

It is not long before Harriet is questioning the standards of Elizabeth Taylor. If she cheats on her DAR State Good Citizen exam, she confesses to an aged suffragette to ease her conscience. Her mother's ideal of being well groomed as well as smart does not automatically produce an invitation to the Junior Prom. Harriet notices that the red-baiter also offers her conventional sexual wisdom. At her student government national convention, she votes for an amendment to a resolution to promote Negro equality and racial justice that removes the words "Negro" and "racial," wondering if she is doing the right thing. The CIA interviewer at Harwyn College wants one or two of the "best girls"; Harriet leaves the meeting early. Through her work in reform politics in New York, she meets her first homosexual friends, yet the candidate Harriet campaigns for subjects her to an intense sexual humiliation.

Marriage pursues Harriet. When she goes to have some chin hairs removed before starting college, Harriet is advised to get her "M.R.S." degree. At college, her friend warns her "you've got to live with men in this world" (p. 97). Her mother and grandmother feel education will solve the problems of "a girl like her"—who might not find a man to support her. Even the college career office director assures Harriet that "a Harwyn education is a wonderful background for an enduring marriage" (p. 144). Part of Harriet's cultural education comes from seeing the effect of class, religion, and geography on her friends' decisions. Darlene, her friend from high school, stays home in Northville and marries a local boy. When Harriet returns for summer vacations, Darlene is already a mother with a drunken husband. Amarillo, rich and Jewish, from Texas, backs into marriage at college graduation "because my father wants me to" (p. 148). Her friends' parents fare no better for being in a different generation. Sloan Trouver's mother is an alcoholic, her father is a bully; Marcia Gold's father can't have sex with her mother unless he ties her up with scarves. Even Harriet's own Uncle Charles may have abandoned a woman who was pregnant by him.

Beyond her class identity, her naiveté, shame, and sensual isolation, Harriet is often surprised at her own resiliency. She can recover from rejections by women just as she has recovered from rejections by men. This is a novel that comments perceptively on lesbian relationships, tracing

Harriet's emotional evolution through the women with whom she becomes intimate. Harriet makes many choices, lesbian choices among them. But *Class Notes* doesn't narrow itself to being "lesbian literature"; it is an absorbing and carefully crafted novel. The author's mastery of irony keeps Harriet's emotional roller-coaster into young adulthood in perspective. Although the sections at home and at school are full of numerous telling details, the last section of the novel, seen less clearly, is the most daring. In her life after college, Harriet's strengths, her still unused potential, are all the more poignant, as she mediates between her ideals and the demands of experience.

Elizabeth Fifer

ROSS C. MURFIN

*Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence, and the Burden of Belief*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Pp. 238.

In this scholarly and perceptive study, Ross Murfin convincingly argues that a reaction against Romanticism largely determined the outlook of Swinburne, who in turn had a profound effect on Hardy and on Lawrence. Very little attention has been accorded Swinburne by modern critics, and Murfin's book does much to restore a proper perspective, not only by ably demonstrating that Swinburne was a major poetic voice, but also by showing how significant he is in the mainstream of literary history.

Swinburne in his earlier poetry derided romantic love, denied the concept that the universe was orderly and life was part of a Divine plan, and that through the spirit man could transcend the mundane and commonplace. Murfin sees the masochism and sadism which are so much in evidence as part of the savage horror of this nihilistic philosophy. This explanation certainly has some validity, but one is left with the uneasy feeling that Murfin is glossing over Swinburne's sexual aberrations which are

well documented and which certainly influenced the kind of poetry he wrote. It is salutary not to emphasize this aspect to the exclusion of all else (a tendency which is manifest in Mario Praz's enormously influential study of romantic decadence, *The Romantic Agony*, which was first published in 1933). Still, by ignoring completely Swinburne's obsession with flagellation, Murfin is tilting the balance too far in the other direction.

In the years between the publication of *Poems and Ballads* (1866) and *Songs before Sunrise* (1871) Murfin sees a fundamental change in Swinburne's outlook. The despair, the disintegration, the sense that "nothing is all" (p. 172), which characterize *Poems and Ballads*, are replaced by an affirmation in the worth of life. Nihilism gives way to a call to work for a society based upon loving-kindness. Swinburne also insists in these later poems that to obtain a modicum of happiness necessitates taking a full look at the worst life has to offer. Murfin suggests that this new outlook is most fully developed in Swinburne's 1876 drama, *Erechtheus*. Unfortunately it is at this point that Murfin ends his study of Swinburne's poetic evolution, an evolution which had come to rest upon the conviction that what was to be striven for was "a humanized *ethos*, a society that, though neither perfect nor millennial, is established in liberty, wisdom and justice" (p. 71). He takes no account of Swinburne's later poems when he was at *The Pines*—poems which include many particularly horrid examples of truculent chauvinism in which Swinburne attacks the Irish and the Boers both of whom had the temerity to struggle against the crushing weight of British imperialism.

Murfin begins his discussion of Hardy by pointing out that Hardy repeatedly denied "transcendental possibilities" (p. 83). This is scarcely a startling discovery; what is surprising is Murfin's wholly plausible argument that this denial stems from Hardy's admiration for Swinburne's poetry and what it said. This thesis is admirably developed through sensitive and often very perceptive readings of Hardy's poems and novels. It is also to Murfin's credit that in his evaluation of Hardy he does recognize "certain biographical catalysts" (p. 91) which shaped Hardy's outlook. This, as has already been mentioned, is what he failed to do in his analysis of Swinburne.

The book concludes with a consideration of Lawrence, and Murfin's chief contribution here is to show not only the extent of Lawrence's indebtedness to Hardy (which has long been recognized, although perhaps not adequately developed), but also to Swinburne (which has not before received any attention). His analyses of Lawrence's poems, particularly those which appeared between 1901 and 1914, go far to strengthen his argument. Considerable space is also devoted to an interpretation of *The White Peacock*, a novel many critics have been tempted to dismiss as a mere apprenticeship piece. But Murfin shows that for all its flaws as a novel, it is an absolutely essential work if one is to understand the basis of Lawrence's thought. *The White Peacock*, he insists, turns inside out that counsel of despair which seems to emerge in Hardy's novels—that only the meek, practical character, who does not rebel against his environment, can survive the hostile forces of society and of the universe. In *The Rainbow* he comes to the conclusion that Lawrence is wrestling, just as Swinburne did, for a humanistic faith in a "post-lapsarian" world. But Lawrence's really important novels, where his philosophical views are developed and refined in all their complexities (and obfuscations), such as *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, are merely mentioned in passing.

Nevertheless, whatever caveats one may have about this book, there is no doubt that it is a valuable contribution to our understanding of certain intellectual and emotional dilemmas which form an undercurrent in so much of Victorian and modern literature.

W. E. Cragg

## GEOFFREY AGGELER

*Anthony Burgess: The Artist as Novelist*

University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979. pp. 245. \$15.75 (U.S.)

Beginning with a well-crafted biography of John Anthony Burgess Wilson, Geoffrey Aggeler's study traces the development of Burgess's art and themes, from *A Vision of Battlements* (written 1949; published 1965)