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Book Reviews

The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination by James V. Baker.
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957. Pp. xiv + 308. \$4.50.

Writers are inclined to pontificate a little hastily upon Coleridge's aesthetics; it is good to have a book by a scholar who has spent years saturating himself in his subject. In focussing upon the theory of imagination, Professor Baker has gone to the heart of the matter. He emphasizes three aspects: imagination as organic, imagination as reconciling opposites, and imagination developing in the unconscious before emerging into consciousness. In these three seminal ideas he has seen the underlying unity, the Coleridgean *one* in the *many*. René Wellek in a tone of mild disparagement has termed Coleridge's criticism eclectic and unsystematic; amidst the diversity, the persistent reliance upon this trinity of related ideas rightly commands attention.

Professor Baker's exposition is richly laden. All the relevant writers of the Romantic and earlier periods are quoted and discussed: the Germans are not neglected for the English or vice-versa; Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus fit into their places. The study looks after as well as before, to the many later developments in thought which Coleridge anticipated. These many glancings give the book an authentic density. Nearly all of the ground has already been gone over in one way or another and much will be familiar to specialists. But the tight collocation of ideas from so many writers into a systematic presentation serves as a useful review, renews old awarenesses, and suggests new ones.

For example, Baker's detailed scrutiny of the eighteenth-century mechanists, against whose passive view of the mind Coleridge waged relentless war, reveals how often these men were forced to recognize a creative element in cognition. Even the arch-enemy, the sceptical Hume, was aware of the creative role of imagination—though, like his successor I. A. Richards, he might have been little interested in Akenside's and Coleridge's conviction that imagination in its highest potency offered intimations of the supernatural. Baker rightly notes that Coleridge's polemical zeal against mechanism, the result of his religious commitments, sometimes throws his criticism a little off balance. It accounts for his excessive disparagement of "fancy" and "association," for his perhaps too sharp cleavage between "fancy" and "imagination," and for his occasional failure to recognize the creativity of unconscious association.

Two chapters of special interest are those on the unconscious and on modern critical views of Coleridge. In the first are included Coleridge's interesting observations on dreams; also, in discussing Freud, Baker makes the point that Freud and Coleridge are both alike rationalists in the great Western tradition. In looking through the other chapter a reader might conclude that when a modern critic comments on Coleridge he reveals as much about himself as about his subject, or perhaps more. Baker is usually on the side of his Ancient when he feels a Modern

has misunderstood or disparaged. Yet he is never blindly partisan. He believes Eliot's emphasis upon conscious workmanship in art is a necessary corrective to some of Coleridge's ideas. Here it may be noted that conscious workmanship is not the absolute opposite of that less conscious creation of genius which Coleridge was fond of extolling. Even in the midst of a deliberate effort to solve an intellectual or artistic problem, the right unification can still come suddenly, as though the final fitting together has occurred one knows not quite how.

A book usually has the defects of its qualities. Amid his dozens of citations from other writers, Professor Baker does not always drive his own point home. He believes that too sharp a distinction between fancy and imagination should not be drawn; he quotes Coleridge's example of merely fanciful verse from Butler's *Hudibras*:

And like a lobster boy'l'd the Morn
From black to red began to turn.

Would it not be possible to come right out and say that when considering such a passage it is manifestly wrong to talk, as Coleridge does, of the simile and its referents as "fixities" and "definites"; to deny that they interact vitally? In their humble way these lines exhibit just that sort of interanimation or mutual modification which Coleridge thought the imagination should bring to pass: the grotesque figure imparts some of its tone to the morning and to the poem as a whole; the poem gives some of its own vigor to the figure.

In a still more important matter Professor Baker might himself have taken a little stronger hand in presenting his subject. He believes that when I. A. Richards adopted Coleridge's critical ideas but discarded his metaphysical assumptions, he was discarding the very element that gave these ideas their intelligible unity. Out of proper respect for his own opinion and for Coleridge's, he might have presented his reasons, if not in twenty pages, at least in four or five. Baker has offered a clue when he insists that Coleridge regarded the imagination as symbolic. But precisely because the term *symbol* has become a shibboleth in modern criticism, it is dangerous for an author to be too polite, to assume that of course his readers know precisely what he means when he uses the term. A reader without a strong grounding in idealistic philosophy might well feel that all the materials have been assembled here to demonstrate the unity of three of Coleridge's key ideas, but that the demonstration is never quite made.

Professor Baker's deepest agreement with Coleridge appears to be religious, a fact which may partially explain his reticence. Again, the agreement is partly philosophic, if philosophy and religion can here be distinguished. Coleridge owed an early and a great debt to the older English and Greek idealists, but Baker believes, quite rightly, that he often found in the German tradition from Leibniz to Schelling the most distinct formulations of the ideas that were growing in his mind. Here, where even the heavily-armed Wellek has failed, Baker is understandably reluctant to launch another full-scale attack on the citadel of Anglo-Saxon impercipience; after all, T. S. Eliot himself stands on the battlements cheering on the defenders.

Leibniz viewed all existence, physical and mental, as manifesting one vital process, essentially an image-making process, developing through successive phases; Schelling, in his own post-Kantian terms, viewed the world similarly. These

philosophies do not solve all difficulties, but they constitute an intellectual reduction as astounding in its way as that effected in our own time for the physical world by Albert Einstein; they were not only prophetic of changes to come but through their influence helped bring these changes to pass. One might even suggest that it was no accident that Einstein's successful quest for unity at a very high level of abstraction was achieved in the country of Leibniz and Schelling. An anti-metaphysical critic may point out truly enough that he makes his own discoveries with the help of Coleridge's humbler and more concrete observations, just as good work can still be done in the sciences without taking Einstein's theory into account. But these pragmatic facts do not invalidate the higher theories. In short, even after Copernican revolutions in thought many old categories and mental constructs can still be used fruitfully, and this fruitfulness does not prove the revolution to have been without significance. Here perhaps Baker is a little hasty when he suggests that Coleridge's old-fashioned "faculty-psychology" is outmoded by his own organic theory of mind. In the words of John Donne, an idealistic metaphysic is a prince lying in prison until it descends to faculties. But after a revolution the old categories must on occasion be used with a difference, and Baker rightly notes that Coleridge sometimes forgets this difference.

Although Professor Baker shows considerable familiarity with the Teutonic mysteries, his commentaries on them are sometimes misleading. In considering the relevance of Immanuel Kant to the general subject, it is not enough to recount what Kant has to say upon the imagination; the philosopher usually employs this term in a limited sense only. One must consider all that is said in the first part of the *Critique of Judgment* about the beautiful as a symbol, about the organic unity of the creations of artistic genius perhaps intimating the existence of one "supersensible substrate" underlying the dichotomous worlds of experience. Here Kant is talking about imagination in the full Coleridgean sense; here he finally reveals himself, for all his critical hedgings, to have been a crypto-Platonist after all, secretly undermining the structure of modern scepticism from within. At least so his last critique was interpreted by his successors in Germany.

Again, in writing on the distinction in the *Biographia Literaria* between the Primary and Secondary Imaginations, Baker seems to suggest that the primary imagination is a rather passive sort of poetic perception, as when Dorothy Wordsworth, without creating a fully formed poem in response to her experience, feels a birch tree to be a spirit. Unless I am mistaken on this recondite point, anything which common sense would regard as in the least "poetical" would be verging upon the domain of Coleridge's Secondary power. His Primary Imagination, as derived from Schelling, is simply the ability of the human mind to take its scattered and fragmentary sense perceptions and build these up into the matter-of-fact world that it knows, of trees, houses, people, solid and substantial, existing in time and space.

Related to this matter is one difficulty which recurs several times in the book. According to Coleridge's own vitalistic theory, the mind is creative even in its unconscious workings. Yet Professor Baker sometimes may leave an unwary reader with the conviction that the Coleridgean distinction between active and passive is the same as that between conscious and unconscious. When Coleridge

is using the terms in the precise sense appropriate to his own theory, the distinctions are different. Coleridge himself and the natural abstruseness of the subject are largely to blame if there is some confusion here.

A few generations ago, in such men as Latta, Royce, and Watson, the English-speaking world produced lucid expositors of the German higher philosophies. These men could be profitably re-read today. This reviewer has no wish to suggest that metaphysics is the same as literary criticism, or that it should displace literary criticism. Yet Professor Baker, after giving so much thought to his subject, believes that in Coleridge's case the lofty speculations liberated and enriched the more practical observations. It is still fashionable to maintain the contrary. But sometimes the very writers who express this opposite opinion admit that they are not truly acquainted with that metaphysic which they suppose to have been more a hindrance to Coleridge than a help.

Southern Illinois University

JAMES BENZIGER

The Rational and Social Foundations of Music by Max Weber. Translated and edited by Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel, and Gertrude Neuwirth. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958. Pp. lii + 148. \$5.75.

Max Weber's importance in present-day sociology can scarcely be exaggerated. Although his death occurred in 1920, his sociological studies, the major ones published posthumously, have still the impact of fresh and up-to-date thinking. Yet a search for contemporary American reviews of his monumental *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1921) reveals that the book was ignored; it seems safe to say that during his lifetime Weber was almost completely unknown on this side of the water. It is only during the last thirty years or so that his theoretical writings have been recognized by American sociologists as extremely fruitful and in many ways pertinent to the fundamental sociological problem of devising a conceptual apparatus in terms of which human social behavior may be comprehended.

In these days of specialization the breadth of Weber's knowledge is amazing. His studies had apparently no imposed limits of time or place, he was synthesizing and comparative historian of economics, politics, jurisprudence, religion, militarism, society, and knowledge. He viewed sociology as a kind of natural science that seeks to recognize regularities which may be stated as laws but that differs from other natural sciences in two important respects: in its concern with meaning and motivation in contrast to the lack of concern, for example, of chemistry with the personal values of a molecule of gas; and in its view of the laws of society, once derived, not as things in themselves but rather as instruments by means of which the discovery of causal interrelationships of historical phenomena is facilitated. Weber's sociology is concerned with regularities in meaningful social action and, in contrast to modern sociological functionalism, find the reality of social *systems* to exist in the probabilities of occurrence of predicted social actions.

In connection with the establishing of constructs by means of which to char-

acterize these stabilized patterns of social interaction, Weber perceived several qualitatively different themes, or motives, around which values and actions are organized. He calls the more important of these *rational*, *evaluative*, and *traditional*; all involve the relationship between means and ends in one way or another, but the theme of "rationality" connotes, in Weber's terms, complete freedom of choice of ends, while means are chosen purely for their efficiency; and the whole process entails a constant attempt to reduce everything to inflexible rules, laws, or conceptual models. It is Weber's contention—a leitmotif that runs through all his works—that Western Civilization alone of all the cultures of the world may be characterized by its great and continually increasing reliance on *rational* social action.

In view of this background it is understandable that the publication of the first English translation of Weber's essay on *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* should be greeted with considerable enthusiasm by anyone interested in the sociology of music. The essay was apparently written in 1911 but was not published until 1921 when it appeared twice, once as a monograph and once as an appendix to *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. The present edition represents an attempt of Martindale, Riedel, and Neuwirth, all associated with the University of Minnesota, to give a wider audience to Weber's pioneering treatise.

And, indeed, they seem to have done their best to make a book out of it. An extended introduction, a bit more than a third as long as the essay itself, gives information on Weber's ideas and attempts to explain the essay in terms of them. They have split the originally uninterrupted essay into seven chapters and assigned appropriate headings. They have provided extensive annotation, including many citations from the ethnomusicological literature since Weber's time. Yet the book as a whole is disappointing, for two reasons. First, the translation has a tendency to be literal. Weber's German was never easy to read, but this is no reason for the translators to render the essay almost unreadable in English. Their preference for English cognates of the German terms employed by Weber, rather than more familiar English words having the same meanings, results often in a kind of gibberish running completely counter to that rule of English—if not German—scholarly style demanding clarity, precision, and unequivocal communication of ideas. This is not to say that the meaning is not there; only that one has to fight for it far harder than he should be expected to, and often harder than the results justify. For example: "By adding another third to a triad, dissonant seventh chords are formed. The most important is the dominant seventh chord built on the dominant of the key with its major seventh as the third which characterizes the key univocally since it appears only in this key and in this composition as a series of thirds made out of scalable tone material." Let us examine the second of these sentences. We find the words "univocally," "composition," and "scalable" here, each in its own way subverting ready comprehension. For the first, "unequivocally," a much more common word, could have been used and, particularly in terms of Weber's discussion of "polyvocality," would have been less misleading. "Composition," in a musical context, inevitably suggests a musical work; the reader is thus quite likely to waste some time in trying to identify the particular composition—since one has not previously been mentioned—to which Weber is referring before

he realizes that in this case Weber is talking about the form of the chord. "Scalable" can be confusing until one understands that "scalable tone material" just means tones of the scale. With these three potential stumbling blocks out of the way the sentence is still not immediately clear, for the major seventh of the dominant of a key is certainly not "the third which characterizes the key," and since dominant seventh chords are under discussion the major seventh of the dominant is in any case irrelevant. Of course, it soon becomes evident that the major seventh of the key and the third of the dominant seventh chord are meant, and that it is the entire dominant seventh chord which characterizes the key, and the passage makes sense. But the whole process is simply not worth the effort, particularly since the sentence is not very important. The passage just vivisected is, unfortunately, typical of the entire essay. It was Weber's privilege to write in ambiguous fashion, and German scholars are to some extent used to this sort of thing, but a translator attempting to introduce Weber's work to an English-reading audience of sociologists and musicologists should do better than this.

The second source of disappointment lies in the scope of the monograph itself, and in the manner in which Weber treats his material. His main thesis, that the peculiar rationalizing propensities of the Western world have resulted in a series of theoretical systems embracing tone, melody, and harmony that have, when made manifest in chordal harmony, standardized instruments, and a "rational" system of notation, permitted the development of musical works and musical styles more complex than those developed elsewhere—this thesis is never outspokenly developed. If the reader is not fairly familiar with Weber's other work he is likely to miss the point, since the editors' introduction only partly compensates for the lack of explicit orientation in the essay. To be sure, the erudition Weber displays is tremendous; he utilizes as examples a wealth of comparative historical material ranging from ancient Greek to modern Western music, and from Ewe and American Indian music to that of ancient and modern China and India. But it all amounts to a hodge-podge of miscellaneous information that contributes little to the exposition of his central concept of rationalization, or "rule-making," as the major force in the development of Western music.

The purely social, as against rational, foundations of music are sketchily treated; Weber merely mentions, in passing, some ways in which certain musical factors have been conditioned by specific social developments. Thus, the piano attained its importance because it made a nice middle-class article of furniture; sound-box instruments developed in the West because "the handling of wood in the form of boards and all finer carpenter's and wooden inlay work is much more typical of Nordic peoples than those of the Orient"; and the technical development of Western instruments is associated with organized musicians' guilds of thirteenth-century Europe. But one searches in vain for the systematic attempt to correlate social with musical values the title of the essay leads one to expect.

The reader beginning this book with the respect for Weber his other works warrant is likely to be disturbed by the realization that, in constructing this essay, Weber has confused the music of the Western world with its musicology. This leads him to assert, for example, that the development of chordal harmony had to wait upon the invention of a "rational" notation system and to imply

consistently that rules somehow had priority over performance in Western music. Even if we grant Weber's point that Western musicology has gone farther than other musicologies in trying to make purely musical "sense" out of music, we are still faced with the fact that the conceptual models produced by the rationalized musicology of Western culture have bearing on the actual music only when these models or rules have been accepted by the people producing and experiencing the music, and even then only as there arise tendencies to perceive the complex phenomena of music in terms of the models and to force these phenomena to conform to the models. Western musicians, relatively or completely in ignorance of the model-building of the musicologists, nevertheless create and perform music that is undeniably Western in style, and Weber's implicit suggestion that the rules form the music must be rejected.

While *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* was undoubtedly a pioneering venture in the sociology of music, the editors' assertion that it "forms a test case as to the values of sociological and musicological sciences for each other" is happily not true. If it were, there would now be no sociology of music, for Weber failed in this treatise to indicate much connection between the subject matter of two disciplines. The real importance of this work lies not particularly in its content, but in the fact that one of the greatest of twentieth-century sociologists was willing to extend his researches into a realm of discourse that in 1911 was commonly considered far removed from the province of the social, political, and economic theorist. As an objective and comprehensive history of certain aspects of musicological theory it has value, to be sure, but to modern sociology of music it stands as forerunner rather than ancestor, and its historical significance resides not in its methodological or factual contributions to the field but in the bare circumstance of its existence.

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RICHARD A. WATERMAN

Literature and Belief: English Institute Essays 1957. Edited by M. H. Abrams.
New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. Pp. xiii + 184. \$3.75.

It is hardly too much to say that the size of this small volume is in inverse ratio to the importance of its subject. The immediate question of how doctrine and value operate in literature takes us inevitably to further questions, ultimately to the fundamentals of literary structure and ontology. Though not until the 1920's explicitly mooted and named, by I. A. Richards, the "poetry and belief" problem is virtually coterminous with all literary criticism and, as Professor Abrams points out, implicit in the many "defenses" of poetry (whether so named or not) since Plato's attack. For these reasons alone it cannot be dismissed on the grounds of its probable insolubility.

Six essays, with the editor's brief foreword, make up the book, four of them from a conference on the topic at the 1957 English Institute. Two additional studies by Professors Nathan A. Scott, Jr. and Louis L. Martz are from other Institute conferences held in 1956 and 1957 respectively. Those by Professors

Abrams, Scott, and Cleanth Brooks confront the issue in theoretical terms. Professor Martz provides a case study from the poet's viewpoint by examining Wallace Stevens' poetry after *Harmonium* against his own statement that in a disbelieving age the poet must "supply the satisfactions of belief, in his measure and in his style." Aside from its explicative value, this essay is a happy inclusion. It shows that the belief problem is not one confined to works which embody readily paraphrasable ideas, but extends in subtler forms even to so-called pure poetry, poetry "palpable and mute."

For no poem, however "palpable" or, as Ransom has it, "physical," can be really mute. Every created object, Father Walter J. Ong argues, is a word. It shows thought, something true *a fortiori* of a poem since "it is not only, as a totality, a word, but the stuff of which it is compounded is words" (p. 82). Father Ong's essay will disappoint those who seek some critical *modus vivendi* with poems whose predicates seem too overt for mere mythical acceptance, where reader disbelief can be suspended only at the cost of some impoverishment of the total aesthetic experience. He largely compensates for deliberately neglecting this central dilemma by discriminating between belief *that* and belief *in*, belief as opinion and belief as faith. Behind the objective form of his creation, his "mask," lies the writer's "voice," summoning us to an act of faith that does not necessarily require assent to the propositional details of its structure. "If we cannot believe in Prospero as a real magician, we can believe that the playwright is using him to convey some further word or truth to us" (p. 103). But what kind of "truth"? There seems small comfort in Father Ong's admission that it "may be a very mysterious matter" (p. 102). But his argument is more than a discerning restatement of aesthetic distance in existential terms. It amply fulfils his aims: "to improve our perspectives and to reveal how limited some of our common views of this problem really are" (p. 93). That these aims are worthwhile is clear when we reflect that such pseudo-solutions as Richards' "pseudo-statements" arise mainly from the crudely reductive way in which the problem has frequently been formulated.

Professor Douglas Bush, who seems in strange company here and confesses that he does not "breathe easily in the rarified air of aesthetic theory" (p. 33), modestly confines himself to inquiring how far the non-Christian reader can "apprehend and assimilate" the essentially Christian poetry of the past. Since Professor Bush himself can hardly be considered unsympathetic to Christian values, let alone critically insensitive, nothing could more eloquently demonstrate the complex embarrassments of the belief question than his profession of limited response to Crashaw, to Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, and to Hopkins' "terrible" ones. That he finds it otherwise (as do his students) with Herbert, Milton, and the Eliot of *Four Quartets* he ascribes to their possessing an "experiential validity," a "truth to life," recognizable even by non-believing readers (p. 41). On much the same grounds Professor Abrams downgrades Blake's prophetic poems, Gide's *Counterfeiters*, Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*, and that most recent challenge to aesthetic tolerance, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. These come short of success because they affront "the beliefs and prepossessions of our common experience, common sense, and common moral consciousness"; they "require our consent to positions so illiberal, or eccentric, or perverse that they incite counterbeliefs which inhibit the ungrudging 'yes' that we grant to masterpieces" (pp. 28-29).

As Professor Abrams is careful to insist, this is something quite different from a doctrinal barrier between work and reader. The latter may without prohibitive loss be waived. There is little new in his position, which sounds very much like that from which the neo-humanists objected to Wordsworth. The notable difference is that Professor Abrams is less open to the charge of separating content and form. His requirement of moral and experiential soundness is posited not as an end but as a means, as a precondition of artistic excellence. Though much can be said for this view, it is scarcely a solution to the problem. (Professor Abrams doesn't pretend it is.) We may ask for instance how it differs from Eliot's celebrated test of coherence, maturity, and fidelity to experience, which Shelley flunked so badly, and which, on closer scrutiny than it usually receives, seems only to beg the question. To assume an experiential community among readers is doubtless the best way of avoiding the dead-end of critical relativism. Yet an objecting relativist would be quick to draw evidence for his objection from this very book. Professor Bush, presuming that "full response to the *Paradiso* is available chiefly to Christians," shares the secular reader's diminishing enjoyment as he progresses from the first to the third part of the *Divine Comedy* (p. 42). Yet Professor Abrams, who describes himself as "an infidel *in partibus fidelium*" (p. 5), not only considers the whole work a masterpiece but finds that one of the most theologically assertive passages in the *Paradiso* (Piccarda's "In His will is our peace") can be "appreciated profoundly, independently of assent to its propositional truth" (p. 22).

But for other and better reasons interested readers will applaud Professor Abrams' contribution (as did this reviewer on its earlier appearance in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*). Because it sets the relevant issues in their proper context of traditional criticism and aesthetics and because it distinguishes, by familiar illustrative examples, among various forms and levels of belief, it ought to be required reading for anyone who would enlighten us further.

Professor Brooks of course explores the question within the organic formalism primarily identified with his name. And in view of the many current attacks on his theory—they range from the cogent to the downright uninformed—it may not be amiss to remark here that three of his collaborators (none of them "new" critics) accept without hesitation his familiar insistence that ideas in literature subsist in a mode of inner coherence, not external correspondence. None directly challenge it, though some imply or express important qualifications. Professor Scott for example notes the "incorrigibly referential thrust" of words (p. 112), which leads him to question especially the priority of the medium in poetic creation. This heuristic notion of composition is a corollary of the formalist's totally closed structure, whose very virtue of establishing literary autonomy ironically enforces critical silence. Drawing on Maritain's *Creative Intuition*, Professor Scott argues instead for the primacy of the poet's "vision," his intuitive grasp of reality, which is not whimsical but rather "in accordance with what are his most fundamental beliefs about what is radically significant in life . . ." (p. 123).

Some readers are sure to bridle at Professor Scott's further conviction that this orienting vision is essentially religious. And even within the framework of his own thesis his flat declaration that "criticism itself must, in the end, be theological" (p. 133) seems unnecessary. His essay is valuable rather for recog-

nizing our present need to define, in terms that do justice to our whole experience of literature, that obscure mid-position that the verbal arts occupy between non-aesthetic discourse and the conceptual innocence of music.

Professor Brooks himself raises the question whether in contextualist theory poetry "has not won its independence at the terrible price of having detached itself from reality" (p. 65). His answer reviews without surrendering the cardinal points of his long-held theory. But he also meets the related charge that structural coherence provides no criterion of appraisal: "our criterion for judging coherence . . . is . . . our basic pattern of human nature. . . ." Without a belief in this basic pattern, "the work of art is indeed incredible and monstrous" (p. 71), a conclusion which, like those of Professors Bush and Abrams, seems at once irrefutable and insufficient as a solution. One recalls Eliot's observation that literature must be defined, but cannot be judged, by literary standards alone. But modern organic theory is no more successful than its less distinguished rivals in telling us how to apply the extra-literary human constants, or even what, exactly, they are. Nor can it of its nature do so, witness the fate of Winters' attempt.

Yet though the critics of Professor Brooks' persuasion have done much to focus attention on this puzzle, they have certainly not created it. It is a very real problem, always most insistent when criticism is at its best, when, according to Matthew Arnold, it is truly "disinterested." But never completely so. The authors of *Literature and Belief* remind us that literature is inescapably if mysteriously involved with values. A criticism whose disinterest has become sheer indifference will therefore not alone be incommensurate with its object, but, like the phantom of pure poetry itself, have attained only the futile autonomy of the dead.

Wayne State University

EMERSON R. MARKS

Literary Reviews and Essays by Henry James. Edited by Albert Mordell. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957. Pp. 409. \$10.00.

This volume reprints for the first time sixty-two reviews and essays published by Henry James in the years 1865 to 1884. None of them will compel any major reinterpretation of James as a critic, but each review is a characteristically engaging example of James's critical practice. Accordingly, we must be grateful to Albert Mordell for collecting them, seeing them through the press with a minimum of error, and accompanying them with full factual annotation. Our debt to Mr. Mordell ends here, for his interpretative notes will not stand much scrutiny.

These reviews are worth having because they constitute the further adventures of a singularly attractive mind, a generous but firm critical intelligence which looks directly into the center of literary questions. They also supplement our knowledge of James's interest in several authors on whom he wrote at greater length—Turgenev, Arnold, George Eliot, Howells, Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert, and

others. Except for the Arnold essay, which provides a rather formidable catalogue of the critic's virtues, these studies are all the more interesting because they are partial, tentative assessments and not final statements of tempered judgment. Most of them glance at an author's less imposing works—the poetry of Howells and George Eliot, Flaubert's *Temptation of St. Anthony*, Turgenev's *Virgin Soil*, some unrepresentative sketches by Sainte-Beuve; they therefore require James to stay close to particulars, to expose the specific grounds for his judgment. Such reviews as these are valuable illustrations of James's critical method and also indispensable footnotes to the longer essays. A few of the reviews have the special attraction of strangeness—an unsparing attack on Hardy as an imitator of George Eliot, close critical evaluations of the dull piety of Froude and Kingsley, the rather startling observation that a book by Louisa May Alcott is likely to subvert children, and searching examinations of such improbable subjects as Mormons, Indians, and communists. But when James attacks his proper subjects, when he states the problems peculiar to the historical novel or prophesies the literary biographer's preoccupation with *minutiae*, what he says is more fresh and pertinent than any remarks which any present critic is likely to make on these matters.

James's first concern is always to hit off the precise quality of the author under consideration. He tastes, he savors, and then he proceeds to make concise, accurate formulations which stand up extraordinarily well. Thus, he finds that Renan is delicate and pure but his fault is "intellectual foppishness." Taine is powerful but lacking in subtlety; his images are stronger than his ideas. Gautier's style is perfect, but he has the mind of "an intelligent poodle." Daudet is "in two words . . . the most *charming* storyteller of the day." Mérimée's salient trait is "reserve"; he is "a sly fox . . . not a writer of rich genius." Turgenev's "great quality" is "the union of the deepest reality of substance . . . with the most imaginative, most poetic touches." Hitting off the precise quality is the heart of James's method; it is the first and surest test of critical success. If the formulation is correct, it reveals the true and permanent properties of its subject. The next step is judgment, which may be of less permanent value, as James himself often recognizes. When James proscribes an author for a certain audience, notes that his own age has emphasized humor at the expense of sublimity, or regrets Stendhal's misfortune in being judged by "an English tribunal," he is acknowledging the limitations of a particular upbringing, a particular century, a particular nation. If we wish that James cared more for Stendhal or Flaubert and less for George Sand, we may take some comfort in James's historical relativism. If a few—remarkably few—of his judgments now seem deficient, he is no more than the creature of his time and no less than the most discerning critic produced by his nation in his century.

In passing judgment, James invokes such criteria as form, verisimilitude, and intellectual soundness, but his ultimate decisions issue from the organ of taste—the critical palate. Sooner or later, James raises the question of taste and its opposite, vulgarity. His adventurous palate is receptive to a great variety of writers. The versatility of his taste is best seen in little matters—when he appreciates the ingenuity of so fundamentally unsympathetic a man as Martin Luther, savors the "humor and point" of the paragraph in which Renan fancies himself

as the master of slaves, enjoys the Oneida Perfectionists' odd allusion to free love, "one family relation." He is tolerant enough to entertain Julian Hawthorne's intolerance of the Saxons, but what he will not endure is Hawthorne's inadequate, unpersuasive expression of his intolerance.

Morality has become the most vulnerable of James's criteria, but his moral judgments are as careful as any others he formulates. He often demands only that the characters of a novel exhibit a decent capacity for conscience. He is less concerned to find perfect dramas of poetic justice. But even immorality need not be a simple basis for condemning a book or essay. Of a narrative that reveals Sainte-Beuve to be "very little of a moralist," James can say: "To a serious mind it offers perhaps more matter for reflection than any of the other essays." He finds moral questions to be worth examining, and for that reason, exponents of unexamined morality, such men as Froude and Kingsley, win no praise from him. For James, as for the authors he admires, moral judgments must be hard won, never easily arrived at.

Albert Mordell is a strange companion for an author of such delicate discernment. He exhibits just that grossness of taste which James has in mind when he assails "those who swallow without tasting." It would be hard to find an editor less suited to appreciate James. Fortunately, Mr. Mordell saves most of his misprints for his own annotation; he cites, for instance, a novel called *The Sacred Font* and such critics as O. F. Matthiessen, Richard Blackmuir, and F. R. Lewis. His writing is clumsy and inexact. He specializes in one-sentence paragraphs, of which my favorite is: "James also refers to Renan's urbanity." Naturally, Mr. Mordell does not know what to make of James's concern for style. When James sharply attacks a critic named G. B. Smith for failing to appreciate "the niceties of diction" and for using words like "spake," Mr. Mordell, who gets off an occasional "nay" himself, tells us what the real trouble is: "James is captious because he differs with Smith in some literary opinions in which James is wrong." James records at length his carefully reasoned objections to Hugo's *Ninety-Three*, but Mr. Mordell rejects them; James, he reveals, is piqued because Hugo "was a propagandist for radicalism." Elsewhere in this very book, James shows how little his political conservatism colors his literary criticism: he notes the decline in Wordsworth's writing after the poet turned conservative and praises Taine's indictment of *l'ancien régime*. Mr. Mordell seems not to have digested these passages.

Of course, Mr. Mordell is not a professional author or editor. He exposes as much when he claims for James "the right to write" or goes on to argue: "Reading about them does not make for worse reading." But Twayne Publishers is presumably a professional firm. I should like to know where its editorial staff was when Mr. Mordell turned in his manuscript.