, to contradict which is to fall into deformity. . . . If by felicity is meant any thing of chance or hazard, or something born with a man, and not earned, I cannot agree with this great philosopher. Every object which pleases must give us pleasure upon some certain principles; but as the objects of pleasure are almost infinite, so their principles vary without end, and every man finds them out, not by felicity or successful hazard, but by care and sagacity.

There is little enough of the "romantic" in this characteristic passage, or indeed in the whole of Discourse III of which it is a part. Blake found this Discourse especially offensive. He expressed his distaste in a headnote:

The following Discourse is particularly Interesting to Block heads, as it endeavours to prove That there is No such thing as Inspiration & that any Man of a plain Understanding may by Thieving from Others become a Mich. Angelo.

Empirical aesthetics played its role in the disintegration of neo-classical art. But Reynolds, despite his use of many of its principles, remains one of the last great neo-classicists and has no claim to being one of the first romantics.

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After any fundamental shift in the conception of poetry—after any critical revolt—comes a period of consolidation in which the implications of the revolution are worked out and the exaggeration of the new emphases corrected. The recent revival of metaphysical poetry, with its startling effects upon contemporary poetic practice and the new perspective which it has imposed upon the literature of the past, has now spent its initial energies and has indeed met with sharp reactions. Joseph E. Duncan's very interesting work, The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry, attempts a reasoned reassessment of that revival of the metaphysicals with which T. S. Eliot has been particularly identified. Duncan begins with the beginnings, but, as his subtitle ("The History of a Style, 1800 to the Present") indicates, he concerns himself with the last one hundred and fifty years. Duncan
finds the significant revival as beginning in the early part of the nineteenth century, with its apogee occurring in the second decade of the twentieth. His is a detailed history, ably documented, filled with a great many highly interesting and significant things. Its interest and usefulness are by no means cancelled by what seems to me some confusions and wrong choices of emphasis.

One feature of Duncan's work is an "ironing out" of literary history. Jagged breaks in the landscape, sharp fault lines, and decisive chasms smooth out under the historian's eye. What had seemed decisively revolutionary comes down to the merely evolutionary. A similar process of smoothing and leveling shows itself in the work of the scholars who a generation or so ago worked over the beginnings of the Romantic revolt. Instead of dating the revolt from the publication of the frankly experimental Lyrical Ballads in 1798, they pushed the beginnings of Romanticism further and further back into the eighteenth century. More recently still, a scholar has persuasively argued that even Wordsworth's "lyrical ballads" differ in topic, style, and theme far less from the current magazine verse of the time than we have been led to think.

Since literary culture always possesses much more of a continuity than our love of simplification wants to allow, the toning down of decisive shift and reversal has its element of truth. At any rate, this rounding of contours is apparently inevitable when the historian comes to contemplate historical processes of any kind. This kind of smoothing is beautifully exemplified in Mr. Duncan's book. The beginnings of the revival are found far back in the early nineteenth century. One might, if he liked, push the beginnings back earlier still: Pope and Parnell were sufficiently interested in Donne to rewrite some of his satires and it may be that Pope's interest triggered the 1719 edition—there had been no edition since that of 1669. But few would argue for an earlier beginning than the end of the eighteenth century. Here it is Coleridge, of course, who has the most important part; but DeQuincey, Landor, Beddoes, and Hood are all shown to have been interested in the metaphysical poets and to have played their parts in creating a taste for seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry. Duncan devotes a chapter to "John Donne and Robert Browning," another chapter to "The Beginnings of the Revival in America," in which the names of Emerson, Thoreau, and Emily Dickinson are invoked, and a chapter on "The Catholic Revival and the Metaphysicals," where the relations of Hopkins, Francis Thompson, and Alice Meynell to the seventeenth century poets are vigorously canvassed. In short, Duncan argues that Grierson's edition of Donne in 1912, far from initiating the revival of metaphysical poetry, actually "marked the end" of what Duncan calls "the first stage of the metaphysical revival." And Duncan goes on to say: "Similarly, Eliot's essays were not so much a new note as a sensitive formulation of ideas that had become familiar by 1912."

This updating of the metaphysical revival is, up to a point, convincing. Undoubtedly there existed a very real interest in Donne and the other metaphysical poets from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward and the example of metaphysical poetry did, in one way or another, help determine the shape of a good deal of nineteenth-century poetry. For example, it is startling to discover that Charles Lamb could write "On an Infant Dying as Soon as Born":

She did but ope an eye, and put
A cleare beam forth, and strait up shut
For the long dark: ne'er more to see
Through glasses of mortality.

The antecedents of this quatrains are clearly metaphysical. Again, Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven" seems unmistakably reminiscent of the poetry of Donne in some of its paradoxes and in some of its more vigorous and complicated metaphors (though one hastens to add that the poem itself is as thoroughly "nineteenth century" as any poem can well be). The substantive question, however, is whether the interest exhibited by the nineteenth century in the metaphysicals is indeed the same as that which has played upon our poets of the twentieth century. Twentieth-century poetry is markedly different from late Victorian: the common denominator of these poetries is surely not their specific inheritance from the School of Donne—or at least not characteristically that.

Duncan's emphasis upon the nineteenth-century antecedents of the revival of the metaphysicals calls to mind a related present-day movement which also undertakes to account for the modern metaphysicals in terms of nineteenth-century origins. Frank Kermode's recent book, The Romantic Image, for example, represents a very intelligent and, at points, persuasive attempt to derive not merely Yeats, but also Pound, Eliot, and Hulme from the late Romantics and especially from the poets of the 'Nineties. Indeed, it is possible to interpret the revival of metaphysical poetry as the response to certain needs felt by the later Romantic poets. And Kermode has done so, though again I must say that I cannot concede his argument full conviction. Kermode, by the way, is aware of some of Duncan's arguments and tells us, citing an article in the Journal of English and Germanic Philology, that Duncan has shown that Donne was "well and truly revived long before Eliot's essays." Unfortunately, Kermode's book evidently came out too late for Duncan to be able to allude to it. It would be interesting to have his comments on some of Kermode's arguments, particularly those which tend to assimilate the modern metaphysical strain to fin de siècle Romanticism.

In any case, it would have been helpful had Duncan been more explicit in distinguishing between the impact of the metaphysicals on the nineteenth and on the twentieth centuries. Here lies the crucial issue and it is not an easy one to resolve. This general matter has caused trouble in the past. One remembers, for example, how Eliot, many years ago, in depreciating what Coleridge made of Donne, remarked that "when it came to Donne and Cowley—you will find that Wordsworth and Coleridge were led by the nose by Samuel Johnson: they were just as eighteenth century as anybody." One remembers also that I. A. Richards was to disagree and to argue that Coleridge did deeply appreciate Donne. Richards, of course, was right in the sense that Coleridge did indeed admire Donne and in his own poetry assimilated some of Donne's manner: see Coleridge's late fragmentary poetry. But Eliot was right too: the revolution in poetry that Wordsworth and Coleridge effected was not Donnean—not, surely, in the sense that that led by Eliot may be called so. If both Romantics and moderns have used Donne, it is clear that they made something quite different of him.

In general Duncan's book is strong in its scholarship: he is thorough in canvassing nineteenth-century poetry; he has a sensitive ear for echoes of the metaphysicals; and he uses good sense in organizing and deploying the material that he has gathered. The critical aspect of his book seems to me somewhat weaker.
Though Duncan duly takes note of all the featured marks of metaphysical poetry—wit, irony, ambiguity, the play with logic, the employment of a system of correspondences, a sacramental view of the world, the note of impassioned conversation, the use of dissonant images, and all the rest—I think it is less clear that he has arrived at a definition of his own which unites these concepts, or which by a process of sorting and modification gives them coherent relationship. The objection is not that Duncan's first consideration should be to provide us with a neat formulation of metaphysical poetry. It is rather that, lacking a clear conception of metaphysical poetry, he is sometimes thrown off his course by some of the vigorous reactions to the modern "revival." For example, Duncan is moved to state his fears that Donne would probably feel "undone" could he see modern interpretations of his poetry. Or, he is impelled to report that Rosamund Tuve has shown that Donne was "clearly not rebellious, mysterious, or unique," does not answer to the notions of modern metaphysical poetry, and indeed "worked within an accepted Renaissance tradition." Or again, Duncan is constrained to tell us that he thinks it unlikely "that the metaphysicals, as some critics have suggested, used words and images connotatively to give 'ironic' or 'dissonant' dimension to their work for its own sake. Poets used images to adorn or to disparage, but not to do both simultaneously." The last quotation involves a complicated confusion. Who of the modern critics argues that the metaphysical poets did both "simultaneously" (though such a critic might say that Donne or Marvell frequently developed complex shadings of tone)? And who of these modern critics would describe metaphysical poetry as meant "to adorn or to disparage"? For most of these critics have actually rejected an ornamentalist theory of rhetoric. They would maintain that Donne does not use his images "to adorn" at all, but rather that his images function to express the very substance of the poem. (Duncan elsewhere in his book agrees that in the best metaphysical poetry the metaphors are the poem.)

Indeed, the ultimate point at issue here is whether a correct view of Donne's poetry waits upon the reconstruction of the author's intention. Such a reconstruction involves the "historicism" reprehended by René Wellek and Austin Warren in their Theory of Literature. One of their examples of such historicism, by the way, is Rosamund Tuve's attempt "to explain the origin and meaning of metaphysical imagery by reference to the training in Ramist logic by Donne and his contemporaries." But, as Wellek and Warren argue, we do not need to "enter into the mind and attitudes of past periods and accept their standards, deliberately excluding the intrusions of our own preconceptions." It is certainly possible, as Duncan hints, that a Donne, transported to our time, might be surprised and even upset by the way in which twentieth-century critics and scholars have gone about describing the structure of his poetry. But then, if they could read later accounts of their poetry, so in all probability would Chaucer, Shakespeare, and John Keats be surprised.

Duncan may also have let himself be too easily browbeaten by criticism of Eliot's conception of "unified sensibility." He remarks that "recently it has become ... fashionable to dismiss" it "as an incomprehensible private myth of Eliot." One must not expect Duncan to do everything, but it would have been helpful had he presented his assessment of this fashionable view. Does he have in mind F. W. Bateson's note on the "Dissociation of Sensibility"? If so, one
remembers that Bateson himself concedes that "something like this [dissociation of sensibility] did happen. The relationship between the sensuous and the intellectual elements in poetry did change in or about 1650."

Duncan further remarks that Eliot has understood the poetry of the metaphysical poets better than they could have understood his theory about their work. But if Eliot has indeed understood their poetry, then perhaps his theorizing about it, granted that his theorizing necessarily employs twentieth-century terms, may make its own sense. The point is that we need not necessarily square it up with what we suppose to be the metaphysicians' own conception of what they were doing.

"Ambiguity" is the term that causes Duncan most trouble and is the term that is most ambiguously used in his book. The choice of this term is unfortunate, of course, though it was William Empson, not Duncan, who fixed it in modern criticism. "Richness" or Wheelwright's "plurisignification" or even "tonal depth" would be more accurate and less apt to suggest contrived obscurity or dissonance used for its own sake. The quality in question occurs in Greek poetry as W. B. Stanford has demonstrated, though a term to describe it does not occur in Greek criticism, Aristotle, for example, treating ambiguity as merely a defect. In the same way, the lack of discussion of this quality in Elizabethan and Jacobean criticism does not mean that the thing itself does not exist as an important element in metaphysical poetry.

I have dwelt in some detail on what I regard as a weakness in this book. But I do not mean to underrate its strengths. They are more than considerable. The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry will be a useful book to scholars for a long time to come. As a compendium of relevant citation and quotations it has extraordinary range. What is to be found here will serve to correct all kinds of superficial views of the revival. As a kind of test case of the interrelation of literary history and critical theory, it illustrates their necessary interplay and suggests both the magnitude and the delicacy of the task of writing fully coherent and responsible literary history. In this book, Duncan has given us a most interesting first draft of an important chapter of that history.

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I should like to begin this review of Hyatt H. Waggoner's study by quoting from another book, a collection of reports made of Faulkner's appearances in Virginia, in 1957 and 1958.* Any serious scrutiny of his remark as published there is bound to result in a necessary caution over the elaborate symbolic interpretations his recent work often seems to invite. Speaking of the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, he says:

* Faulkner in the University (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1959), ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner.
I think that no writing will be too successful without some conception of God, you can call Him by whatever name you want... That to me is the difference between Camus and Sartre, the difference between Sartre and Proust, the difference between Sartre and Stendahl. That Sartre has denied God.

This is so typical of Faulkner's manner as almost to make it paradigmatic. God is indispensable to moral certitude, but it is "some conception of God," by whatever name you wish to call Him. He is much more interested in God's creatures than in any elaborate design of creation; and the religious documents which, among other sources, he uses as the details of reference in his fiction are a part of the fictional substance. That is, the Bible helps Faulkner to define his people, not vice versa. The "Christ symbolism" which is so active a part of Faulkner criticism is very much to the point here.

... there are so few plots to use [Faulkner said in another session with the Virginians] that sooner or later any writer is going to use something that has been used. And that Christ story is one of the best stories that man has invented, assuming that he did invent that story, and of course it will recur. Everyone that has had the story of Christ and the Passion as part of his Christian background will in time draw from that...

Of course it would be imperceptive to suggest that Faulkner is being "put upon" by critics without cause; I do not wish to maintain that he hasn't put temptation in their way. Indeed, from the very beginning, as Waggoner shrewdly points out, there is a succession of image, innuendo, half parallel, and overt pronouncement that ought to convince the most reluctant critic of Faulkner's "Christian" origins and intent; and in A Fable (1954) we have what appears to be a full panoply of inventive analogue. The real question is, how ought we to take these uses of Christianity. There is a genuine risk to enlightened Faulkner criticism in the sheer weight and number of these allusions.

I should say that Faulkner is only incidentally a critic of religion, whether doctrinal or institutional. He is preeminently a student of man, good and evil, symbolic and naturalistic, and of the human relationships that inform one of man's moral inclinations. He is also, or has lately become, a "concerned" guardian of the "verities," defensive and even desperately anxious to prove that man will "endure" and "prevail." The verities are themselves seen all but exclusively on a human level—one might almost say, on the level of corporeal substance. So, Faulkner sets himself again and again the simple set of alternatives: man will progress, or he will die. All of his characters "progress"—or try to—in accepting the alternative to death. Their psychological complications are a result of the human peculiarities of choice—whether obsessively to choose a kind of being, compulsively to accept a burden of commitment, or stoically to act against community pressure in the interest of "the right." The right is not defined doctrinally or legalistically, but in terms of human, earthy, immediate, practical exigency. Religious symbolism does get "in the way," for after all the Bible (and especially the story of Christ's Passion) is a most persuasive and enduring "story" of the human enigma.

I should want to put Faulkner's concerns very close to those of Dostoevsky,
whose Brothers Karamazov he puts in a small list of books he admiringly rereads. Except that I think Dostoevsky is much more tensely concerned to preserve Christian doctrine, Faulkner much more inclined to regard the human tragedy an acting out of its myth, for what specific moral values the myth has in human appraisal. Faulkner is not only a self-styled “humanist”; he is interested in every form of good and evil, relying upon man’s instinctive discrimination concerning the enduringly good and the destructively evil.

Mr. Waggoner is not unaware of these facts, and is indeed quite admirably capable of taking them into account. His discussion of A Fable is one of the most sensible we have. Moreover, he reviews the fiction from the beginning in an earnest effort to determine its formal excellence and precision. But there are two tendencies in his review which strike me as invariably moving in a wrong direction: he regrets many of Faulkner’s choices as somehow failing to meet a standard of which Faulkner is himself not aware (or if he is aware, aware of it in a far different way); he reviews Faulkner too often from a level of interpretation and in a spirit of uncompromising demand that not only causes the work to fail but also allows the critic to admire what isn’t there. I had best explain by sampling the criticism.

Soldiers’ Pay (the title is annoyingly misspelled throughout) contains one important image, of a “falling cross and spire,” which implies “the dominant theme of most of Faulkner’s major works, his tortured and ambiguous mixture of religious denial and affirmation” (p. 3). This is all to the good, and in many ways a fine insight, even though its significance is largely forced upon the context of an unimportant book. More frequent is the tendency to take a very commonplace detail and give it an extraordinary value by relating it to a church document, as is the case of the phrase “dust in their shoes” of Soldiers’ Pay: “The image itself comes, one suspects, from the Book of Common Prayer: ‘Remember, O man, that thou art dust’” (p. 5).

Waggoner follows the line of Christ-research in his view of The Sound and the Fury, in a study that is in many respects otherwise very fine indeed. That Benjy might be considered a modern variant of the Christ figure is not unreasonable, if one realizes to begin with the deliberate reductiveness of the portrait. It is in a kind of patient insistence upon the full ecclesiastical implication of the reference that the critic errs. It is really rather obtuse to say of Benjy that “If his values prevailed, the family might be saved” (p. 45); and it is gratuitous, to say the least, to call Dilsey “a kind of foster-mother of Christ, the enabling agent of a revelation at once spiritual and aesthetic” (p. 46). Whatever else Dilsey may be, she is anything but “the enabling agent of a revelation.” Faulkner’s own brief statement of her and her race, that “they endured,” is enough to put her character in the right perspective.

This free disposition of nuance is not much more shrewd than the psychoanalytic view, offered by another critic, of Benjy as id. Neither is wholly wrong; both are ill-advised. Much more to the point is Waggoner’s discussion of Quentin and the tense struggle of wills with his father that takes place at the moment of his suicide. In fact, Waggoner’s discussion of Quentin and of the Quentin “type” in Faulkner is altogether admirable.

I find the analysis of As I Lay Dying quite ingenious and altogether unacceptable. It runs counter to almost everything that a careful and attentive reading of that
novel should reveal. “Analysis of a work of art is always in danger of distorting the object it takes apart,” he says (p. 76), by way of a disclaimer. Not only analysis but synthesis is at fault here. How is one to take this eloquent affirmation?

The novel not only re-enacts the Eucharist, it is incarnational in its very form. In it the word becomes flesh, meaning is embodied, idea takes on substance and substance gets form and so meaning. (p. 87)

I can only humbly say that the novel does no such thing, that to say this of it is to remove it from critics’ reach, and that it can be described this way only if Addie Bundren’s relationships to family and neighbors are quite deliberately distorted. This is the only piece in the book where Waggoner gives in entirely to a tendency (elsewhere always present but never altogether domineering over the text) to replace what Faulkner says by a figurative conception of what he might or should have said. The implications are everywhere in the interpretation: Vardaman’s fish “parallels Christ killed and ritualistically eaten and drunk to prevent the death of the believer” (p. 66); “Worshipper, priest, altar, and the Last Supper are all suggested by Vardaman’s early chapters” (p. 67). Addie remains an enigma to this critic: he seems to share Cora Tull’s despair of her. Is Addie “the result of a breaking up of the role of Christ and a distribution of the disunited functions among several characters” (p. 83)? The chapter is a remarkable example of what can be made of a work of art if only one makes up one’s mind firmly about it ahead of time.

There is neither space nor need to elaborate. Waggoner’s evaluations of other novels are often very shrewd, skillful, intelligent. They are seldom without some hint of earnest spiritual judgment. Not infrequently his intelligence is waylaid by an anxiety to visit dogmatic injunctions upon the scene and its people. His failure to understand Joe Christmas, for example, comes from his overpowering wish to make him a “demonstration case”: “. . . a rebuke to the community, a measure of its sin and of its corruption of Christianity from a religion of love and life to one of hatred and death . . .” (p. 108). This is not so much untrue as it is “too true.” Of course Light in August is an indictment of Protestant Christianity—among other things. It is above all an analysis of the violent disorder to which a man comes who has been morally misled and misdirected. To say that he “made no choices” (p. 116) is to miss more than half the point.

Both Pylon and Wild Palms receive a much sounder treatment. Indeed, Waggoner avoids the worst of the extremes of Pylon criticism, though I must confess that his conclusion about both these novels seems very strangely sentimental: that “in the world of Faulkner’s imagination there is finally no adequate substitute for ‘the old virtues’” (p. 147). Are we also to assume that Eliot (who is most frequently invoked here) also preaches “the old virtues”? And what are they? The reading of Absalom, Absalom! is quite sound and sensible, and the conclusion is, I should imagine, not far off from what Faulkner might have said of it: that in the end Shreve and Quentin examine the Sutpen story in terms of “classical-Christian tragedy . . .: history contains both God’s judgment and man’s decision, both necessity and freedom . . .” (p. 168). The remarks on The Unvanquished are by all odds the best we have on that book.
On the other hand, *The Hamlet* is crucially misunderstood. Here again, almost worse than in earlier chapters, Waggoner's tendentiousness dominates him. Who else would have thought of Mink Snopes as a Prometheus, "unpromethean only in his contempt for mankind" (p. 189), or insist that Faulkner "wholly identifies himself with Houston," or call Ike Snopes "little Pip, driven insane by his direct confrontation with the reality of the depths" (p. 191)?

The extravagance of these associations is even more disturbing in the light of Waggoner's good and often entirely perceptive readings of the recent work. One can certainly nod agreement to his assertion that in that work Faulkner abandons his earlier true sense of form and balance, with the result that there is a "splitting apart of behavior and imagination" (p. 223), or to the fine judgment of *A Fable*, that "we have constantly to readjust our understanding as passages of vivid but not meaningful realism give way to Biblical echoes" (p. 230). But in this latter case it is because the roles are for once reversed: it is Faulkner's extravagance and Waggoner's restraint that right the balance.

I think that Waggoner is very just in this statement, and I consider the statement itself an excellent clue to the real significance of Faulkner's religious concerns:

It is not simply that Faulkner is not Dante or Milton or Bunyan: neither is Eliot. It is rather that in Faulkner's works the crucifixion is central and paradigmatic, but the resurrection might never have occurred. (p. 247)

But one ought to ask, which crucifixion, and what is the nature of the resurrection denied in this case. Faulkner's men and women do not die on the cross; they invite violence, or commit it, and they come close at times to an appearance of wishing to push all human force to the edge of self-destruction. Nor are they resurrected, except in the only sense that Dilsey's Negro preacher from Saint Louis could have meant resurrection: as the persistence of man, that he will "endure" and "prevail." This is a wholly human circumstance, and it is attended by great risks. But these are scraps of evidence that he has "progressed" and that some cantankerous, error-laden sense of the good will and does win out. It is a vulnerable position, and Faulkner would be the last to deny its weakness. It is a mistake to judge it in terms of any extraneous symbology or doctrinal system of truths—not because Faulkner is immune to criticism on any ground, but because the merits of his work will tend to decline and even disappear under so severe a scrutiny. Above all, the best and the most scrupulous will in the world cannot conceal the fact that a system of extra-literary demands upon the fiction eventually, in some way or other, distorts it. In almost every detail, therefore, I should say that Mrs. Olga Vickery's new book, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Louisiana State University Press), is superior to Waggoner's, and a necessary corrective of it.

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The first volume of the series of drawings planned to commemorate Max Beerbohm's career as a caricaturist and cartoonist has made its debut in England and America after a delay occasioned by the death of its editor Allan Wade. The idea of celebrating each decade of Max's work as a graphic artist with a volume of his best uncollected, unpublished, or otherwise hard to obtain drawings had been Wade's, and the artist himself had long ago gladly placed his imprimatur upon the scheme. But Beerbohm's intention to write for each plate in the series "a brief critical note about the drawing or the person" was cut short by his own death in 1956—although not before he was able to select the sketches he himself felt best epitomized his work in the 'nineties.

One obvious advantage in having Beerbohm's own choice of drawings for the volume is that his selection was guided as much by a nostalgia for his subjects as by a sensitivity to the artistry with which he had sketched them. The result is that he has given us a good cross-section of the kinds of people who had most enthralled his interests, tastes, and imagination in the fin de siècle atmosphere he recorded, often satirically, in essay as well as in drawing. One is not surprised to find the book most heavily populated by such literary acquaintances as Oscar Wilde, George Moore, George Meredith, Henry James, and W. B. Yeats; the political figures who intrigued him ever since he had been "a small boy seeing giants"; and the theatrical performers whom he had probably met through his actor brother Beerbohm Tree or encountered "professionally" after he succeeded Shaw as dramatic critic on the Saturday Review. By including two rather dandified self-caricatures—one for the frontispiece of the volume and another (a rear view) for the tailpiece—Max ingeniously accomplishes his own entrance and exit with characteristic elegance and nonchalance.

The task of completing Allan Wade's editorial work on the collection fell to Mr. Osbert Lancaster, a humorist who, like Beerbohm, has shown himself to be as articulate and witty with the draftsman's pen as with the writer's. However, perhaps because Mr. Lancaster's own work is really so divergent in method and intent from Beerbohm's, he reveals in his introduction to the collection a misapprehension of the full value of this sample of Beerbohm's early drawings.

To Mr. Lancaster, one of the paramount accomplishments of Max's Nineties is that it demonstrates Beerbohm's early wisdom in disassociating himself from the all but exhausted du Maurier-Leech-Keene tradition of using the satirical cartoon as a lampoon of the upper class domestic scene. Rather Mr. Lancaster sees Beerbohm, and rightly so, as a revivalist of the tradition of the single-figure caricatural portrait, which was once so fresh and vital in the work of Vanity Fair's "Ape" (Carlo Pellegrini). As far as the artistic merits of the drawings themselves are concerned, however, Mr. Lancaster finds their chief interest to lie in the embryonic way they prefigure the maturity of craftsmanship to follow and reflect the "false starts and responsive influences from without" to be abandoned later.

It is in this latter vein of reasoning that Mr. Lancaster goes astray—or rather does not go far enough. What he fails to see, in his haste to attribute Beerbohm's multifarious caricatural styles to tentative borrowings and "false starts," is that
Max the sketch artist was just as much the virtuoso of parody as Beerbohm the writer of *A Christmas Garland*. He sees Max's isolated effort to caricature Phil May in May's own style of drawing for *Punch* as a revelation to Max himself that May's swift, heavy, but very economical line was too purely visual to be made compatible with his own conceptual approach. But Beerbohm's effort here was obviously not to adapt a style of drawing to his own uses but merely to caricature a renowned artist and at the same time to revel in a perfect parody of that artist's technique, just as his drawing of Beardsley pulling a toy French poodle is concomitantly a caricature of Beardsley's person, a mockery of his francophilism, and a parody of his style of draftsmanship.

Such drastic deviations in execution, without any attempt to fuse or extend the various techniques, is strong evidence that Max, even in this early period, was merely parodying styles rather than groping for one of his own. The clever parodist—the one who is able to simulate with only mild exaggeration and without burlesque the most characteristic spirit and form of the original—usually achieves this power to fathom others so completely only after he matures and perfects his own technique. Indeed, Bohun Lynch's discovery almost forty years ago of rudiments of the "Beerbohmian" style in such of Max's juvenilia as his self-caricatures drawn when he was fifteen (1887) and his sketches done at Oxford (1895), directly, though of course anachronistically, challenges Mr. Lancaster's conclusions. Certainly, among Max's drawings in the present collection, the caricature of, let us say, Earl Spencer (1895), with its sense of self-possessed grace and movement, is just as "Beerbohmian" as anything Beerbohm did later.

Whereas some of Beerbohm's drawings in the 'nineties were, as I have pointed out, just as parodic as his early gems of prose and verse in *A Christmas Garland*, many of his essays were just as caricatural as his drawings. Both are really species of the same art with the same mode and intent—only the medium of expression is different. One can see in this present selection that the drawing of Sir William Harcourt as a robustous multi-chinned and very solid right-triangle of a man delivering a speech in Parliament is in exact tonal accord with Beerbohm's description of him, in his essay on the "House of Commons Manner," as a speaker who, "majestic among molehills," pours out the "last poor rivulets of the old lava" of a florid rhetorical style. Or one can see how Max's profile sketch of George Moore, with its soft glowing white head undemarcated from its gray background and with a vague question-mark for the eye and cheek, later evolves into his word caricature of Moore as a person of "luminous vagueness" with an "outline [that] seemed to merge into the air around him."

Besides paralleling both the descriptive and interpretive treatment of personality in the writings, the drawings in *Max's Nineties*, like the drawings that were done later, complement the essays by offering a further insight into the kind of political and aesthetic sensibility with which Beerbohm responded to the whole *fin de siècle* decade. The enthusiasm with which he wrote on "Dandies and Dandyism" is given its full scope of expression in the loving care with which he drew the elegant poses and clothes of such dandies as Wilde, Beardsley, Earl Spencer, Cunninghame Graham, and of course his own urbane self. And the top hat, which he wrote nostalgically about in 1942 as "a black but shining old monument" of the past, is here, even in one of the early sketches of "club types," given the bright highlights with which he continued to be fascinated in his later drawings.
and which, together with the slender elegantly shod foot, became the typical Beerbohm symbol for the Victorian and Edwardian dandy.

Although Max's political figures in this series appear chiefly in caricatures rather than in cartoons and therefore carry no obvious political thesis, the exceptional cartoon sequence in which “Mr. Gladstone Goes to Heaven,” but ultimately ends up in the other place, could hardly have delighted serious-minded Gladstonians. Once again the drawings can be seen to form a harmony with the writings, for in “A Small Boy Seeing Giants” Beerbohm tells us that although he stood in awe of Gladstone the grand old statesman, his Conservative politics inherited from his father forced him to regard the aged prime minister as “a great power for evil.” We can see why this frame of mind consequently forced him to reject Punch’s presentation of Gladstone as “muscular” and in “striking” attitudes. In fact, Beerbohm’s picture of him is rather that of a mean and vulgar person: his actions are cowardly and obsequious, his face is that of an irascible Scrooge, and his misshapen top hat and enormous feet make him the epitome of the “anti-dandy.”

From all this it can be seen that in Max’s Nineties the caricatures and cartoons are as conceptual as they are perceptual in rendering the essential aspects of the personalities of the figures represented.

Much could be said about the tradition—aside from the already mentioned parodic one—to which Beerbohm’s work in this volume belongs. That Max was not a subscriber to the popular notion that a caricature necessarily had to assume the proportions of a small body and a large head is amply demonstrated by the almost miniscular heads he places upon the torsos of Arthur Balfour and Sir William Harcourt. That he sometimes reverted to the original seventeenth century Italian concept of the “caricatura” as a man drawn in the likeness of an animal can be seen, I think, in the barely suggested walrus-like head and face he gives to Sir George Lewis and the more obvious rooster-like appearance of Joseph Chamberlain (who obligingly holds out his coat tails to suggest, to my mind at least, a fowl’s wing and tail plume).

One comment should be made in anticipation of an objection to the draftsmanship of some of the drawings. The point is well taken by Mr. Lancaster that since in the ’nineties block-making by photographic reproduction on zinc was still in its infancy, the mandatory use of the line-block method with its reliance on the pen rather than on the pencil makes some of Max’s drawings in this volume appear to unfair disadvantage when compared to some of his reproduced pencil work. With this point in mind as the only real, and unavoidable, flaw in a volume of drawings which have value as both art and document for an interesting decade and which form a witty and varied companion to the writings of one of our most accomplished essayists, the peruser of Max’s Nineties should discover that he has in his hands a small treasure-house of constant delight.

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Interpretations of American Literature, according to its editors, Charles Feidelson and Paul Brodtkorb, "is designed to serve the student and the inquiring reader as a running commentary on the basic texts" of American literature. Beyond this the editors tread very cautiously. The articles neither represent "any particular mode of interpretation" nor "the full range of methods and preoccupations in contemporary discussion of American writers." The essays are to help the student "grasp particular literary facts—works or writers or movements ... by posing questions of sufficient scope and offering answers adequate to the questions asked."

The book, however, has more coherence and significance than the modest assertions of its editors indicate. The opening essay is on The Scarlet Letter and the editorial assumption that the basic texts of American literature begin here is in keeping with the nature of the entire anthology. This book is a collection of criticism about literature first—even about particular literary works first—and about movements and writers only secondarily. It nods only shyly and occasionally in the direction of the history of American literature, or the history of American ideas, or the history of American writers. To exclude such writers as Franklin, Irving, and Cooper without even an apologetic gesture is perhaps a little literally snobbish, but no one can seriously propose that any work in American literature prior to The Scarlet Letter is even close to the latter in literary eminence. And since major literary work by Poe, Melville, Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau is being done almost simultaneously one might well say that it is at this point in our cultural development that American writing achieved sufficient literary dignity to be identified as American literature.

The essays in this anthology are as often as possible interpretative essays as the title indicates. Consequently the reader's attention is concentrated as exclusively as is practical on the texts of American literature. Yet the best essays in the anthology are those which in the process of explicating the particular work or works demonstrate at the same time a sensitive awareness of the personality of the author as well as an intimate knowledge of the particular milieu in which, and perhaps partially because of which, the work was created.

Two essays will indicate the point. Calvin S. Brown's "The Musical Development of Symbols: Whitman" is one of the weakest selections in this book because of its carefully limited purpose. Mr. Brown's essay is an extract from his book Music and Literature where it serves as an effective part of his total argument. Here it is too exclusively esthetic; that Whitman utilizes musical principles in developing his symbols does not say enough about Whitman or his place in American literature to serve the purpose of this anthology.

On the other hand Dorothea Krook's "Principles and Method in the Later Works of Henry James" is one of the most fitting and significant selections. It is an analysis of the significance of the "abstraction" of James's late style. Miss Krook explains the style in terms of the ambitions and tenets stated in James's critical prefaces. She explains it in terms of the sins of pride, ennui, "cankerous sexuality," and "infernal aestheticism" which are peculiarly Jamesian preoccupations in the late novels. There is a brief discussion of James's boyhood, his
reading, and the manner in which his milieu influenced his particular way of perceiving and hence of writing. The analysis of James’s abstract style thus becomes a cornucopia from which critical information flows in plenty. Miss Krook starts with a particular problem and never loses sight of it, but on the way to solving it she exposes the reader to a welter of literary facts and insights concerning the late novels of James.

In most instances the editors have chosen essays that are more than simply interpretations of particular works. Often these essays open up into generalizations about the writer’s total work and the period he writes in so as to form something of a continuously challenging commentary on the nature of American literature itself. On the other hand occasionally, as in the instance of Mr. Brown’s essay, the editors seem to have been content with an interpretation which, though sufficient to its own purpose, is comparatively weak because of the very modesty of its intention.

There are two essays different in nature from the rest: Lionel Trilling’s “Reality in America” and Roy Harvey Pearce’s “The Poet as Person.” Each essay uses the work of two or more writers to speculate about a cultural condition. Mr. Trilling attacks an assumption about the nature of reality which he finds fostered by the criticism of Vernon Parrington and which leads to an uncritical preference for writers represented by Dreiser as opposed to writers represented by James. Mr. Pearce uses an argument between William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, exposed in their letters, to illustrate a split among contemporary poets between those who find the possibility of significant community within their own individuated sensibilities, illustrated primarily by Williams, Stevens, and Cummings, and those who find the possibility of significant community only outside the self, illustrated primarily by Pound, Eliot, and Frost.

Both essays are challenging and responsible attempts to explain difficult problems and need no apology for inclusion in this anthology. But each essay appears in the anthology in a position where one might expect more. With the exception of Mr. Trilling’s essay the editors chose to move directly from Twain to James to Hemingway. One might justify excluding Howells, Norris, and Crane, but it is regrettable that there is no discussion of Henry Adams, particularly in view of the increasing interest in his works in the past few years. Mr. Pearce’s essay is the only essay on modern American poetry and suggests that poetry gets short shrift compared to fiction. While there are two essays each on Hemingway and Faulkner, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Frost, Cummings, Williams, and others are given necessarily only the briefest discussion in Mr. Pearce’s essay.

Interpretations of American Literature suffers from the editors’ apparent unwillingness to formulate a very specific principle of selection for its essays. The arrangement of the essays and many of the essays themselves suggest that the editors’ principles of selection were often more complex than their modest admissions. Yet such problems of coherence do not keep the anthology from being a collection of significant statements about American literature.

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