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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

*John Donne: Essays in Celebration* edited by A. J. Smith. London: Methuen, 1972. Pp. viii + 470. \$20.00.

Following the editor's intelligent discussion of the permutations of Donne's reputation, this quartercentenary volume presents fifteen methodologically varied essays on the verse and prose. The range of the collection is great, attesting to the intellectual liveliness and diversity of current Donne studies.

Eleven essays treat the poetry, ten of them the secular verse. Of these, A. J. Smith's analysis of "A Farewell to Love" as Donne's creative response to a rich body of traditions is the finest learned study of a single Donne lyric since John Freccero's explication of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Indirectly answering Helen Gardner, whose Donne is "absurdly placed among idealists and transcendentalists," (p. 126) Smith argues that Donne expresses a "sexual consciousness undefined" (p. 90) in earlier love poetry, reminding us that his "instinct was to subvert, flout, revise the received pieties of the day in the name of hard actuality." (p. 129) The most impressive of the other essays on the verse are Howard Erskine-Hill's comparison of *Satyre IV* with Pope's revision and Margaret McGowan's examination of the epithalamia in their original courtly setting. The former is much the best study of the fourth satire, if not of the satires generally; the latter is an exemplary piece of historical scholarship whose discussion of the way "social context . . . determined form" (p. 217) should be extended into the rest of Donne. Patricia Thomson does this somewhat in her latest piece on the poetry of patronage, concentrating on the verse letters to noblewomen, in which she detects Donne's habitual "intellectual restlessness" (p. 312) as well as a fine adjustment of a Petrarchan stance to particular social circumstances. Alan MacColl's informative essay on the circulation of Donne's poems in manuscript (which he limits to the second generation impact) would have been strengthened by a more careful consideration of their contemporary social context.

In a collection that lacks independent studies of the *Anniversaries* or the religious poetry, it is somewhat surprising to discover two pieces on Donne and music. Brian Morris and John Hollander both assume that Donne's verse was beyond the resources of contemporary music: Morris claims it required the operatic *recitativo* settings only available fifty years later and Hollander, who calls for a reexamination of Donne's prosody by modern linguists, believes Donne's complex use of contrastive stress can only really be handled by twentieth-century composers. Returning to Ovid and Propertius as touchstones, Roma Gill examines Donne's elegies against their ancient models. Devoting considerable attention also to Donne's many contemporary allusions (which are actually a substitute context for the Roman poets' mythology), she stresses Donne's closeness to "native dramatic tradition," (p. 66) noting, for example, a specific connection between "The Bracelet" and Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda*.

What emerges finally, however, is unremarkable or disappointing: the promising comparison with the Latin love elegists lacks sufficient articulation and the author, whose silence about the recognized influence of the Neolatin poet Maximianus might be excused, irresponsibly ignores Anthony LaBranche's 1966 *Modern Language Review* article, the finest study of the elegies to date.

The other essays on the poetry I shall note briefly. Dominic Baker-Smith gives a chronological account of Donne's personal search for religious authenticity, noting particularly the influence of Fra Paolo Sarpi. Barbara Hardy discusses the emotional subtlety of the *Songs and Sonnets*, but she essentially (if eloquently) restates some familiar critical opinions. Eluned Crawshaw's cautious study of Donne's alchemical symbolism complements the earlier work of Duncan and Mazzeo (whom he only mentions in passing), but concentrates upon the encomiastic verse. Brian Vickers' overwritten survey of the topic of hyperbole is only minimally useful.

Two of the three essays on Donne's prose merit close study. Sydney Anglo carefully recreates the broad controversial context of *Ignatius His Conclave*, informing us that it is part of a promised work on "the reception of Machiavelli in Tudor England." (p. 360) D. W. Harding clarifies the intellectual and emotional content of the *Devotions*. W. Moelwyn Merchant's narrower study of Donne's sermon to the Virginia Company gathers some useful data but brings the volume to an unspectacular close.

For this reviewer, these essays point to two related issues in Donne studies: the question of audience and the problem of the critical value of biographical material. Critics, like Barbara Hardy, who seem to ignore the private character of Donne's poetry are apt to make errors similar to Dryden's when he objected to the way Donne "perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy." Roma Gill's discomfort with what she calls the "fairly irrelevant nastiness" (p. 57) of the love elegies is related to her failure to appreciate them as male audience performances. On the other hand, Margaret McGowan's essay on the epithalamia is admirable for its careful definition of audience: she understands that "Donne's verse . . . should be studied as the natural expressions of a highly literate society" (p. 175) "whose criteria of expectation assumed by poet and audience alike" (p. 177) we need to examine closely.

Concerning the relationship of Donne's life to his art, it is curious that we still encounter a strong aversion to the use of biographical data in criticism. Both MacColl (p. 33) and Hardy explicitly avoid "reading life into works." (p. 70) Even though he necessarily assumes a close relation between the *Devotions* and Donne's personal experiences, Harding is surprised that Donne is so "explicit and specific about his personal sins" (p. 394) in a work meant for publication, forgetting that, just previously, he had alluded in his Lincoln's Inn sermons to his embarrassing past. Other contributors to this anthology acknowledge the narrow relevance of biography. Erskine-Hill wonders about a connection between "the fearful attitude toward the law in *Satyre IV*" (p. 282) and Donne's life and environment, but had he recognized this and the preceding three satires as Inn-of-Court pieces, the matter might have been brought more into focus. (Philip Finkelpearl's book on John Marston illustrates what might be done with such information.) Baker-Smith's examination of Donne's intellectual-spiritual development commits him to noticing biogra-

phical-literary affiliations, so that he seems free to speculate, for example, how Mirreus and Graius of *Satyre III* might be "discarded *personae*" for Donne whose "satiric exposure [is] the echo of a personal decision." (p. 407) But, on the whole, the contributors to this volume, like most other contemporary critics and scholars, seem haunted by the spectre of the "biographical fallacy" and only reluctantly discuss the "interanimation" of Donne's life and art.

In the case of an essentially coterie author like Donne, the issues of audience and the life-art relationship are closely joined. Donne's readers knew him personally, for the most part, and his habitual self-dramatizing played itself off against this knowledge. Even for modern readers, however, reading Donne is a curiously personal matter: the tone carries over. Harding makes a comment in his essay that brings the whole matter home to us: "The biographical illumination that the book offers is relevant to the question of its continuing significance: the sort of man he was defines the readers who can, and those who can not, meet Donne here in the *Devotions*." (p. 385) Donne, it seems, not only chose his contemporary readers (as far as this was possible), but also his audience in posterity. For the generations following Donne's, this has not simply been a matter of the intellectual difficulty of his works, but one of his personality as well. Now that we have in R. C. Bald's biography a scrupulously objective and full account of Donne's life, we can begin, perhaps, to put the man and his work together once more—not in order to make him over into our own image (though this is partly inevitable), but in order to hear and respond to his best writing as the truly subjective utterance it is, as aware of its personal as of its cultural and intellectual roots.

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*Samuel Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory: The Intellectual Context of the "Preface to Shakespeare"* by R. D. Stock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973. Pp. xxi + 226. \$8.50. *The Spanish Plays of Neoclassical England* by John Loftis. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974. Pp. xiii + 263. \$10.00.

Though neoclassical drama and dramatic criticism occasionally still bring forth condescension if not sneers from some scholars and readers, the publication of these two books attests to the continuing interest in and vital controversy about this area. Both are more than academic exercises; both are presented by scholars with more than academic commitment.

Perhaps as is true for any "period" of literary history, the major problem in coming to a firm comprehension of the middle and later eighteenth century is finding acceptable terminology with somewhat agreed upon definitions adequately to categorize writers and their individual attitudes in order to establish those similarities and repetitions of ideas which then become "lines of development," "schools," or "traditions." As the dust jacket statement implies and as Mr. Stock documents, the eighteenth century has engendered a superabundance

of terms, usually arriving like good and evil in antithetical pairs, with which the scholar by judicial selection might polarize all the writers into opposing camps in order to document the demise of one era and the birth of another. From the older, and perhaps grosser, distinctions between neoclassical and pre-Romantic, the oppositions have been nicely refined by the application of humanist, rationalist, sentimentalist, traditionalist, and as Mr. Stock notes, ". . . the last few years have seen several attempts to persuade us that Johnson was an Augustinian, a Hobbist, a Thomist. . . ." (p. xiii) Though each of the new terms may offer a useful measuring device, there is always a danger that the devising researcher will unwarily begin to imitate Procrustes and produce a view of the age that too perfectly fits his terminology.

It is one of the virtues of *Samuel Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory* that Mr. Stock is aware of the danger and offers labels only tentatively and only after a scrupulous and exhaustive examination of the evidence. This may well be "the first study to sort and investigate the criticism of this period so thoroughly," as the dust jacket asserts, for the array of sources is impressive and convincing. Reasonably wary of seeking out only "influences," so often impossible to determine with certitude, Mr. Stock has surveyed critical statements from Boileau through Johnson's later contemporaries, British and continental, from major critical documents to minor reviews in periodicals and passing allusions in contemporary novels in order to establish the context, insofar as it can be known, of *The Preface to Shakespeare*.

Each chapter is devoted to a meticulous analysis of Johnson's major points in light of the contextual background, with an aim to explore the age itself and the originality, idiosyncrasy, and ultimate worth of Johnson's statements. Stock's conclusions are neither surprising nor very new—by which is meant praise; as he quotes Johnson: "There are truths which, as they are always necessary, do not grow stale by repetition," to defend the lack of "originality" in *The Preface*, so one might explain the necessity of reaffirming the value of this study. Applying for the most part a balance and impartiality which he finds a virtue of Johnson's own critical procedure, Mr. Stock has weighed Johnson's virtues and faults, ultimately to fix the overall value of *The Preface*. Johnson, he determines, opposes the sentimentalist doctrines and the rationalist in favor of a reflective position. He resembles Dryden, Swift, and Burke in his basic traditionalist suppositions, many of which Mr. Stock indicates he shares. *The Preface*, while idiosyncratic in some parts, is not "original," but in the realm of criticism, which Johnson sees neither as impressionism nor science but art, the "decisive" statement, the grand "summing up" is often more important. His examination of the style of the work finds it not always Johnson's best but better than some scholars have allowed.

A few aspects, minor to be sure, are less happy. At times, especially in the opening discussion of eighteenth century attitudes toward reason, the antithesis between traditionalists on the one hand and the rationalists and sentimentalists on the other tends to grow a bit overly rigid, to the point where those critics, even Hume, who do not easily fit, are implied to be confused. And then, after the scrupulous setting up of such categories, later to deny that a certain position taken by Johnson is "pre-Romantic" seems less than meaningful since the term itself has lost most of its validity. Perhaps Mr. Stock felt it necessary to refute

other schoars who have applied the term to Johnson, but here it seems out of place.

To defend Johnson's use of "Nature" in two senses, general and "sublunary," as ultimately a grand inclusiveness on Johnson's part is ingenious but less than totally convincing. The word still contains such multitudes that even our contemporaries lose themselves in its use; therefore it is not surprising that eighteenth century thinkers might shift meanings in mid-argument without being aware of the differences. On the other hand, to find Johnson's denial of dramatic illusion overly sweeping and perhaps misjudged is to oversimplify, and Stock's discussion does not seem satisfactorily concluded.

Finally, along with a defence of and some special pleading for Johnson's position and that of the traditionalists, there ought perhaps to be a greater recognition of the corollaries of eighteenth century Shakespearean criticism—the quality of eighteenth century tragedy: *Cato*, *The London Merchant*, *Irene*. However, these are but minor carpings against an excellent study which will settle a number of points of controversy and, undoubtedly, raise others. One hopes it will bring forth further contextual examinations as thoroughly analyzed and lucidly presented.

While Mr. Stock's book concentrates, John Loftis's *The Spanish Plays of Neoclassical England* expands. The focus on *The Preface* attempts to end, through extensive analysis, controversy on certain closely related matters, but Mr. Loftis has sought to investigate a wide range of interests under the inclusive term "Spanish"—literary, historical, and generally cultural—and his study will most likely lead to further research and open new fields of controversy.

Although it is obvious to all who dip into Restoration drama that there is a continuing strand of "Spanish" reference and allusion, not to mention subject matter—even the reading of anthology pieces will require one to encounter *The Conquest of Granada* if only in notes to explain Drawcansir—as Loftis indicates in his preface, scholarship, especially American, has been somewhat dilatory in failing to assess the importance of this strand through investigation of Spanish literature and history and its familiarity to Restoration writers. The Golden Age is acknowledged by everyone as important to the history of drama, but the connections to English drama of the later seventeenth century have not been fully examined in the scholarly forum, as is attested by Mr. Loftis's use of unpublished theses and dissertations to document many of his conclusions.

The two major areas of influence pursued here are the "Spanish plot" drawn from the *comedia* of the great names of Spanish literature such as Lope, Calderón, and Tirso, and the use of Spanish history, legend, and story by several English playwrights, but especially Dryden. For the general reader, less familiar with plays not often reprinted, the most valuable and fascinating parts of the study are those tracing the borrowings of situations but with shifts of tone and meaning in the plays of Wycherly and Dryden, and the close comparisons of incidents in written Spanish history with Dryden's presentation of them in *The Conquest of Granada*.

The conclusions Mr. Loftis draws seem valid enough: that Spanish influence was pervasive and widespread among playwrights, critics, and playgoers in general, especially in the 1660's and 1670's; that Dryden and his contemporaries had ambivalent attitudes toward the Spanish playwrights from whom they

borrowed, attitudes complicated by the influence of French neoclassical dramatic theory; that borrowing from the Spanish often failed to produce the value of the Spanish original because of cultural differences; that similarities between English, French, and Spanish dramatic traditions "illustrate the pervasiveness of an international literary culture." And they seem valid despite a curious tentativeness in tone, an abundance of statements introduced with "It is possible that . . .," or "It is not implausible . . ." due perhaps to the very nature of a study of "influences."

One might wish, however, some further assessment of the overall influence of the "sword and cape" intrigues and the "point of honor" theme on the very quality of Restoration drama in general that has led to its being so controversial for readers through the subsequent ages. Loftis's assessment, for instance, of *The Conquest of Granada* as owing to a host of materials dealing with the Cid, through Corneille back to Spanish medieval legend, casts some light on the problem of Dryden's attitude toward his Herculean hero and his overblown rhetoric. Some further investigation of the Spanish influence in bringing about what Lamb regarded as a fantasy world of gallantry might illuminate what still remains highly controversial—the relationship of the world of the plays to the "observed life" of the social world of England during the Restoration.

Both books are handsomely presented—I found only one misprint in each, on page 46 of the Loftis text and on page 172 of the Stock—though the Loftis would benefit those wishing to pursue the study had it, like the Stock, an index and bibliographic supplement which listed scholarly sources.

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*Keats the Poet* by Stuart M. Sperry. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.  
Pp. xi + 350. \$13.00.

Stuart M. Sperry's *Keats the Poet* is a solid achievement and merits attention not only from Keats scholars but from those generally interested in English Romanticism as well. His book is thoroughly grounded in 20th century criticism of Keats's poetry, particularly that done at Harvard, and it should be observed at the outset that the ideas it raises in chronicling Keats's intellectual and poetic development are familiar ones. Yet despite the absence of a radically new thesis, Sperry's book is remarkably fresh, for two reasons. First, the author provides scholarly reviews of the British Empiricists' understanding of "sensation" and of the vocabulary used by various 18th century scientists to explain chemical processes, both of which clearly influenced Keats's own thinking on how the imagination mixes its materials. As a result, we not only come to understand more exactly Keats's seemingly random comments on the imaginative process; we are also afforded a new perspective from which to observe the aesthetic commentary contained in the poems themselves. And second, quite apart from this intellectual background, Sperry's numerous *aperçus* into well-read works

steadily accumulate to give the effect of a new reading. Related to this is the ability of Sperry's criticism to act as both chemical reagent and solvent, examining and then quietly dissolving the varnish of some long-unchallenged critical assumptions, to reveal the fine grain and texture of the original wood.

In examining individual poems, Sperry focuses on Keats's evolving conception of the poetic imagination which, as is well known, came to be a crucial *moral* issue in his intellectual development. In fact, the book's leading assumption is contained in a passage on "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." "Like so much of Keats's other verse," Sperry writes, the poem "is most of all about the essence of poetry itself. . . ." Sperry is clearly aware that in some poems, notably *Lamia*, such a focusing may downgrade other significant themes, and at times he concedes to discuss them; but by and large Sperry's decision to concentrate his effort yields both conciseness and a shapely critical narrative. Only in the case of *The Eve of St. Agnes* does one feel that the author's approach has partly betrayed him. Sperry contends that "*St. Agnes* is not primarily a glorification of sexual experience or even, for all the condensed richness of its imagery, of the human senses. It is, rather, an exceptionally subtle study of the psychology of the imagination and its processes, a further testing . . . of the quality and limits of poetic belief." Sperry's subsequent analysis seems overly refined, and may in fact evince that "grim intellectual seriousness" which he decries in some previous commentaries. Without question, Sperry accomplishes what he sets out to do, namely to show how in *St. Agnes* "Keats is both using and spoofing the conventions of romance . . ."—but that's only part, and probably not the major part, of the story.

Preceding Sperry's various analyses of the poems themselves, however, are the two chapters devoted to the history of ideas both of great interest. The first deals with definitions of a notoriously amorphous term—"sensation." He notes that this phenomenon is in fact "a *process*, an assimilation of outer stimulus and inner response that proceeds through time," adding further that "by Keats's day the notion of sensation as a continuum was, in one way or another, assuming ever greater relevance to poetry." Yet while poets like Wordsworth and Keats "were finding a broad and fluid notion of sensation ever more fundamental to their sense of poetry and its basis in human experience, their philosophic contemporaries were becoming steadily more dissatisfied with the inexactness of the concept yet were discovering the extraordinary difficulties of defining it with any precision." Sperry then turns to Locke. He notes that although Locke's first definition of sensation in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* "appears to designate a relatively distinct and individual perception," in elaborating his thought the philosopher clearly introduces "the notion of a *process*. It is 'the actual *entrance* of any idea into the understanding by the senses' that constitutes sensation." But, of course, it was the *way* in which this process occurred which was to be a central preoccupation of subsequent British empiricists. That is to say, the difficulty in defining sensation was bound up with "the division between the objective and subjective worlds, nature and mind. . . ." Sperry then notes that common to both late 18th century aesthetic criticism and much British associationism was the notion "of a vital accommodation between mind and object, perception and sensation, operating in a way most analogous to a kind of instinct"; this instinct theory at least "offered a practical bulwark against the

extreme skepticism of Hume. . . ." Yet despite its currency, "the notion of some inherent instinct adjusting sensation to perception and mediating between the world of consciousness and that of external reality was tenuous at best and subject to continual questioning."

Sperry then focuses on a single writer who puzzled over these problems, Abraham Tucker. He chooses Tucker not because he was particularly significant to his age, but because his treatise *The Light of Nature Pursued* strongly influenced Hazlitt, who in turn powerfully shaped Keats's thinking. In a manner which in some ways anticipated Coleridge, Tucker differentiated between "imagination" (synonymous with "the total contents of the mind and its faculties as they have developed through time and as they exist in their capacity fully to respond to new experience") and "understanding" ("the deliberate use of our faculties for some particular end or purpose"). But what distinguishes Tucker was his conceiving of a "necessary cooperation" between imagination and understanding, whereby the mind's "store of knowledge can acquire an autonomy of its own, a freedom from any mechanical dependence on the trains of association through which it has been achieved. Such knowledge that has become habitual and spontaneous he describes as 'instinct.'" Thinking ahead to Keats's metaphoric statements on how the imagination operates, Sperry sums up Tucker's achievement in this way:

The imagination, as a kind of instinct, must be latent and play 'an under part' in guiding the intelligence even in its more customary and methodical operations, just as the understanding must act to 'transfer over some part of her treasures to the imagination' in return. Yet such reciprocity cannot be described so much as a process of transference as an act of genuine coalescence, for it involves for Tucker a *qualitative* change supported by his notion, borrowed from chemistry, that 'a compound may have properties resulting from the composition which do not belong to the parts singly whereof it consists.'

The second of Sperry's preliminary chapters, entitled "The Chemistry of the Poetic Process," pursues the notion that "for Keats, certain fundamental analogies between the laws of physical change and the processes of the imagination were current and readily available in the chemical theory of his day." Until now, no one has observed systematically "how many of Keats's favorite words for referring to poetry or the process by which it is created—'abstract' and 'abstraction,' 'spirit' and 'spiritual,' 'essence' and 'essential,' 'intense' and 'intensity,' 'distill' and 'distillation,' 'empyrean,' 'ethereal,' 'sublime'—all have more or less exact meanings in the chemistry of his day." For example, Sir Humphry Davy, in his discussion "Of Radiant or Ethereal Matter," says that "'their principal effects seem rather to depend upon their communicating motion to the particles of common matter, or modifying their attractions, than to their actually entering into combination with them. . . ." Reviewing a number of Keats's well-known comments on the imagination and the creative process in which (to pursue this example) the word "ethereal" figures, Sperry then shows how the "notion of an ethereal matter forever at work in the world's atmosphere and bringing about continual changes in its elements offered Keats a useful and suggestive parallel to the operations of the spirit of poetry." One instance among many: in writing to Tom from Scotland, Keats declares, "I shall learn poetry

here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows." Sperry's scholarship proves useful as well in glossing familiarly obscure passages in the poetry, such as these lines from Book III of *Endymion* wherein Keats pays tribute to

*ethereal things* that, unconfin'd,  
Can make a ladder of the eternal wind,  
And poise about in cloudy thunder-tents  
To watch the abysm-birth of elements.  
Aye, 'bove the withering of old-lipp'd Fate  
A thousand Powers keep religious state,  
In water, fiery realm, and airy bourne;  
And, silent as a consecrated urn,  
Hold sphery sessions for a season due.  
Yet few of these far majesties, ah, few!  
Have bared their operations to this globe.

In showing how consistently Keats drew upon chemical terminology to explain "the origin and operation of poetry as an immaterial or 'spiritual' power active throughout the universe," Sperry does not claim that Keats did so with conscious, theoretical intent. The vital point is that Keats's "sense of artistic creativity was partly subliminal and largely metaphoric." Knowing the scientific reference of these analogies, however, is quite telling.

The remaining chapters of the book are to be viewed in the light of these first two. The light is never glaring; Sperry applies his scholarship subtly and with grace. To be sure, not all of his analyses are uniformly satisfying. I have already noted my disagreement with his treatment of *St. Agnes*; the irony in *Lamia* may not be nearly so conscious as the author argues; the "indeterminacy" (Sperry's word for the spirit of irony which pervades the odes) that he discerns at the end of "Ode to Psyche" seems less darkly ominous than is suggested. One could go on, but the book's virtues are far more important. Not the least of them is Sperry's ingenious grappling with the final lines to "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Questioning whether the epigrammatic close functions as one proposition among many such expressed in the ode, or as a distilling conclusion to the whole poem, Sperry posits that it is potentially both, and thus constitutes a paradox. "It stands on the periphery of the poem, partly inside and partly outside the poetic process, just at the point where sensation, speculation, the language of poetry begins to give way to the processes of logical analysis, the language of thought." For this reason "the apothegm resists our attempts to fathom it"—and rightly so. What one ultimately realizes "is simply that sensation, speculation, and the kinds of propositions poetry makes to us can never assume, force them how we will, the finality of reasoned thought." "It is as if the poet, frustrated by the silence of the urn in the face of his human questioning, had forced it to speak beyond the power of its means." The entire argument is more complex than can be indicated here, and is surely one of the best we have of this endlessly ponderable poem. It epitomizes the sensitivity of Sperry's criticism throughout.

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*On Modern German Literature* by Paul Konrad Kurz, S. J., trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy. University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, Volume II, 1972. Pp. 188. \$8.00. Volume III, 1973. Pp. 154. \$6.75.

Kafka, Brecht, and Thomas Mann, the lyric scene in contemporary Germany, writers versus Christians, the poetry of Günter Grass, the vanishing "Gruppe 47"—there is no dearth of interesting topics in this kaleidoscopic view of modern German literature. By juxtaposing portraits and surveys, themes and critiques, by changing approaches and perspectives, the author has avoided categorization and clichés, vapidity and triteness; and the reader, instead of turning yet another pale page of literary history, is invited to experience modern German literature as a living entity. We are obliged to Sister Mary Frances for her continued fine effort to bring this engaging series to the English reader: to volume I of Kurz' *On Modern German Literature* (reviewed in *Criticism*, vol. XIII, no. 3) she has added volumes II and III and is now preparing volume IV.

Kurz' approach to literature is variable and eclectic; there is no single consistent point of view, no specific critical method. There is, however, one definite pattern of presentation: each topic is seen through a characterizing perspective. Thomas Mann, for instance, is presented via his concept of irony as an artistic tool and as a humanistic stance. The essay produces no new insights, yet it sharpens the familiar picture and serves as an excellent profile of both the writer and his major rhetorical device. The monograph on Brecht (also in volume II) is a bit more comprehensive, but nonetheless specific in its theme. "How can goodness be brought back into the world"—this seems to be the fundamental question that Kurz perceives as underlying Brecht's work. And the Jesuit critic gives high marks to the Communist writer both for his search and his artistry. While his praise is not unqualified—Brecht's attempt to reduce life's ambiguities to a mere matter of social inequities is quite correctly viewed as misleading—it is fair to say that Kurz' essay on Brecht is a striking piece of scholarship: it is forceful yet tender, critical yet filled with warmth and understanding.

Two criticisms must be recorded here. One is directed at the publisher: my review copy of volume II is missing thirty pages in the middle of the Brecht chapter. Buyers beware! The other critique is of the author: on page 89 he says of Grusha, the central figure in Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*: "At the risk of her life during an enemy attack, she rescues the child of the Governor's wife." The statement seems correct. Yet so much is left unsaid about this fateful moment in Grusha's life, her fear, her love, her indecisiveness, the contradiction of existence and the dramatic quality arising from it, that the statement almost becomes untrue. In other words, the theme of goodness in Brecht is dealt with on so narrow a scale that important ramifications of the theme remain unconsidered. This is a symptomatic shortcoming of Kurz' approach, an approach which elucidates by concentration, by bundling the probing energy, but which often neglects significant details that lie outside the chosen perspective. The essay on Max Frisch, "Identity and Society," is a case in point: a different topic and aspect, as, for instance, the crisis of the language, would have necessitated close analyses of different works which in turn might have yielded a different impression of Frisch's artistic intentions.

A brief article on Hans Mayer, distinguished literary critic, concludes volume

II. Mayer, erstwhile professor of German in the West, then in the DDR, then in the West again, is in an excellent position to comment as he does in his book, *Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit*, on the literary activities and artistic quality of both Germans, and Kurz rightly pays tribute to the knowledgeable Germanist and his comprehensive view.

Volume III contains essays on poets and poetry in modern Germany, comments on "Gruppe 47," and delivers a fascinating exhortation of writers and theologians. The most brilliant discussion in the book, offering clear and incisive analyses, is the essay on "Wind Hens Interrogated." Kurz is bold and straightforward in his assessment of Günter Grass' poems which he perceives as truly original products of a truly imaginative mind, but, at the same time, as esoteric constructs built on tricks and tomfoolery. Some of the questions raised here are taken up in the following chapter, entitled "Lyric Poetry Today?" Again, Kurz wrestles with a difficult problem: who needs and reads poetry nowadays? And while he attempts an answer, using Hilde Domin's poetic criteria as a basis, it becomes clear that posing a question is sometimes more important than answering it.

There is much food for thought in the last two chapters of volume III. One traces the history of "Gruppe 47," a kind of "Who's Who" of postwar German literature the final pages of which are filled with uncertainties and honest questions: will there be another generation of "Gruppe" writers, where are the new Enzenbergers and Grasses, where are the young lions and rebels; is the group, is German literature dead? The final essay, the one perhaps closest to the author's heart, is a discussion of writers and their relationship to the Christians in the world, a story of the vis-à-vis of faith and knowledge. The two "camps," says Kurz, have much in common; in spite of their estrangement, they have the same moral goal and function, and they should try to work together. I am tempted to disagree. The chance for this particular togetherness was irretrievably lost some four hundred years ago; besides, "fences" are not always detrimental, they have sometimes a stimulating effect and keep separated brothers honest. Yet I regard this essay as one of the most thoughtful pieces of critical writing that I have recently come across; and in many ways it is representative of this attractive series: it allows room for argument, it deals with a significant issue, it is transmitted with clarity and verve, it generates new ideas, and it is marvellously and joyously alive.

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*Franz Kafka* by Ronald Gray. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

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In *Franz Kafka* Ronald Gray, lecturer in German at Cambridge University, offers "a personal view" of Kafka which he intends to contribute to a "general agreement" about his subject. If this agreement ever comes to be reached, the value of Kafka's work will be severely diminished. His superiority to his own epigone William Sansom will remain assured; but his prose will suffer by com-

parison with Defoe's ("Defoe's prose . . . is, though as unadorned as Kafka's, without his repetitiveness.") and his defeatism will rank him below a number of writers whose work, unlike his but like Conrad's, "records a triumph over despair." Dr. Gray has not written the "sympathetic" work which the jacket asserts his book to be: he finds Kafka's style "dispirited," "irritating," "hesitant." And these shortcomings are not less pronounced for recording so steadily "[Kafka's] own degradation, . . . nothing more than [which] . . . is visible in the fictional work." In Dr. Gray's view Kafka's language after 1912 is marred by "signs of uncontrolled neurosis"; the disease is most palpable during the last years of Kafka's life, especially in stories like "The Hunter Gracchus," "The Burrow," and "Report to an Academy." (!) Kafka obstinately resists "speak[ing] in the more accustomed language of enduring suffering until relief comes" (one of the few statements of Dr. Gray's which no one would dispute); he will not "turn to new things . . . Only the increasingly loose hold on life could manifest itself, and did manifest itself in his fiction."

The attempt at radical devaluation of Kafka is not unheard of, especially in Communist Europe outside of Czechoslovakia: Dr. Gray himself reprinted Edmund Wilson's dissenting view of Kafka in his anthology of Kafka criticism (1962); but the charge is rarely made in the West, and is by no means part of a new wave in Kafka study nor likely to cause or join one in the future. One foresees instead a fertilization of the inexhaustible fascination which Kafka creates, by the linguistic and structural methodologies under discussion in France and America. The writer who characterized his mode of being as *Schriftstellersein*, for whom writing was "a purpose which found itself," will sooner or later magnetize the view of literary language as a system of signs perpetuating itself by its own logic and exacting for discovery that "cold determination to sort out the logic . . . [which, for Dr. Gray,] is not an interest compatible with art." Hence, in taking so opposed a stand, in seeing Kafka's art as mainly an act of complicity with masochistic suffering, the author would evidently merit respect for his independence. Yet the question remains: with what rigor has Dr. Gray laid the foundations for his negative view?

The topic of critical method is heard regularly enough in other places not to usurp the subject under review—a number of concrete texts as discussed by a critic professing interest in "writing," not "ideas." But I've seen few critical studies in which a poetics established at once by decisive assertions and omissions seemed so much an obstacle to cogent results. In Dr. Gray's sense of the act of writing, "the business of a novelist is to expose himself to experience without reserve"; yet for Eliot who, Dr. Gray well knows, is hardly the boldest innovator of a constitutive theory of writing—for Eliot,

the business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him.

Dr. Gray goes on: "the remaining part of [the novelist's] work is to see what experience *looks* like with the most lively consciousness he can bring to bear." (italics mine) Ontogeny may not recapitulate phylogeny, in which case Heidegger would very likely be wrong to criticize the post-Socratic tendency to found

truth on the *visual* paradigm; but it is a child, according to Piaget, who described the process of creative painting in a similar way: "First I make a think, then I draw a line around it." By employing the mimetic, visual model, Dr. Gray is enabled repeatedly to condemn Kafka's fiction for generating characters who are not empirically visible and values which do not affirm familiar life (life being "a sentimentally humane world"). But the critic cannot simply ignore the many arguments—as in Walser and Bense—which show Kafka "modern" par excellence for his constitution of consciousness on principle and independent of empirical models (the necessary condition of a consciousness is not the life-world); nor, as a consequence, does any reader have to be warned off Kafka on account of an alleged morbid frequency, in his works, of images of passivity. Kafka's fiction deliberately exploits modes of experience "as it must not be" (Heselhaus); his fictional worlds begin at the point where the mind by immanent necessity suspends its concerns for practical activity, empowering language to act, in Wordsworth's phrase, for "the gratification of the mind in contemplating the image itself." Nor is this movement which Kafka generates in himself and his reader to be grasped and then dismissed as typical "German inwardness," contemptuous of "externals" (Kafka—a German? and how is writing "internal"?).

Dr. Gray finds fault with Kafka's characters for speculating about intentions where speculation would be idle. Should not this stricture keep the critic from judging texts on the basis of how particular or how "metaphysical" a meaning Kafka can have "intended to portray"? (Dr. Gray has Kafka's production peaking in *The Metamorphosis* because here Kafka was not "concerned to bring universal implications into the warp of his story".) But when we are asked to think what Kafka's father would have done if he had imagined the neurotic satisfaction which Kafka probably obtained from writing "A Message from the Emperor," we must either refuse, or else discount Dr. Gray's own judgments on *The Castle*.

I don't want to suggest that there are not occasional pleasures in this text. One of Dr. Gray's footnotes would make an excellent starting point were it consistently elaborated:

Since Kafka's writing seldom reached beyond the confines of his inner self, it is often the case that his novels and stories do no more than set out the interminable problem of his own writing; it was writing about the possibility of preserving himself as a writer. In this sense, Kafka is a potential writer as K. is a potential surveyor.

His analysis of the conclusion of *The Castle*, in which he detects a movement towards self-destruction in the Castle machinery like the self-destruction of the torture machine in *In the Penal Colony*, leads to an interesting meditation. But there are literally dozens of other statements about the stories which are irrelevant in a belittling way or dubiously argued on a model of mechanical intentionality. The work thus gives an impression of haste to be done with its subject, which grammatical mistakes on pp. 155 and 178 do not improve.

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