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## Book Reviews

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## Book Reviews

*The Singer of Tales* by Albert B. Lord. "Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature," 24. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960. Pp. xvi + 309. \$6.75.

This is a most informed and informative work. Basically, it is a book on the epic tradition. "This book is about Homer. He is our Singer of Tales. Yet, in a larger sense, he represents all singers of tales from time immemorial and unrecorded to the present. Our book is about these other singers as well. . . . Our immediate purpose is to comprehend this manner in which they compose, learn, and transmit their epics" (p. vii).

But this is far from just another book on Homer, and for two reasons. First, the materials out of which it works derive from sources still living, the non-literate bards still active in South Slavic regions, particularly among speakers of Serbocroatian and Bulgarian in modern Yugoslavia. And the materials are quantitatively and qualitatively altogether exceptional, being the distillation of a staggering number of epic texts, translations, and commentaries, as well as interviews with individual singers, all now being published under the joint auspices of Harvard University Press and the Serbian Academy of Sciences. Much of this epic material derives from collections on recordings completed by Professor Lord after having been begun by the late Milman Parry, whose "oral theory" concerning the Homeric poems is well known to classicists and who launched into the making of recordings by the thousands when he was teaching classics at Harvard University in the 1930's. It is the unprecedented spread of its documentation which makes this work so valuable.

Secondly, the importance of this book comes from the fact that its report on the oral-aural cast of mind relates not merely to Parry's "theory" but also to a great many other recent areas of study: modern linguistics (with its primary focus on the spoken word rather than on written texts), folklore and cultural anthropology, phenomenological philosophy, and contemporary scriptural study and biblical exegesis. Many of the distorting frames of reference which ages of manuscript-oriented and typography-oriented culture and scholarship have elaborated are here definitively dismembered and seen for what they often are—irrelevancies and unwitting falsifications not merely of answers but also of problems. These out of the way, the fuller significance of oral composition as such is here entered into with gusto and discernment. If Professor Lord's book is itself of necessity a production of a chirographic and typographic culture, it shows such a culture finally aware of its own built-in squints, and to this extent freed of them by that informed reflectiveness which is the only natural therapy available to finite intellects to remedy their finiteness and which is truly liberal and liberating in the very best sense of these words.

Typographically preconditioned minds, many of them, are likely to show themselves unsure and querulous in the presence of this and similar studies in

which the landmarks they had been taught to take for granted are done away with as useless. The fact is that only with extreme difficulty can the oral performance which this book investigates be talked of at all meaningfully in our civilization, for the very concepts in which purely oral performance must be thought of are often missing from our minds, and contrary to our analytic habits. Most of our conceptual apparatus for handling verbal performance, such as "literature" or "creativity," is here both disabling and falsifying. Literature, which means either something written or at the very least something conceived of by analogy with what is written, does not exist at all in a preliterate culture. The basis for such a conception—writing—is simply unknown. And thus to think of a sung story from the oral-aural tradition as "literature" is to be insensitive to what the story really is. It is true that the modern singers of tales with whom Professor Lord is concerned know of the existence of writing even when they are illiterate, and are influenced by it in varying degrees, as Lord's evidence concerning the effect of song books on some singers spells out in painstaking detail. However, the work of even these latter-day singers grows demonstrably out of a tradition which is historically and fundamentally oral-aural, radically preliterate; it is merely developed retrospectively by literates practicing antiquarianism.

Thinking of a story or tale from an oral-aural culture as composed *for* performance can engender errors as serious as those engendered by thinking of it as "literature." In the oral tradition, a tale or story is not composed *for* performance but *during* performance, while it is being sung. Recording shows that no one performance or singing is quite like another. Here there is no possibility of having an "author" distinct from the performance: the two are necessarily always one. This suggests a certain spontaneity or originality, but one must be very careful here, for this singing is not artistic "creation" either. Quite the obverse: even an original song sung for the first time—and of course there have been such songs—is, in this epic tradition, essentially a re-application of pre-existing formulae and themes by a particular singer (each singer has his own ways of utilizing the formulae, his own oral-aural "signatures") to one more particular "matter" or situation. One can well think of a story in this oral tradition as a child does when he teases an adult to "tell" a story, not expecting that the adult will "create" the tale but simply that he will bring into the here and now, will make accessible, *the* story which inevitably "is" already in existence somewhere, but without being thought of as in writing or in print. Like the chirographic presuppositions supporting the concept of "literature," the romantic presuppositions back of the concept of artistic "creation" are simply missing in the original epic world as reported by Lord. Classical concepts of "invention" as drawing "matter" out of a "store" of commonplaces (*topoi, loci communes*) are considerably closer to the preliterate mind. (The Renaissance revival of the topical logics, the logics built around the "places" drawn on by invention, which I have attempted to deal with in my *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, was thus in a sense the final shower of sparks released by an old oral-aural world as it was plunging from the epic firmament into the sea of a typographical civilization.) A civilization dominated by print, the great conservator, puts a premium on originality, but an oral-aural civilization values the innovator less than the conservator, who serves as a counterpoise to its impermanencies.

Although the first part of this book devotes itself to "theory," its unprecedented spread of documentation makes the "theory" in fact largely exposition of phenomena at hand as Professor Lord works through the performance and training of singers, the formula, the theme, originality and tradition, and finally the divergence of written from oral tradition. Matters heretofore conjectural are approached in terms of direct and for the most part seemingly indisputable evidence. What is meant by verbal accuracy can here be tested by recordings of the same illiterate singer singing what he considers to be the same tale at intervals of some seventeen years, or, in another way, by singers performing a song new to them after they have heard it only once! In these repetitions the accuracy of substance is astounding, if less than perfect, and is quite understandable when it becomes apparent how any performance must be a concatenation of formulae and themes of which all singers have an abundant store. Because these formulae and themes are common property—although always with individualist variations of "style" for each singer—the very substance of any story is in a way common property even before it is told. Chirographically trained persons, and even more those typographically trained, are likely to interpret the singers' remarkable ability to repeat as an optimum development of rote memory. But quite wrongly. Rote memory, in the ordinary sense of word-for-word matching of long passages like that of two printed pages from the same type form, has nothing to do with this reproduction, for it is hardly envisaged by the singers as a desideratum. Indeed, it is not envisaged by them at all, since the very idea of such rote memory is based on experience with writing.

One of the major incidental values of this book is the evidence it adduces to show that not only is literacy no help to the singer of tales, but that it is a positive disability, since the whole "feel" for epic song is destroyed as soon as one thinks of one's performance as matching a written and fixed text—which has *nothing* to do with the *original* oral tradition, being a later development, adventitious and distracting.

Lord's exposition inevitably impinges on a certain type of critical speculation, that concerned with the mode of existence of a literary work—*Where is it?* This speculation is here revealed for what it is, the product of a manuscript and typographical outlook. For the compulsion to think of verbal performances as necessarily represented by a single verbal something or other which is in some sort of place proper to itself is apparently inoperative in the more oral-aural cultures from which epic tradition derives. This is not, of course, to say that such speculation is meaningless or misleading. It is needful and helpful. But it is also a specialized, culturally conditioned kind of speculation.

The second half of this work treats successively Homer, the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, and, more cursorily, various problems in the study of medieval epics, notably *Beowulf*, *La Chanson de Roland*, and the Greek epic *Digenis Akritas*. The treatment of these epics is often suggestive rather than exhaustive. In the light of detailed exposition of oral performance, new lines of thought are developed concerning organization and interrelationships. But standard major questions are also broached.

Having painstakingly set forth what an oral poet does, Lord concludes that "there is now no doubt that the composer of the Homeric poems was an oral poet," for "the proof is to be found in the poems themselves" (p. 141)—that is, in the presence of the oral forms and procedures which familiarity with oral

performance renders evident. These oral forms and procedures are obvious enough in *Beowulf* and other epic or epic-like medieval work, Lord points out in detail, drawing in the case of *Beowulf* on the recent work of Francis P. Magoun, Jr., and Robert P. Creed.

Readers who have not followed Lord's detailed analyses of oral forms and procedure will nevertheless be struck by material in the book's several appendices, notably by "The Song of Milman Parry," composed (that is, sung or performed) by Milovan Vojčić Nevesinje on the twentieth day of September, 1933. Here the skilled use of the epic formulae to celebrate Parry's visit to Yugoslavia as well as his own person as he prepared to embark for America again on the "Saturnia" (the song names the modern ship without embarrassment) creates an atmosphere unmistakably heroic and even Homeric, despite the seemingly less than Homeric dimensions of its subject. Nowhere is the genesis of the epic effect in the epic form and procedure more evident than in this performance, which converts a present-day classical scholar's return to his homeland into an epic song, a minor—if slightly shabby—*Odyssey*.

Lord's placing of the Homeric question in a circumstantially described oral-aural setting does not, of course, solve all the Homeric problems, although it helps us to formulate many of them more adequately. In this setting, the question of multiple authorship for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as conceived by Separatist theory based on the suppositions of a chirographic culture is meaningless. Every performance of every epic in an oral tradition is both different from every other and of a piece with others. Prescriptive rights to fixed versions or parts are out of the question, for, unless we remove the epic from oral tradition by writing it down, no fixed versions or parts even exist. Given this state of affairs, however, the basic epic problem becomes a particularly sweeping one: Why should epos or oral performance of epic have been set down in writing at all? Why should epos ever be transmuted into literature? It is indeed hard to say. Alphabetic writing appears to have been initially useful for such things as account keeping, not for recording what individuals sang aloud. Lord suggests that a wave of intense scribal activity was sweeping across the Mediterranean, and that the Greeks, like the Hebrews and others, were caught up in it, fascinated by the fixity which writing conferred on utterance. Doubtless the human drive for permanence in utterance, as Lord proposes, *any* permanence, even the partially misleading one of writing, was operative here.

As to why the epics known as Homer's should have become the most famous ones, Lord proffers the interesting suggestion that one reason may well have been their length. The length of a singer's tale varies from performance to performance, according to the occasion. Wide experience with singers of tales suggests, surprisingly enough, that singers who can sing the longest songs are likely to be the best singers. They have greater "invention"—which means that they have a more fecund store of formulae and themes, the pieces constituting an epic: their structures simply have more to them than do the sparser structures of less voluble bards. Epic Cycle songs in Homer's day, as it appears, commonly ran to some 7000 lines—as against Homer's own 27,000! The extreme length of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* suggests a very special occasion, and Lord proposes (pp. 153-54) that the occasion could very well have been dictation to a scribe. Dictation, allowing a song to be strung out over several days, was a challenge to do a full-dress oral performance such as had perhaps never been done before—and

Homer met the challenge best of all singers. This hypothesis situates the two great Greek epics grown out of an oral-aural world at the borderline between the doomed oral-aural culture and nascent manuscript culture.

A wealth of more specialized questions is also treated in this work—questions, for example, concerned with the length and structure of epic lines, the “thrift” in use of formulae achieved by singers today and by Homer, and even the question of Homer’s blindness. Lord indicates that there can exist some connection between being blind and being a singer of tales. He and Parry found blind persons who had turned to folk singing as something for which their disability is no evident handicap. On the other hand, their best singers were definitely not the few blind ones whom they encountered. But the possible connection between blindness and a bardic vocation is real enough to keep the question of a blind Homer quite alive.

This book also makes it clearer than ever how epic survivals are being pushed today further and further back into the hinterland, where they will eventually vanish. Literature has won. Singers of songs are relicts of another age. Yet they have helped make us what we are today, and their very difference from ourselves helps us to understand by contrast what we ourselves are. Their study is particularly fascinating and informative as we stand at the dawn of another age when literature itself is entering a new phase of existence in a new communications complex dominated in the strategic areas by electronic media.

WALTER J. ONG, S. J.

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*Music as Metaphor* by Donald N. Ferguson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960. Pp. ix + 198. \$4.75.

Music is probably no more mysterious, ultimately and essentially, than the other fine arts. Immediately, however, it seems to offer less foothold for comprehensive dogmatism. So far as I know, no critic has ever established a durable orthodoxy by defining music as imitation, as pure form mediated by sound, as expression of one sort or another, or as a manipulation of culturally evolved symbols. And no critic, so far as I know, has ever succeeded in supporting any one of these definitions by a considerable body of detailed exegesis.

It seems difficult or impossible, in extensive and analytic discussion, to hold on to a unitary theory of the nature of music. The pure formalists, from Hanslick to Stravinsky, inevitably find themselves engaged with interests that they have dismissed as extra-musical, though it is they who, for the past hundred years, have turned out the most substantial sum of theoretical criticism. One way out—a not entirely unattractive way—is to throw up one’s hands along with Herbert Spencer’s at “the incomprehensible secret” of music’s power. Spencer himself went on to work out a theory of his own, a very unsatisfactory one; and other speculative minds that are responsive to music are not likely to abandon the pursuit.

Another way is to be candidly pluralistic. Almost two hundred years ago, Dr. Burney equated the “idea” of music with “the principles of construction,” but proceeded at once to dwell on considerations of occasion, character, and feeling.

In 1947, speaking in the Harvard Symposium on Music Criticism, Virgil Thomson argued that "the expressive power" of a musical work must be distinguished from "its formal musical interest"; that the questions "What is it like?" and "What is it about?" are separable from the question "How does it go?"

One understandable effect of the current accessibility of music is a heightening of interest in theory. The past decade has brought forth an unprecedented volume of speculative, but closely analytical, criticism. This side the semi-popular and introductory essays, notable books have been produced by Leonard Meyer, Victor Zuckerkandl, Deryk Cooke, and now by Donald N. Ferguson. One reason for the impressiveness of these books, I believe, is that each has concerned itself largely with one of Thomson's secondary questions, rather than with the primary "What is music?"

None is more impressive than Ferguson's *Music as Metaphor*. The peculiar excellence of Professor Ferguson's *History of Musical Thought*, published twenty-five years ago, will have insured the interest of many readers in his mature examination of the expressive resources of music. No other one-volume history has matched Ferguson's accomplishment of breadth without extravagance; turning back to it has furnished relief from the sweeping facilities of Lang and Leichten-tritt. *Music as Metaphor* exhibits the same virtues of precision, range, and modesty.

It does not offer a sovereign theory of music. It argues for the discursive separability of the notion of form from the notion of expressive meaning—though never forgetting that the two are fused into one in a concrete musical discourse. It engages itself with the actuality of meaning, with the kinds of meaning possible to music, and with the natural resources of music for the articulation of meaning. Above all, it insists on the community of meanings between music and other modes of human experience.

The weightiest immediate difficulty confronting such an argument as Professor Ferguson's is the need to clarify its key terms. One always knows what Ferguson's words mean: "structure" and "form" (identified with each other), "expression" ("the intelligible utterance, not merely of feeling but of thought"), "emotion" (any kind of qualitative response to observation, stimulus, or reflection), "experience" ("a distillation of the meaning resident in fact"), "idea" ("a summary and interpretation of experience"). One may have reservations about the adequacy of some of these definitions. I have special reservations at some of the uses of "beauty," "aesthetic," and "moral." But Professor Ferguson's language, like his whole argument, is tight and clear.

The thesis of the book is deliberately built up. Musical "form" and musical "content" are individually scrutinized. The "elements of musical expression" are then isolated—intrinsic properties that music shares with non-musical experiences. These are shown to be, basically, tonal motion and tonal tension, with various secondary factors—timbre, register, phrasing, and so on—serving as adjuncts. Thus, the controlled employment of musical elements may induce responses that are identical with responses that can be aroused by words or ideas or objects or acts or situations.

Professor Ferguson insists, then, that music can fairly be described as a representative art, representing not words and acts but the ideal responses to words and acts. Because of music's unique fluidity, it can define the force of a word or the quality of an act more exactly and more ideally than any other medium

of expression. The music defines the word, not the word the music. I do not see how anybody who has ever listened to *The Saint Matthew Passion* or to *The Magic Flute* or to *Falstaff* can doubt the validity of the contention.

But its validity is not limited to music that articulates a verbal text. Resources of the same species are exhibited by instrumental music. Professor Ferguson examines passages from *The Well-Tempered Clavichord*, from the *Eroica*, and from Mozart's piano sonatas, as well as bits of Wagner's operas, in demonstrating "the functioning of the elements." In my opinion, every one of his demonstrations is scrupulous and just. And the important thing about the whole explication is that, to some degree, its method can be emulated by any serious listener to music. The book should help to relieve the sense of sheer bafflement at the experience of musical explicitness.

This is a large contribution, enough for one book or man. But I think there are intimations of something beyond this. In his chapter on Sonata Form, Professor Ferguson deals with form as itself an element of expression. He represents form as the servant of expressive purpose, not the essence of the purpose. I wonder here whether there may not be a difficulty that is due to too restricted an understanding of the possible meanings of "form."

When Aristotle says that the music of a flute can imitate love, he is obviously thinking of love as a form. Form in this sense is necessarily structured; but, just as necessarily, it is an idea or an essence. The *Eroica* does not merely "say something about" heroism; in the *Eroica*, one hears heroism. Professor Ferguson prosecutes his inquiry within the scheme of a naturalistic psychology. But I think he leads his reader to the threshold of a metaphysic of music.

CHARLES T. HARRISON

*The University of the South*

*Henry Green: Nine Novels and an Unpacked Bag* by John Russell. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960. Pp. viii + 251. \$5.00.

*A Reading of Henry Green* by A. Kingsley Weatherhead. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961. Pp. 170. \$4.50.

Across these thirty-five years, the man who signs his books as Henry Green has published nine novels and a volume of reminiscences, a pretty good showing for an industrial executive who might be called a Sunday writer. A study of his work by Edward Stokes (*The Novels of Henry Green*) appeared in England in 1959, full of tables and statistics of the kind so many British critics pejoratively dismiss as American, when an American does it; it is an extremely useful book, and now here are two American volumes on Green which also deserve that description, useful, Russell's published in 1960 and Weatherhead's last year.

In the little space available for comparison of these last two books, it might be said that Weatherhead's is somewhat more valuable because it usually penetrates more deeply. Both his volume and Russell's deal with various aspects of Green, and they are particularly good on his special use of language, but Weatherhead more consistently evaluates while Russell tends oftener to synopsise. Now synopsis is an acceptable procedure when a critic uses it to convey his particular

slant on a story; and when Weatherhead draws up summaries he usually does so in a way that is in itself evaluative. Russell is somewhat more generally paraphrastic.

In their treatments of what is probably Green's best novel so far, *Loving*, Russell does make some pertinent comments, but he dwells at too great length on details of the story; Weatherhead, although he mentions some of the action of the novel and, like Russell, quotes bits of it, is continually analyzing and adjusting perspectives, to a greater extent than Russell does. Russell, for example, says: "By threatening to quit, Raunce virtually blackmails Mrs. Tennant into giving him the job; then by brazenly outfacing Miss Burch he is able to usurp Eldon's old chair at the servants' dinner table, and to complete the transition from footman to butler." True enough, but merely a report; consider how Weatherhead, describing the same circumstances, interprets, deepens, gives meanings—in short functions as a critic: "When old Eldon dies, Raunce takes the fearful step of assuming the other's office and his chair, an action accompanied by dread, guilt, and alienation. It is dreadful because he fears what he himself does, as he offers notice to Mrs. Tennant in order to get the office. But the leap from security into hazard, small though it is and fundamentally insignificant, is successful. And his immediate gain is his identity, for Mrs. Tennant begins to call him Raunce instead of the generic 'Arthur.' Again, in taking Eldon's chair at the table he is filled with dread at his own action. And he is at once alienated from Miss Burch [who] asks him, 'Would you be in a draught?' And the draught in *Loving*, though like 'Siam' in *Living* it only gradually acquires full connotation, is a metaphor for guilt."

It must be made clear, however, that if Weatherhead's volume is somewhat critically superior to Russell's, both are important contributions to an understanding of Green. And reading him with appreciation now must be something like the experience of a contemporary who could see the virtues of Jane Austen's novels a century and a half ago. Of course in our haughtiness we may think that we know more of Jane Austen than her coevals did—this despite Whitehead's having pointed out that we can never truly understand the past because we aren't in its ambience and can't know what the people in a given period took for granted; be that as it may, Henry Green remains a current writer to whom one should be alert, and in building toward a greater awareness of him, both Russell and Weatherhead are immensely helpful, and so is Stokes, for all of them bring out salient features in Green's writing.

One of the things that has always been evident to me in these forceful novels is something Weatherhead notes: that each of them "may be thought of as a separate species," and that "the features of each novel, being the terms according to which self-creation is pursued, tend to be peculiar to that novel; for the process is essentially the private struggle of a private personality"; all quite true.

Both Weatherhead and Russell are wide ranging in their attempts to place Green; Weatherhead mentions, among others, Flaubert as part of Green's background, while Russell suggests Swift, Fielding, Sterne, Lewis Carroll, Butler, and "perhaps even Ronald Firbank." Among contemporaries, Weatherhead implies parallels with parts of the fiction of such writers as Hemingway and Silone and with various points expressed in the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and others. Among contemporaries, Russell's comparison between Green and Kafka is better sustained than the one he attempts between Green and Céline.

Well, enough has been said to indicate that these two recent books on Henry Green are full of stimulating suggestions, with Weatherhead's running somewhat in advance of Russell's. As a last word, a stringent one: it's too bad the Weatherhead volume, Ford Foundation grant and all, is so cheaply produced and lacks an index.

HARRY T. MOORE

*Southern Illinois University*

*The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation* by Murray Krieger. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960. Pp. xiv + 268. \$5.00.

According to Murray Krieger the tragic vision in modern literature tends to resist both dramatic catharsis and philosophical reconciliation. The protagonist of modern fiction is typically a Kierkegaardian Abraham who accepts the irrationality of the universe but resists the leap to faith. An "uncompromising hero," the tragic visionary believes that the world of felt human experience is nothing less than a "bewildering complex of seeming contradictions."

This familiar view is transformed into a critical methodology and applied to novelists as diverse as Conrad and Kafka and to novels as distinct as *The Stranger* and *Pierre*. In each essay Mr. Krieger isolates the existential "shock" or moral dilemma experienced by the fictional protagonist and examines the novel's resolution or lack of resolution. It is a measure of Mr. Krieger's strength as theoretician and critic that his results are most noteworthy when his machinery groans the most. He is no doubt arbitrary in implying that Malraux should have written a different *Man's Fate* with the fanatical Ch'en as the central figure and not Kyo, the ideal Marxist. But Mr. Krieger's scheme enables, or perhaps compels him to make the significant comment that Malraux the craftsman could not prevent Malraux the artist from emphasizing Ch'en's visionary qualities, at the expense of his scheduled role of playing Hotspur to Kyo's Prince Hal. The chapters of *The Tragic Vision* reveal an extreme, and perhaps non-literary critical view, but Mr. Krieger's methodology is appropriate to his subject matter and yields a number of genuine insights.

However, the importance of Mr. Krieger's book lies in his extraordinary effort to extend the principles of the "New Criticism" to what he calls the discipline of *thematics*, or the study of the "experiential tension which dramatically entangled in the literary work, become an existential reflection of that work's aesthetic complexity." This boils down to the assertion of a relationship between the critic's emphasis upon the autonomy of a literary work and the artist's vision of life as ultimately irrational or at least beyond the possibility of ideological or "ethical" characterization. In order to understand and evaluate this maneuver, one should become acquainted with the effort of contextualist aestheticians to justify the methodology of modern criticism in the language of formal aesthetics. Both Mr. Krieger (*The New Apologists for Poetry*, Minneapolis, 1956) and Eliseo Vivas (*Creation and Discovery*, New York, 1955) have tried to demonstrate how a poem can be autonomous in spite of the poet's use of conventional language. Mr. Vivas in particular has explained a poem's autonomy in terms of

the reader's special experience, his so-called intransitive apprehension or awareness of immanent meanings. Whenever a poem inspires references to the outside world it is not being read contextually or, as Mr. Vivas phrases it, *qua* poem. In *The Tragic Vision* Mr. Krieger supports this claim for a poem's uniqueness by relating the meaning function of poetry to the Kierkegaardian sense in which all human experience eludes rational discrimination. The poet, "whose only commitment is to experience," is impelled to adopt a stance toward moral reality that necessarily involves a vision of "cosmic disharmony." In this way a "thematic" equivalent of contextualist tension in poetry is found in novels whose protagonists are confronted by ontological absurdity—by a "Manichean" universe in which the conflict of good and evil, of the universal and the particular, cannot be resolved. Not only is literature the only area in which "the existential" can be explored; it is the only possible form of existential philosophy.

I believe that I am sympathetic to contextualism in general and to Mr. Krieger's work in particular, but I am convinced that the connection he makes between the tragic vision and the autonomy of a work of art is spurious. Recognition of the fact that human experience eludes rational categories may properly be compared to the aesthetician's recognition that a poem's meaning eludes paraphrase. Moreover, there is a sense in which an author's awareness of "existential paradox" is often expressed in his creation of a work of art whose organic structure defies ordinary semantic analysis. But what is contradictory or irrational about the poem involves only the inadequacy of paraphrase and should not be confused with ontological absurdity. The fact that a critic can give a rational interpretation neither of a poem nor of the universe does not indicate a mysterious connection between his criticism and his metaphysics.

The source of confusion may be traced, I think, to the emphasis in contextualist theory upon literature as constituting or involving semantic *value*. According to Eliseo Vivas, the artist not only creates objects, he "*discovers* the hidden reality of our practical, commonsense world" (*Creation and Discovery*, p. 23). Mr. Krieger expresses a similar vein of contextualist mysticism in wanting the novelist to strip away the world's mask of logic to reveal existential chaos. But why should one man's ontology be more literary than the next man's? Are the "values" implicit in *Emma* or *Joseph Andrews* less literary than those of *Moby Dick*, Mr. Krieger's paradigm of the tragic? Can we really say that the "meanings" in the two earlier novels are more amenable to paraphrase; that their structure is less contextualist? Mr. Krieger pays insufficient respect to the ambiguity of *any* reference to literary meaning or literary value, and he ignores the difference between one author's avoidance of ethical formula and another's existential commitment.

This flaw in Mr. Krieger's conception of "thematics" seems to be responsible for the characteristic weakness in his criticism—that of confusing artistic and philosophical concerns. Surely his tragic protagonists are first of all characters in a novel and only secondarily, if at all, rebels against the universe. The distinction is important, since Mr. Krieger looks for evidence of self-conscious rebellion and grades the protagonist and often the novel accordingly. But in facing moral ambiguity, such characters as Pierre in Melville's *Pierre* or Heyst in Conrad's *Victory* confront complexities relevant to their dramatic situation or their personality weaknesses and not necessarily to Manichean despair. Mr. Krieger successfully evaluates individual novels in terms of their relation to an

ideal work that directly expresses an existentialist vision. But he has difficulty in convincing the reader that this ideal work could be written, or that it would be literature.

PETER SWIGGART

*The University of Texas*

*Colette* by Elaine Marks. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960. Pp. 265. \$5.00.

Elaine Marks' *Colette* represents an attempt to treat for an English-speaking audience the bulky corpus of novels, short stories, plays, essays and reminiscences written over a period of fifty years by France's prolific Sidonie Gabrielle Colette. Synthesizing the author's creative philosophy in the word "regarde," Miss Marks calls Colette "magician and sage, a master stylist and a wise moralist. . . . The particular point of view which her art reveals and the equilibrium which she reached in old age are both a result of her complete acceptance of the real, of her desire to depict it in words, of her desire to face it with courage." It is not the stylist but the wise moralist (and the woman) who receives the attention of Miss Marks, who traces the development of and the continuity in Colette's wisdom, blending the biographical approach with treatments of themes, motifs, plots and characters and even with a side-glance at the manuscript revisions. The result, though not completely satisfactory, should serve more than adequately to give the American reader a coherent view of Colette's literary output.

Miss Marks has approached her subject with system, treating first the biographical data: Colette's family, her painful first marriage with the libertine M. Willy, who started her as a writer (or ghost writer), her connection with the music halls after her divorce from Willy, and her subsequent success as author under her own name. Miss Marks is particularly interested in the sublimation of Colette the person and the creation of "Colette" the character. Passing from the author's life to the works themselves, she groups the novels, plays, stories and essays by type and quality, tracing tendencies, themes, characters, discovering the idiosyncrasies of each work and period, and the quality of Colette's development as author. In the last chapter she touches rather gingerly upon the problem of the writer's style which others have described confusingly enough as "'classical,' 'spontaneous,' 'natural,' 'ornate' . . ." but which Miss Marks prefers to characterize in terms of matter and direction: "The style, then, is directed by this intention. The resuscitation of childhood through sensations, usually familiar odors, necessarily demands the use of the concrete." Given the amount of ground covered we may excuse the author for devoting a great deal of space to plot summary, interlarded it is true with instructive critical commentary and a generous sprinkling of value judgments, all of which is useful in a book treating a writer whose production is large and unequal.

Miss Marks' comments are characterized by a sense of proportion which prevents her from indulging in unstinted praise of the author or of her own preferred works. Four books are for her Colette's "masterpieces": *La Maison de Claudine*, *Sido*, *La Naissance du Jour* and *Le Pur et l'Impur*. Of them she writes, "Two of Colette's major themes, childhood and the conquest of self, reach their fullest expression in these works." Miss Marks emphasizes throughout

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the living models for Colette's characters and argues that the nearer she approached to her own experience the greater was her success. The "masterpieces," which are not classed with the novels, contain accurate and moving portraits of Colette and Sido (her mother). Of the "best" of Colette's novels, *Chéri*, *La Fin de Chéri* and *La Blé en herbe*, she writes, "they are very good novels, but they are not great." They lack what greatness demands, "great" characters. One may wonder at such a statement, for other modern writers have written great books without great characters, as witness Kafka and Malraux.

Colette's relatively simple novels, tales and essays succeed in part, as Miss Marks has pointed out, because the author's essential honesty leads her to explore the world with the eye of a child and hence to convey to the experience the impact of discovery. Of equal importance are other factors to which the author of this study pays slight attention: Colette's peculiar gifts: her lightness of touch (sense of proportion), her particular brand of humor, her ironic detachment (which is incidentally not confined to the use of a detached narrator) and all other aspects which can perhaps best be treated under style. It is not sufficient, though it may be expedient, to dismiss these aspects with statements like the following: "Colette's style reveals that her particular quality of vision emanates from the distance, the reserve, the modesty, which Colette maintains between the words and herself. This distance translates, in aesthetic terms, Colette's personal relation to reality, her respect for life."

Though we may disagree with some of the writer's judgments and her approach, it is only fair to say that what Miss Marks has done, she has done accurately and thoroughly, generally without resorting to dogmatic statement. The essential rightness of most of her comments and the care with which she documents her points make the book useful and often provocative.

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*The Continental Model: Selected French Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, in English Translation* ed. Scott Elledge and Donald Schier. Minneapolis: Carleton College and the University of Minnesota Press, 1960. Pp. x + 406. \$7.75.

*Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays* ed. Scott Elledge. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2 Vols., 1961. Pp. xxxvi + 1225. \$12.50.

On his shelves beside G. Gregory Smith's collection of Elizabethan critical essays and J. E. Spingarn's of the English 17th century, every student of literary criticism will be glad to make a place for these two anthologies.

In *The Continental Model* Messrs. Elledge and Schier present critical pieces by a dozen French critics, some of them newly translated by Mr. Schier, some contemporary or nearly contemporary translations. Their aim was to place at the disposal of students of English literary history examples of the less easily accessible French writers who influenced English neoclassical literary thought. This aim is laudable and on the whole well fulfilled in the result. Here to speak for themselves are those figures so often evoked by Dryden and Rymer, by Dr. Johnson and the Wartons: Chapelain, d'Aubignac, Saint-Evremond, Bouhours, Rapin,

and several others. Direct French influence on the English criticism of Dryden's day is well known; and that British attention to French critical opinion of *Le Grand Siècle* continued long after Dryden's death is clear from many places in Mr. Elledge's own two volumes (e. g., I, 424, 556, 454-455; II, 721, 727, 739, 740).

But the omission of Boileau is regrettable. The reason for this given by the editors is that his work is in most college libraries. Yet Boileau ought to be here not only for his enormous impact abroad as well as at home, but also because his *Art Poétique* was, and remains, far and away the most provocative and engaging critical achievement of his time and nation, and the one worthy critical counterpart to the brilliant imaginative creations of France's golden age. Even after the Romantic avalanche was supposed to have buried him forever, Sainte-Beuve, himself an erstwhile Romantic, numbered Boileau among those writers who had always most attracted him, those who had most constantly nourished him in thought ("avec qui j'ai le plus vécu en idée").

The inclusion of Boileau would have added little to the bulk of this anthology and much to its intrinsic value, its usefulness, that is, apart from the ancillary purpose its editors mainly envisaged. As it is, to read the book through is to be reminded all too disconcertingly of the ironic overtones of the line from Pope which Messrs. Elledge and Schier borrow as epigraph, "But critic-learning flourished most in France." There are exceptions of course—parts of the Saint-Evremond, the La Bruyère, and the Fontenelle selections, for example—but by contrast with English criticism of the same period the French seems tame and jejune. The same issues predominate: the place of the Rules, decorum, the genres, the Ancient-Modern controversy, and so forth. Yet there is nothing to match Dryden's questing independence or even Rymer's flash and vigor. The *Art Poétique* would have gone far toward redressing the balance and would itself have gained significance by being read in the context of the rest.

The notes are helpful and nicely calculated to further the editors' intention to facilitate study of the continental roots of English neoclassicism. Mr. Schier's translations are lucid and, if my samplings are typical, faithful to the sense of the originals.

Mr. Elledge's two handsomely printed volumes, representing forty British critics from Addison to Alexander Knox, fill an obvious need long felt by students and teachers. As a fundamental tool for studying the evolution of British literary criticism between Dryden and the Romantics, they are a worthy sequel to Spingarn, even if, as their editor modestly confesses, the vastly greater amount and range of 18th-century criticism denied him any hope of achieving the exhaustive representation that Spingarn claimed for his collection. Mr. Elledge devotes roughly half his space to what may be called literary criticism proper: studies of individual poets, essays on the various genres, on versification and imagery, and on the relation between literature and cultural factors. The other half is given over to those aestheticians, or proto-aestheticians, most of them Scotch and many of them voluminous, who wrote mainly in the later decades of the century. These wordy anatomists of beauty and genius are the despair of the anthologist; they can neither be left out nor adequately represented in the space available. In this anthology, for example, should Kames's *Elements* have only 10 pages to the 35 allotted Alison's *Taste*? Should Duff be out and Gerard in? Even if such questions are not mere quibbles, most of them will be referable to no sounder principle than individual preference.

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Willard Durham's decision to stop at the quarter-century mark (*Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1725*) may well have been dictated as much by prudence as by historical tidiness or economy. It is hard to see how Mr. Elledge could have brought off his far more difficult task better than he has. The picture of an age of literary and aesthetic speculation that emerges from his choices is incomplete, as it had to be; but it is not distorted, as it may easily have been.

Except for unnecessary summaries of some of the texts, the editorial paraphernalia on the back pages are excellent. Mr. Elledge's biographical, bibliographical, and analytical notes, enriched throughout by generous reference to the best recent scholarship, are judicious and informative. *Eighteenth-Century Critical Essays* is a splendid performance, for which Scott Elledge and Cornell University Press deserve hearty commendation.

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