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Book Reviews

Styles in Fictional Structure: The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot by Karl Kroeber. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971. Pp. x + 293. \$11.00.

Karl Kroeber's book is actually two books yoked, not quite by violence, together. One is represented by the main title, *Styles in Fictional Structure*, the other by the subtitle, *The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot*. Of the first book it must be said that it is extremely interesting and challenging, but not wholly successful. Of the second the converse is true: it is extremely successful, but not wholly interesting or challenging. Perhaps the reason for this curious situation lies in the dubious economy of joining the two books in one.

Styles in Fictional Structure is designed to set forth something of a new theory and method in the criticism of fiction. *The Art of Jane Austen . . .* etc. is designed to illustrate that method in practice by analysis of the styles of three nineteenth-century authors (who happen to be women, which is irrelevant, and who happen to span almost a century in their writing, which is relevant). Ideally the two should coalesce: the method, which is explained both independently at the outset and periodically during the course of the work, is supposed to emerge as viable and fruitful for application elsewhere. In that respect, then, the two books are two only by misadventure, for they are clearly intended to be one. That they are not is a function of the failure of the theory and method to be absolutely convincing.

Kroeber's point of departure is unexceptionable. It is in brief that the criticism of fiction has been simply too parochial: it is either disguised social, political, religious, or historical commentary; or, when it is concerned with style, it concentrates exclusively on some one aspect of the novel—metaphor, point-of-view, imagery—to the neglect or exclusion of others. Kroeber does not dwell especially on the deficiencies of the first approach, though he repeatedly suggests that his method will transcend these shortcomings too. His real interest, however, is in style and stylistics, and here he finds much wanting in the traditional and fashionable approaches. His complaint, and it is a valid one, is that these approaches give us a very partial view, for they deal with units too small or too narrow to be of any value in arriving at an understanding of the aesthetics of fiction. For Kroeber style is something far more comprehensive than tracing the thread of a recurrent image through a novel, and something far more comprehensive too than talking about declarative sentences and average number of words per sentence. Indeed, one of the most valuable contributions Kroeber's book makes is its knowledgeable demonstration of the shortcomings of the purely computational school of stylistic analysis. Eager literary computer programmers should be compelled to read Kroeber for a sobering corrective to their giddy hopes for criticism based on binary numbers.

But the important aspect of the theory is what Kroeber would do about the

shortcomings of existing analysis. All that he says in this line sounds very fine. He would seek to analyse works of fiction by approaching "patterns." By this he means patterns, large and small, of sentences, units of action, groups of chapters, narrative patterns, dialogue patterns, "point-of-view" patterns (the phrasing here is mine; Kroeber's is more subtle)—in short, an approach to the whole structure of the work but one that also incorporates particulars, even particulars of sentence structure, even particulars of word choice. The prospect is quite exciting and is bound to strike some, as it does Kroeber himself, as a kind of breakthrough in literary criticism, as new light after the endless spate of animal imagery articles, metaphor articles, allusions in . . . articles, and all the rest. In Kroeber's method tabulation would be involved, not for its own sake, but rather as a means of casting light on the entire organization of a fictional work, and even—such are the hopes—on the aesthetics of fiction as it develops in time. Thus Kroeber holds out the prospect of explaining through his method why Jane Austen writes the kind of novels she does and why George Eliot coming after her and after the Romantic period as well writes novels in her way, and perhaps even whether one is "better" than the other.

The question immediately arises, how is this admirable aim to be realized? Well, apart from retooling, so to speak, the critical mental apparatus to look and think in somewhat different terms about the question of style in fiction, the main way of realizing these high goals is never quite clear. To say that it is through a kind of quantitative analysis that is simply more imaginative, more finely drawn, than what has been perpetrated in that line in the past is to say what one *feels* Kroeber is up to, but not quite what he states. For what he states repeatedly is that quantitative analysis is chancy and usually badly done and subject to problems too numerous to cite, problems generally ignored by its devotees. Yet he is somehow using it. So the proof must reside in the practical analysis offered.

Yet, when one turns to it, the practical criticism does not really answer the question either. Not because it is bad; on the contrary, it is often of a high order. But because it does not visibly issue from the method, despite the wealth of tables in the back and constant, if always qualified, references to them in the text. The only insights that appear to issue from the method turn out to be rather tame things after all: Jane Austen's world is intensely social, Charlotte Brontë's personal, and so on. Even though he deplors the adjectival approach to criticism, he repeatedly comes up with the observation that Jane Austen's style is "transpicuous," which is only an uncommon adjective for a common idea.

The really fine parts of Kroeber's analysis—and these are many, although I am slighting them here to concentrate on the method—arise less from his method than from his own critical acumen. It is not enough to subject passages from works to statistical analysis; one must do something with the results. Kroeber does things with the results, to be sure, but the things he does issue from the interplay of the computational finding with his own broad knowledge of the works in question, of the periods in which they were written, of the authors' whole output, of previous criticism of fiction, and above all from a departure from the statistics to the richer realms of Kroeber's own critical intelligence. One has the feeling that the author's critical brilliance has been *triggered* by the

statistical results but not truly shaped or forced by them, and that some other critic less acute and less well-read than Kroeber would, using the same method, come up with very unremarkable stuff indeed. This says a great deal for Kroeber's critical excellence, and a great deal for his own transpicuous style, but not so much for the general utility of his method.

In one passage Kroeber claims that "the principal objections to modern literary criticism . . . are that it is separatist, egocentric, and committed to perfection. The work of even the best critics is of very little *use* to subsequent critics." Surely this is extreme. Were it true none of us would trouble to read yet another critical book, not even the present one. Nor would Kroeber's often fine criticism of *Emma*, *Villette*, and *Middlemarch* be able to take its place so smoothly in the tradition of informed criticism. Where the flaw may lie is in assuming that there *is* a method *tout simple* which can be applied by one and all who know the rudiments of reading. Perhaps the essence of great criticism, like the best passages in Kroeber's own book, defies systematization. If criticism is an art, it is as difficult of easy explication as any other, and the secret of interpreting it may lie shrouded in a deeper mystery than is contained in the heart of IBM.

None of this is to say that *Styles in Fictional Structure* is not somehow still a good book (or books), for it is that. It is stimulating, thoughtful, shrewd, and deeper than I have been able to indicate here. It will, I fear, spawn many imitators who speak modishly of units and patterns instead of imagery and metaphor, but that will not lessen its own considerable virtues. But what these virtues are will perhaps be misunderstood. They are the ultimately mysterious but quite welcome thing that happens when an astute critical intelligence is allowed to work on an approach to works of fiction that transcends the limitations of most current critical approaches and that endeavours to see such works steadily and see them whole, or at least in large parts.

G. B. TENNYSON

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Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development by Morris Dickstein. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971. Pp. xviii + 270. \$9.50.

It is Mr. Dickstein's argument that the central fact of Keats's poetry is the recurrent crisis of consciousness that it reveals, the crisis of a mind at war with itself, aware of that internal disjunction, and bravely but for the most part futilely confronting its self-knowledge. Mr. Dickstein is impatient with critical attempts, on any scheme whatever, to construct a pattern of unambiguous development from early irresolution to mature philosophic "health" and self-possession. Keats may have found intermittent resting places for his psychic anxiety, but he was whipsawed throughout his writing life between a powerful need to create within his consciousness a view of the world commensurate with his desires and an increasingly powerful awareness that the world was not obliged to allow any such accommodation and must at least minimally be dealt with at the level of primary experience. His poetry, Mr. Dickstein says, reflects the

poet's varying attempts to resolve the dilemma of this dual awareness and all too seldom records the two tendencies in fruitful interaction. And this dilemma of the mind cut off from the secure assurances of our civilization's past and having to, in Keats's words, "create itself" if it would be creative of anything else, is our dilemma too, and so Keats is one of us.

This may not seem such a novel view of the poet (and indeed it is probably less novel than Mr. Dickstein wishes to claim for it) to those who recall Keats's own expression of "the yearning passion I have for the Beautiful, connected and made one with the ambition of my Intellect"; or Matthew Arnold's view of Keats as the superbly attuned sensor of nuance in experience and language who yet repeatedly failed to achieve an intellectual and (in the largest sense) moral character commensurate with his ambition and with his gifts of utterance; or, to choose at random among modern commentators, Miriam Allott's formulation of the Romantic, and particularly Keatsian, problem of "the tension that arises when the imagination of the Romantic poet seeks to come to terms with what is actual," leading in Keats to the "constant . . . opposition between romantic enchantment and colder actuality." However, if the portrait is recognizable, indeed familiar, that is a reproach to no one but is rather an assurance that we have all, including Keats himself, read the poet correctly. It is not the ingredients of the mix with which Mr. Dickstein concerns himself but with their vital interactions in the mixture. His claim is not one of radical revision but of modified modern perspective, a modification dictated not by the need to make Keats ratify our tenuous certainties, but rather by a willingness to apply the insights of our experience to our reading of his poetry, whether or not we are comforted by the results. The Keats we get back from his scrutiny is an existential hero and not a cultural one, not an apotheosis of our public values in fulfillment but a mortal man who copes, who tries to answer questions that are never clearly asked, and who loses at least as often as he wins. In our historical moment of widespread personal alienation (which Mr. Dickstein recognizes but does not endorse) there is a certain justness in thus rediscovering Keats, not as collective man, representative man, or generic man, but simply as a man. Nor, appropriately to our moment, is Keats seen as a pioneer, and we the beneficiaries of his exploratory chartings, in the ambiguous country of the modern mind. He is simply *there*, where we are, perhaps a prototype of our peculiar fate, perhaps a precursor of such wan glory as there may be for us, but he lives in another part of our forest and can only show us how it is, not how to get out.

This demythologizing of the poet, which humanizes but does not degrade, seems to me Mr. Dickstein's greatest overall achievement. His major technical achievement is his exploration of the "bower" motif throughout the poetry, in which he succeeds in raising it from a motif to a theme, a pole of creative consciousness that functions for the poet as both psychological haven and epistemological jail. While one might argue that Mr. Dickstein merely translates a Keatsian word into a metaphor that covers a wide variety of already understood Keatsian strategies of idealization and escape, it does work because it is indeed "Keatsian." The leafy retreat, the nest, the grotto, the arbor, the cave, wherein the poet repeatedly tried to find his imaginal felicity and his refuge from the world in which we jostle, was also, as he recognized all too well, a denial of full and honest consciousness, and one feels, after Mr. Dickstein's analysis, an

increased poignancy in Keats's literally lifelong attempts to convert it into the wreath'd trellis of a *working* brain.

This being said, and it is much, one must also record that the book is not unflawed. Speaking for myself, I was seldom entirely persuaded by the explication of individual poems, most of which seemed strained in some particulars; and one has frequent cause to wish that Mr. Dickstein had not felt the obligation of comprehensive exegesis. Since this was to him perhaps the vital center of the enterprise, he may find my comment anomalous. But to say of the "Ode to Psyche," for example, that it is a weak poem insofar as it fails to dramatize the structure of a divided consciousness seems an outrageous man-handling of lyric beauty for the sake of justifying the critic's dialectic. (The structure is weak; it is the bald reductivism to which one objects.) Since Mr. Dickstein sees fit to pursue Keats's hint back to Apuleius, he might have considered that Psyche's representation there, as a mortal woman surpassing in beauty even the divine Venus, made her an exemplar of that "material sublime" that Keats so ardently desired and which constitutes, supposing her "real," a singular reconciliation of the oppositions with which Dr. Dickstein is concerned. On the positive side, I think it fair to say that Mr. Dickstein deals more fully, honestly, and intelligently with the neglected concept of love in *Endymion* than any previous commentator, restoring it to a position of internal consequence that must be taken seriously—although he, like Keats, tends to lose focus as he goes along. Again, much of what he says about the "Ode to a Nightingale" is interesting, but he falls far short of justifying his claim for it as the central poem in all English Romanticism. The reader cannot but be disappointed to see Mr. Dickstein's genuine sensitivity, and indeed wit, so often betrayed by his tendency to get lost in his own arguments through over-inclusiveness and his apparently deliberate strategy of overstatement. To connoisseurs of the latter I recommend pages 64-65, with particular reference to what happens to cows that sleep in moonlight and critics who stay out in it too long. However, as space forbids a comprehensive presentation of the author's vices and virtues of explication, and as my own judgment, God wot, may sometimes be aberrant, such responses should perhaps be left to individual readers.

Given my willingness, despite such local objections, to accept the Keats whom Mr. Dickstein presents, and the general view of Romanticism that he extrapolates from this case history, I hope it will not seem merely captious to wonder whether he has been sufficiently inclusive in his weighing of the components of Keats's and his fellows' aesthetic thought. I can't help remembering Keats's (indeed early and Haydon-induced) speculation about the possibility of Shakespeare or some other spiritual presider's guiding his composition, and his speculation in *Endymion* (III, 23-40) that the universe is run by spiritual powers which are chary of self-revelation to our understandings, and his adjuration to the questing mind to cease active questing and, flowerlike, await the coming of the fructifying bee, and his calm assurance that "The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man." And I think of Blake's solemn affirmation that he was merely the shaping amanuensis of material spiritually "dictated" to him, and of the Aeolian harp images in Coleridge and Shelley, and of Wordsworth's "wise passiveness," and of Coleridge's concept of the Imagination, which, if requiring the exercise of the individual will at the secondary level, is necessarily

passive at the all-important primary level. One could cite much more, but I think the point is clear. If self-consciousness and self-confrontation have a larger role in both the composition and the subject matter of Romantic poetry than we have hitherto recognized, and if the creators of that poetry may therefore be supposed to have looked at life with eyes more like ours than like Chaucer's or even Pope's, there yet remains a variously conceived but persistent sense of the poet as the passive instrument of powers and intentions outside himself, and in this the Romantics were unlike us and more complex than Mr. Dickstein allows. To be fair to him, he does not refuse to notice this tendency, but he is inclined to associate it with the "bower" mentality, or regressive pull, in Keats particularly and Romanticism generally, and it thereby takes on the character of a weakness to be overcome, rather than the consciously held article of aesthetic faith that the poets themselves so often proclaimed it to be. I do not think that this invalidates the many good things that Mr. Dickstein does, but I do suggest that it is not yet time to close the books on the questions with which he concerns himself.

One of the most ingratiating things about this study is the frequency of arresting, and often profound, generalizations that sum up in a few words antinomies which lie at the heart of all those questions we continually ask ourselves about the great Romantics. For example: "Through imagination the poet becomes a creator, a lawgiver, a god; yet by virtue of that largeness of vision he sees all the more acutely that he is a mortal man." Now *that* comes very close to the critical sublime. Take him warts and all, Mr. Dickstein is worthy our respect and pondering.

WALTER H. EVERT

University of Pittsburgh

The Situation of the Novel by Bernard Bergonzi. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971. Pp. 226. \$6.95.

The Situation of the Novel does just what its title says. It examines the novel's current status and questions its future. Is the novel healthy? Dying as an art form? Haunted by philosophical empiricism? Where can it go after Proust and Joyce? Where, in fact, has it gone since its golden age of technical breakthrough, the 1890-1930 period?

Few critics are as clear, sensible, and thought-provoking as Bergonzi. *The Situation of the Novel* falls between the poles of American criticism, which is often thesis-ridden or aggressively analytical, and the polite appreciation associated with British critics. Bergonzi neither polemicizes nor lures converts. Rather, he takes a free, systemless look at prose fiction. Much of his appeal, in fact, comes from his refusal to study the novel within a vacuum. He does not write the dogmatically "pure" criticism of James's prefaces and Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*. "A novel," he says, "is a narrative as well as an object, that is to say, it is a tale that has been told." His generous, many-sided mind goes beyond technique. Instead of viewing the novel as a formal self-contained object, he discusses the cultural forces—historical, political, biographical—that give it

life. In the cases of Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Powell, where insight into these forces is essential, Bergonzi's cultural approach scores high, especially with a non-British reader.

Bergonzi builds his book around a few leading ideas—the novel, as we know it today, may disappear; British fiction has always avoided theory and experiment; several new British novelists have broken with this conservatism to extend the frontiers of British fiction: to use an image from H. G. Wells, these new writers—B. S. Johnson, Margaret Drabble, Julian Mitchell, the Doris Lessing of *The Golden Notebook*, the newly resurrected Irishman, Flann O'Brien—are edging the splintering frame into the heretofore autonomous canvas.

These ideas are not new. What makes them compelling is the freshness with which Bergonzi perceives them, the learning that backs them up, and their subtlety, clarity, and inclusiveness of presentation. Bergonzi is a stylish, urbane critic who has read widely both in and out of literature. He quotes the criticism of Ortega y Gasset, Robbe-Grillet, John Bayley, Robert Scholes, and Susan Sontag. He knows his Wittgenstein. (He shows how novelists have coped with the problem posed by the gulf between words and the realities words are meant to describe.) He contrasts American and British attitudes on the value of existence and on the relationship between individual and society. *The Situation of the Novel* gives you a great deal.

The book's weaknesses? These all come in the middle chapters, where the prose gets chatty and where Bergonzi's analytical-comparative technique leaks into plot summary. Then there are errors in judgment. He underrates John Fowles's *The Magus* and overrates *A Clockwork Orange*, which he calls "Burgess's most brilliant and blackest achievement" and rates higher than *Lord of the Flies*. But he comes back strong in the closing chapters. The novel may not be novel or new anymore now that Proust and Joyce have carried narrative experiment to such extremes. But the novelist's commitment and originality both remain strong. England's new writers are thinking more than their predecessors about the process by which experience becomes literature. By reshuffling levels of reality and mixing rhetorical modes, they have hammered out solid amalgams of fiction, history, and autobiography.

Yet Bergonzi does not see these amalgams as the paving stones of a new novelistic millennium. Nor does he forecast the coming of a revolutionary voice. The shadows of Proust and Joyce, the intractability of words, and the novel's restriction to the printed page—these realities inhibit new developments. Bergonzi's outlook for the novel is guarded: "There is a reasonable chance that a literary form called 'the novel' will survive, with a somewhat diminished significance." Judging from his evidence, this outlook is reasonable. If not consoling, *The Situation of the Novel* is honest, sane, and bracing. It generates force while giving real pleasure. Large-scale, exciting, and exacting, it is high-level criticism, indeed.

University of Missouri—St. Louis

PETER WOLFE

After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson by John Cody, M.D.
Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.
Pp. ix + 538. \$14.95.

Psychoanalytic criticism is still near enough to the frontier that we may applaud Dr. Cody's carrying on the pioneering spirit of his ancestor, Buffalo Bill. The major claims of this important book are not wholly unanticipated: several people have guessed that Emily Dickinson may have experienced major psychotic episodes; and Rebecca Patterson, twenty years ago, detected in Emily Dickinson "strong homosexual propensities." But Dr. Cody is the first scholar with enough theoretical and clinical experience to examine these possibilities and put them into a context which is psychoanalytically convincing and capable of clarifying many of the monumental obscurities in the poems.

Stripped from its mass of supporting evidence, Dr. Cody's portrait of Emily Dickinson looks something like this: From infancy, she suffered acutely from her mother's inadequacies and, as a consequence, never developed a normal identification with her mother; thus she failed to resolve benevolently the oedipal constellation, she prolonged inordinately the period of adolescent identity confusion, and in her twenty-fifth year suffered "a snarl in the brain" (as she described it to her cousins) which was at least two years in the unravelling (1856-1858). Only after the symptoms of her psychosis began to remit did she begin in earnest to write poetry, and a good deal of this poetry reflected her recent ordeal. Typically, her creative activities proved an inadequate mechanism of defense: for the rest of her fifty-five years she suffered from psychogenic illnesses (such as the apparently non-organic eye affliction of 1864-65), as well as periods of acute depression—not to mention her celebrated eccentricities of dress, reclusiveness and so on. In Eriksonian terms, Emily Dickinson's identity crisis was only partly resolved. She became able to make a profound commitment to her life-work, writing more than a thousand poems between 1858 and 1866; but there was no parallel evolution out of the sexual-social narcissism of her adolescence.

Literary scholars will probably be more interested in Emily Dickinson's poems than her pathology; those prepared to grant Dr. Cody his psychoanalytic assumptions may find help with poetic meanings in the process he describes by which poetry is linked to pathology. With admirable sensitivity and considerable insight, he "decodes" certain recurring symbols and images, perceiving these in both their poetic and psychiatric contexts. The sea, for Emily Dickinson, usually implied the threat of lost identity—in Cody's terms, the loss of ego-boundaries—and one of the contexts in which this threat occurred was that in which she fantasized sexual experience. The volcano was something she felt within herself—violently destructive impulses over which she must exercise constant control. Material possessions (being a "millionaire" as in J. 299) signified womanly fulfillment. The loaded gun (as in J. 754) represented her ambiguous sexual identity as well as the secret rage attending this conflict. The sun symbolized either Edward Dickinson or the gaze which his daughter shunned—not so much because she feared the authoritarian tyrant previous biographers have portrayed, but because she feared the oedipal fantasies within herself evoked by her father's presence.

The sort of reading Dr. Cody's study enables will have to be demonstrated by a single example—selected because of its brevity—J. 232.

The *Sun*—just touched the Morning—
The *Morning*—Happy thing—
Supposed that He had come to *dwell*—
And Life would all be *Spring*!

She felt herself *supremes*—
A *Raised*—*Ethereal Thing*!
Henceforth—for Her—*What Holiday*!
Meanwhile—Her wheeling King—
Trailed—slow—along the Orchards—
His *haughty*—*spangled Hems*—
Leaving a *new necessity*!
The *want of Diadems*!
The Morning—*fluttered*—*staggered*—
Felt feebly—for Her *Crown*—
Her *unannointed forehead*—
Henceforth—Her *only One*!

The psychological substructure Cody describes is based on the assumption that the sun unconsciously refers to Emily Dickinson's father:

The feminized "Morning," here of course representing the female child, mistakenly believing the Sun has claimed her as his own, is inflated with self-importance. Her happiness is short-lived, however, and after a brief period she makes the painful discovery that her possession by the Sun was illusory and that he has moved on (presumably to something more mature—possibly "Noon"). What was it the little girl expected of her father, here designated a "Diadem" and referred to as "a *new necessity*"? It seems clear that the girl has made the discovery that she *is* a girl, that is, that she lacks a crown—a corona—such as is possessed by the Sun-King. She is thus faced with her incompleteness. "The Morning—*fluttered*—*staggered*— / *Felt feebly*—for"—the penis that was not there? The poem concludes with the implication that the loss was irrevocable and that the poet resigned herself to it. (Pp. 430-31)

As Dr. Cody elsewhere acknowledges, such a reading by no means excludes those which deal with the poet's more conscious intentions. William Robert Sherwood believes that the sun refers to Emily Dickinson's phantom-lover and that the poem conveys her feelings of apotheosis through renunciation. It seems to me that a comparison of these two readings demonstrates the value of the psychoanalytic approach. Dr. Cody's reading suggests a great deal about how and why Emily Dickinson might have held such conscious feelings as Sherwood attributes to her, but the reverse does not appear to be true. Sherwood shows us how Emily Dickinson *resembled* other poets; Cody shows us how she *differed*—and in that difference we perceive the magnitude of her genius.

No review of a book on Emily Dickinson can end without asking, What new light has been shed on that most vexed of questions, who was the poet's phantom-lover—the "Master" she addressed in unsent letters and poems? In Cody's view, the historical identity of her "Master" should be as unimportant to us

as he thinks it was to Emily Dickinson herself. Unresolved oedipal conflicts led her to create entirely within herself narcissistic fantasies which may have had no objective focus whatever. Nevertheless, her fantasies created a highly specific—if improbable—set of characteristics. He had to be heroic and paternal, capable of appreciating her genius, of giving her the unqualified acceptance and attention most children seek from their mothers—divine in his ubiquity and omnipotence. He had to be both the tenderest lover and the terrifying rapist she constantly feared would enter her room at night and attack her. Most of all he had to be always inaccessible. Probably there was an objective man around whom the poet's fantasies centered, but the identity of the only possible such person seems to have eluded Dr. Cody as surely as it has his predecessors. Only one man in Emily Dickinson's America could have fulfilled all the poet's requirements. I refer not to the Reverend Mr. Wadsworth, nor to Samuel Bowles, but to—Walt Whitman!

STEPHEN A. BLACK

Simon Fraser University

Allen Tate: A Literary Biography by Radcliffe Squires. New York: Pegasus, 1971. Pp. ix + 231. \$6.95.

This first biography of Allen Tate is probably the fullest account of the poet that we shall have during his lifetime. It is really just the outline of a biography. Reading this, we know where the poet lives and what he is writing during a given year. From time to time an "incident"—a seaside picnic on the Mediterranean or Eliot's famous Minnesota lecture—is rendered and the man Allen Tate briefly appears before us. But the man who loves and suffers and doubts, and who must seem very complicated to his friends, hardly ever emerges from the data that have been assembled here. I don't mean to be at all carping about this, because Professor Squires has done his work well, given the limitations set by the Pegasus American Authors series. It is simply that a brief biography of this sort cannot pretend to do more than chart the movements of its subject.

As a literary biography, it correctly directs our attention to those movements when the "life" leads into the poems. Allen Tate's poetry, rather austere for some readers, is in fact strikingly personal. In the end he reveals far more of himself than William Carlos Williams does. Professor Squires, himself a poet, is a sensitive critic, and the best pages of his book explore the poems where an intensity of experience finds its proper form. Tate is an ambitious poet, even in his short things, and the intensity is sometimes too great ("Sonnets of the Blood" for example). Professor Squires deals with this issue better than anyone else who has considered Tate at length. My sense of the literary public is that readers either admire this poet almost without reservation, or they quite dislike him. Most readers, that is, are unwilling to accept the failures for the sake of the successes. Tate never writes poems just to keep his hand in.

As a young Fugitive, Tate found it necessary to reject much in the South. Certainly Southern literary culture offered nothing that he could imitate directly, but his sense of the age led him to the French symbolists and back to Poe. His

best poem before 1925 is his version of Baudelaire's "Correspondences." This seems almost more important than his association with his first master Ransom, because it allowed him access to the mainstream of modernist poetry. Then there is his friendship with Hart Crane, which began in 1923. I feel that this is crucial in the development of Tate's style. Crane's letters of this period reveal an almost idolatrous attitude which Tate held about his precocious contemporary. (Crane's style was completely developed by 1923 or so). If we compare Tate's "Death of Little Boys" to Ransom's "Dead Boy" we notice only the similarity of the subjects. Southern literary men sometimes say that we, Southerners, have a firmer grip on the fact of mortality than others, and I have actually heard these two poems cited as evidence. But turn to Crane's "Praise for an Urn" and "Voyages VI" and the similarity to Tate is very great. Indeed, I am inclined to call Tate's poem a kind of superior exercise in style, and Professor Squires doesn't quite convince me of its "consummate despair." (The two poems by Crane are beyond question deeply felt.) From Crane Tate learned about Eliot. The closing lines of both "Death of Little Boys" and "Praise for an Urn" point back to Eliot's "Preludes."

Where Tate's Southern quality emerges most convincingly is in the elevation of tone that one associates with the rhetoricians of this section. In a sense the Old South was organized by the voices of the preacher and the politician. Ransom's ear for this is especially acute, and the subdued oratory of "Antique Harvesters" and "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" is masterful. Tate's approach to this mode of speech as poetry was powerful but uneven—see the "Causerie" poems of the late 1920s. But by 1926 he was writing some of the best passages of "Ode to the Confederate Dead," and he "imitated" Paul Valéry in a language mostly his own. This is a somewhat synthetic poem, however, and perhaps it doesn't quite bear comparison with "Le cimetière marin."

The refrain lines about the wind and the flying leaves (added in 1930) bring Tate close to another contemporary, MacLeish. The lovely "Emblems" of 1931-33 are even closer—see MacLeish's "American Letter" of 1930. And "The Traveler" is a deliberate reworking of MacLeish's "You, Andrew Marvell"; the form is taken over completely. At this point Professor Squires might have analyzed the difference between the refined humanist perspective of MacLeish (surely very representative) and the implicitly religious perspective of Tate. I assume that Tate's movement toward Christianity was based on historical insight—that is, where one stands in time. Much of this comes out in "The Mediterranean" (1932), which is as splendid as Professor Squires says it is.

Now that Tate has been studied adequately as a Southerner, perhaps it is time to study him in his generation of poets, who would include MacLeish, Cummings, Bishop, Winters, Crane, Warren, perhaps Phelps Putnam. This second generation of modernists had to deal with the presence of Yeats, Pound, and Eliot, and for the most part they reasserted a strictness of form. Why? (Cummings wrote *Eimi*, but he also wrote large numbers of sonnets.) There is a good book to be written here.

I have been unjust to Professor Squires, who rightly moves Tate's best work forward to the 1940s and early 1950s. "The Swimmers" may well be his finest poem. (It is the title poem of the large new collection.) He has had access to Tate's papers at Princeton and has sometimes turned up some valuable material,

especially in the case of *The Fathers*, which is beginning to look like one of the best American novels. This brilliant, restless poet has taken chances and then fallen silent for almost twenty years (his privilege), but his achievement remains very considerable.

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The Wild Prayer of Longing: Poetry and the Sacred by Nathan A. Scott, Jr.
New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971. Pp. 118. \$6.75.

In the past decade, Nathan A. Scott, Jr. has established a commanding reputation as one of the most perceptive and authoritative figures in the interdisciplinary field of theology and literature. With each new publication, he extends and solidifies his position as a cultural and theological critic. Each book constitutes a continuing part of one body of work and one developing meditation. *The Wild Prayer of Longing* is an extension of the reflections contained in his previous work. In *The Broken Center* (1966) and *Negative Capability* (1969), Scott's dialogue ranged largely over the bleak terrain of contemporary culture, densely portraying the grave difficulties of modern man's theological and artistic search for a restoration of values, some authoritative center which would sustain him in a time of *post mortem dei*.

The Wild Prayer of Longing is a continuance of these meditations on man's endeavor to extricate himself from a pervasive nothingness, from a mere "waiting" as in Samuel Beckett's famous play. In a recent note, Scott has stated the intentions of his new text: "For it is precisely the purpose of my latest book . . . to indicate how unserviceable now are the super-naturalist projections of traditional piety and to commend the relevance to our period of these literary stratagems—the poetry of Theodore Roethke is my chief example—which seek to reinstate the possibility of a sacramental appropriation of the world but which seek to do so without resort to super-naturalist illusion." Scott argues not for the expulsion of transcendence, but as he says, "what is actually occurring is a *relocation* of transcendence." In *The Wild Prayer of Longing*, the author is recording a "drastically new conceptualization of the Christian faith that is required in our time." With a genuine understanding of the restlessness and disquiet that belong to the cultural ferment of our age, Scott carefully delineates the complex relation between culture and religion; and with rare insight and an enormous grasp upon the intricacies of this complex union, he dramatizes a new mode of human response, a new law of participation, in which a sacramental vision of life becomes a higher reality.

As in all of Scott's books, the structure of argument is a finely-wrought design. Careful in argumentation, he is, moreover, a gifted synthesizer of enormous detail. The reader is forever reminded of Henry James' artistic distinction between "telling" and "rendering." Like James' ideal fictive authors, Scott "renders" his material in an intensified and wealthy reference to the concreteness and density of dramatic form.

Drawing his title from W. H. Auden's "For the Time Being" ("Legislation

is helpless against the wild prayer of longing.”), Scott raises the question “as to what it is in the nature of reality that can be counted on finally to sanctify human existence.” His main purpose is, as he says, “not so much to push a thesis as it is to suggest how powerfully the strategies of art invoke mysteries and meanings that might otherwise elude our grasp.” The cultural contemporary scene is, he maintains, replete with “evidences which suggest that one of the principle issues of our age concerns the possibility of the modern imagination finding its ballast in a sacramental realism.” The prompting passion (the wild prayer of longing) by which men are today deeply moved “is a great need—in the absence of God—to find the world in which we dwell to be . . . a sacred reality.”

In a brilliant opening chapter (“The Decline of the Figural Imagination”), Scott traces the particular development which the life of the Word, in both its religious and artistic versions, has undergone; and he unfolds a process which might be said to be the Decline of Figuralism. Drawing his clue from the distinguished philologist, the late Erich Auerbach, Scott views the traditional premodern imagination as imbued with a reading of reality marked by the concept of *figura*. In the figural imagination, the world is apprehended to be but a shadow of the Eternal and was, therefore, itself felt to be essentially a *figura* of an occult reality. The history of the Judaeo-Christian tradition was a drama interpreting the significance of the entire process of life. Auerbach and Scott’s explication of the concept of *figura* presents us with one of the most crucial keys “for unlocking that whole sense of reality which prevailed throughout the Western Community almost until the advent of the revolution in thought and sensibility which we call the Enlightenment.” Without attempting to trace—as Scott so carefully does in his book—the devaluation of the figural rendering of reality, one can more immediately sense its total demise in the writings of Nietzsche. The radical shift from a figural realism to a purely historical realism is exposed in the total collapse of all value which Nietzsche called nihilism. Instead of man’s being in a dialogue with the world, his situation is now one in which he confronts an alien universe, “a system of objective facts or forces essentially unrelated to the human presence itself.” The world has become a vast collection of facts and the distance between man and his world has been interminably lengthened. As the progress of imaginative literature in our time has shown, the one decisive fact shaping human sensibility in modern experience is “the increasing difficulty that men have in thinking of the world as a *figura* of anything other than a transcendent to itself.” The decisive development has been the death of the figural imagination. The world has been divested of holiness.

Yet in our late time, intimations of a new urgency, a new way of “reconceiving the human universe as a world which offers the promise and possibility of life under the law of participation” are being dimly discerned on the horizons of contemporary art. Brave declarations are being made in the poetry of such men as Theodore Roethke, William Carlos Williams, Richard Eberhart, Dylan Thomas, and many others.

In the central section of his book, “The Sacramental Vision,” Scott explores the implications of this new urgency for a grounding of life in a new holiness—a more positive evaluation of a sacred reality. Scott here argues for the creation of a new attitude, a new way of receiving the world. “The great challenge which is now presented to contemporary reflection is that of finding some new system

of ideas whereby this profoundest concern of the human spirit can be articulated in ways that do not violate the established grammar of modern intelligence." The sacramental vision he offers rests upon the traditional concept of sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace"—a world "charged with grandeur" which will flame out, as Hopkins said, "like shining from shook foil."

The core of this new vision rests upon the Heideggerian concept of Being. (The important distinction made by Heidegger—and by Scott—is the opposing modes of appropriating reality.) Under the term "calculative thinking," man is possessed with the positivistic desire to discover, order, and control the world of things. "It is precisely this essentially predatory motive that constitutes the sovereign passion dominating the mentality of our period." In opposition to man's "calculative thinking" is the spirit Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit* (that is, surrender, abandonment, acquiescence), a condition of "releasement toward things." Scott redefines this attitude of "letting-be" as one of simple enthrallment before the abundant wonders of "all the givens of the earth." The world's sacramentality is here freshly posed and itself may be received independently of supernatural theism.

In the concluding chapter, the poetry of Theodore Roethke becomes the particular example of a sacramental imagination "at work on the living body of the world." In Roethke's poetry, the "calculative reason" is hushed, and his way of "hailing" a world whose presence is itself conveyed as a kind of music becomes the characteristic voice of the poet. In his poetic canon, no message is conveyed, nor do the "minute particulars" run out into great universals; Roethke was not possessed by the need to develop a system of moralizing analogy. His rhetoric is one suffused with intense concreteness for the joys of earthly life in all of its unique and specific manifestations. "The gesture which his poetry performs is a gesture of *Gelassenheit*, of abandonment, of surrender to the sheer presence of Being in the things and creatures of earth." Scott views Roethke's poetry as a supportive expression of man's "wild prayer of longing," a legacy which reinforces our yearning for a sense of participation with the earth.

The Wild Prayer of Longing will stand as a significant document in the dynamic dialogue of culture and religion, and Scott's meditation will be a provocative center for new reflections, for a new examination of our spiritual ground. Within the dense aura of Scott's theological perspective, the literary critic is offered a powerful redirection for his critical energies, a richness for new insight. In one of his classic essays, "Religion and Literature," T. S. Eliot asserted that the "greatness" of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards: "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethnical and theological standpoint." *The Wild Prayer of Longing* is a brilliant example of the task of completion which Eliot affirmed for the critic.

Although *The Wild Prayer of Longing* is probably designed for a professional audience, the intelligent lay reader will find the book a beneficial and exciting synthesis of the cultural signs of our time. In a more popular vein, Sam Keen's *Apology for Wonder*, Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture*, and Charles Reich's *The Greening of America* speak for a renewal of wonder for the varied life of the earth. Scott absorbs these many signs and places them in a compelling pattern of meaning for modern man.

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