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Book Reviews

Spiritual Autobiography in Early America by Daniel B. Shea, Jr. Princeton, N. J.: The Princeton University Press, 1968. Pp. xvi + 280. $7.50.

In the "Bibliography Essays" appended to this book, Daniel Shea remarks that autobiography has recently come under the sort of critical scrutiny generally reserved for the analysis of fiction and poetry, and also that one can now discern in some studies of American fiction and poetry "the thematic interests and analytic techniques of a broadly coherent approach to [autobiography]." This disintegration of arbitrary barriers between "literary" and "non-literary" materials seems a reaction by scholars against the limitations which purely formal criticism, narrowly interpreted, imposed on the study of literature. The new criticism arose partly as an adjunct to the "anti-romantic" programs of earlier twentieth-century poetry and partly as a corrective to the methods of historical scholarship, which often slighted the text in favor of the historical context. But now that the new criticism has taught a generation of younger scholars to read literature, these readers are anxious to follow up the avenues into which their close reading directs them, even if those paths lead into the forbidden areas of "non-literature." What is more, their formal and linguistic training has enabled them to come back to non-literary materials with a new sophistication. They are no longer tempted to view literature as "another thing," as history or philosophy, but are prepared, on the contrary, to see literary structures and strategies employed in all forms of human utterance, of whatever discipline.

Spiritual Autobiography in Early America stands firmly in the ranks of this movement. It displays many of the merits habitually associated with literary scholarship—attention to historical and intellectual ambience, the desire to treat works as representative of their times—and enriches these with the critical skill of the close reader: an eye for literary form and for significant nuances of expression. Shea tests what he sees as unsupported generalizations about Puritan and Quaker autobiographies by examining in detail representative works in each category. He shows in the process that Puritan spiritual autobiography, often considered an undifferentiated mass of rigidly conventional accounts of conversion, actually covers a wide range of highly individualized documents, distinguished by the strategies their authors employed to make a prescribed format answer the needs of their felt experience and to resolve conflicting demands within the convention itself. Although less successful in his attempt to differentiate among the works of Quakers, which seem doctrinally determined to follow the model of George Fox at the expense of individuality, he does manage in both cases to restore to our vision the lives and minds of actual people, too long buried in the grey generalities of scholarly inattention.

A good deal of Shea's success in demonstrating distinctiveness is due to his decision to treat Jonathan Edwards and John Woolman as the great exemplars and their respective autobiographies as the ripest fruits of the Puritan and Quaker traditions. He comes at these two works from a discussion of the traditional pattern in each category and of some of the varieties possible within each pattern,

an approach which prepares him to identify the remarkable uses to which Edwards and Woolman put the autobiographical forms they inherited. Although one may argue with Shea's use of exceptional individual cases to characterize the possibilities inherent, but not evident, in a conventional form, he does strike a judicious balance between attention to the type and analysis of the unique case. Whatever undeserved benefits the less distinguished performances in the genre may derive from their association with acknowledged masterpieces, are offset by the help those lesser works give us in identifying the accomplishments of genius.

While Shea's willingness to analyze critical works previously regarded as mainly historical or doctrinal—that is, as non-literary—places him in the scholarly movement to extend the domain of literary analysis, he is kept out of the vanguard of that movement by what appears at points in his discussion as a certain indecision about the meaning of his materials, and in the work as a whole as a problem of organization. Despite the pioneering work of Georg Misch, autobiography continues to be viewed by too many literary critics as sub-literary (with a fixed canon of notable exceptions) and by historians as untrustworthy. In neither case has it been treated as a unique form of knowledge, to use Misch's phrase. Shea has exonerated the spiritual autobiography from the charge of historical unreliability by showing how its metaphors may be translated into reliable statements, of use to historians. Sophisticated as this approach is, it falls somewhere short of an even more valuable possibility of interpretation, that of educing from autobiographical form and statement a shape of human consciousness—the self that is created rather than reported on in its pages. In places, Shea's analysis loses sight of its implied objective, to find in spiritual autobiography a characteristic shape of consciousness, and begins to justify itself on the grounds of purely historical relevance.

This indecision about the value and meaning of autobiographical materials seems to vanish, however, at those points where Shea leaves the works of minor figures and begins to consider those of Woolman and Edwards, and particularly in the closing chapter, where he examines the relevance of Woolman's *Journal* and Edward's *Personal Narrative* to *Walden*, *Song of Myself*, the poetry of Emily Dickinson and *The Education of Henry Adams*. Yet, this shift in direction and emphasis strikes the reader as a problem in organization. Shea seems not to have imagined, when he began, how useful his reading in spiritual autobiography would be to an understanding of these later writers, and so his analyses of several minor Puritans and Quakers are imperfectly related to the important suggestions about the impact of spiritual autobiography on nineteenth-century American fiction and poetry offered in the last chapter. What appears there almost as an afterthought cannot help but strike the reader as the direction that the entire study should have taken. Some revision of the earlier chapters, along the line Shea apparently took in reworking the Woolman and Edwards portions, would have removed some relatively uninteresting historical interpretations and substituted discussions more directly germane to the exciting suggestions of the last chapter. It is neither unreasonable nor unfair, I think, to see *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* as a spiritual autobiography in its own right, a record of the author's coming to a full awareness of his proper subject. One hopes that, having found his line, he will now pursue it in a further study of the autobiographical impulse in nineteenth and twentieth-century American literature.

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The Veil of Allegory by Michael Murrin. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969. Pp. x + 224. $8.75.

Icons of Justice by Jane Aptekar. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969. Pp. x + 278. $9.50.

Perhaps because the age has become more interested in allegory, one has had in recent years an upsurge in excellent books about both the general nature of allegory and the specific use to which it is put in the writings of Edmund Spenser. In one such study, *The Veil of Allegory*, Michael Murrin argues that the original decline in allegory was a consequence of the rise of print, a Horatian view of communication, scientific thinking, and a closer linking of poetry and rhetoric. His study treats allegory as it was defined through Boccaccio and applicable to the English Renaissance and Spenser and perhaps applicable as well to Richard Crashaw and Henry Vaughan. Based on Boccaccio, his argument is that in ancient times allegory was supposed to be neither oratory nor prophecy since oratory precluded a secret meaning for a select part of the audience and prophecy precluded successful communication. Yet, by the Renaissance, it had, in fact, taken on some of the characteristics of prophecy and would, in time, move to take on some of the characteristics of oratory. By the end of the sixteenth century it became the exceptional poet who understood its manner of thought. Within this argument Murrin further argues for allegory's open-minded nature. It begins in a vision of truth outside the art work and ends, again outside the art work, in interpretations provided by its audience.

What Murrin does not show is his otherwise provocative, interesting, and often right analyses is that allegory remained viable, if not continuously in literature, in sermons and religious writings long after Spenser. Moreover, citing Marshall McLuhan, Norman O. Brown, Ezra Pound, and others, one might extend his arguments to show that the renewed interest in allegory may be traceable to the recent declines of precisely the elements he cites as accountable for allegory's demise. Certainly, statements like Alan Watts's from "Wealth vs. Money" (1968) demonstrate how much science has been undermined in some quarters: "Man as an organism is to the world outside like a whirlpool is to a river: Man and the world are a single natural process, but we are behaving as if we were invaders and plunderers in foreign territory. For when the individual is defined and felt as the separate personality or ego, he remains unaware that his actual body is a dancing pattern of energy that simply does not happen by itself. It happens only in concert with myriads of other patterns–called animals, plants, insects, bacteria, minerals, liquids and gases." Moreover, the open-endedness which by Murrin's argument leads to an integration of art and life has been a long time aesthetical preoccupation. It relates to the dying-into-art which Friedrich Nietzsche writes of in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and which dominated the desires of so many *fin-de-siècle* writers as well as framed the more contemporary collage, construction, and imagistic poem, and may even be colored and distorted by these concerns. Yet Murrin bypasses such matters. Earlier studies like Edwin Honig's *Dark Conceit* (1959) and Angus Fletcher's *Allegory* (1964) which viewed the mode through the permanent products of both past and contemporary cultures have as a consequence richer and more flexible arguments that take openly into account such possible distortions.

Murrin's one-sidedly historical and intentionally simplistic approach fails in addition to integrate the work of critics who insist that art is influenced not only by theory but also by the artist's observations of life and of previous art works. His consistent slighting of what allegorists learn from other expressions of allegory negates many of the critics' valuable discoveries. As proof of the allegorist's priority of truth over form, he cites Spenser's willingness in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene* to disregard narrative sense and leave Amoret and Scudamor unreconciled and ignores the strange ambiguities which elsewhere beset the work and which studies of its narrative sense have illuminated. Likewise, his failure to deal in any way with the vision of Merlin which projected an Arthur coming to England's rescue in time of need tends to make Murrin's reading of allegory's reliance on the past suspect. Arthur comes not only in the sixth century, as he insists, but also in some future time much as in Revelation Christ will come again. In stressing the non-visual characteristics of allegory, he tends also to underemphasize the structure in *topoi* in both memory house and commonplace traditions.

In this last matter, Jane Aptekar's *Icons of Justice* provides a partial corrective, treating the iconography and thematic imagery of Book V of *The Faerie Queene.* Book V is one which Murrin would have readers believe "the most ardent Spenserians ignore." Yet, Mrs. Aptekar's study follows on the heels of T. K. Dunseath's *Spenser's Allegory of Justice in Book Five of The Faerie Queene* (1968) and comes in anticipation of a new study of Book V by Angus Fletcher. One might suspect that its theme of political justice sparked the new interest. In a time of a struggle for civil rights and of inequities produced by a society forced into rapid changes by technology, interpretations unconsciously take on these echoes. Mrs. Aptekar sees the book as "concerned, in the first place, in orthodox fashion, with justice's relationship to God" and "more ambiguously, with justice's place in the ambivalent tradition connected with force and fraud, and with Hercules." As clues to these concerns and as a basis for Spenser's visual detail, she offers a tradition of emblem or painting. By the study's close, her own engrossment in the rightness of her selection of icons, many of which appeared after the publication of *The Faerie Queene*, prompts her to offer their specific embellishments as evidence of the special ambiguity that Spenser's work contains.

Throughout the study Mrs. Aptekar's case is overstated both in terms of evidence and in terms of explanations of evidence. But perhaps even more curious is the way in which the study itself becomes allegorical. Predicated upon an unstated assumption that Western culture is dying and will be dead so soon that to write for a current reader is a mistake, it assumes a future reader whom rapid advances in technology have left ignorant of such homey chores as threshing with a flail. To this reader who is advanced enough to select not a general study but one devoted to icons in Book V, she meticulously explains: "A flail is the implement which is used to beat out grain from its husk. The useless powdered threshed husk is called chaff. The chaff is winnowed from the heavier grain by a bellows or fan which blows it off and scatters it." The charm of such naiveté leads one almost to hope for the end of Western culture if only for the delight in reconstructing it on the basis of such miraculous moments of vision as hers.

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The Shadow of Heaven: Matter and Stance in Milton's Poetry by Jon S. Lawry. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968. Pp. xv + 416. $8.75.

Jon Lawry's *The Shadow of Heaven* addresses itself to a difficult general question: how does a Renaissance Puritan Christian poem retain its meaning and effectiveness for a twentieth-century reader? Those who have taught Milton, especially to undergraduates, are aware of the problem. Lawry's answer is that both author and audience must become involved in a *methexis*; "the reader's usual statement that in fiction he 'sees' and 'feels' will no longer be merely figurative. Instead, the audience will be led to the meditative or incarnative affirmation, 'We realize': the awareness of God-within-us." Milton's poetry demands not only that we witness it, but that we actively participate as a methektic audience as well. The total *methexis*, Lawry argues, "asks that author and audience to the works, together with the rehearsals and judgments within the works themselves, share the expression both of divine truth in its many manifestations and of human experience in its manifold forms."

Lawry's preface defines several terms necessary to his analysis of the ways in which our methektic participation comes about. The first of these is "matter," the subjects which Milton treats in his poetry. The second term, "stance," is somewhat more complex. Stance indicates, among other things, point of view and change of setting. But more importantly, it also indicates the "static or progressive placing of author and audience in a poem—placement as much spiritual and judicial as physical." Stance, Lawry adds, demands two things of Milton's readers: first, that the audience participate morally in the place and attitude of the stance and, second, that we separate ourselves from a speaker, face him and become his audience when he addresses someone else at length. The terms *methexis*, "matter" and "stance" coalesce in Lawry's frequently employed image of the perpendicular, where "the vertical line is that of divinity—timeless, unchanging, harmonious, infinite," and the horizontal line is that "implying Hellish and human time, history, cacophony, and change." In Milton's subjects for his poetry, the horizontal is usually composed of biblical and classical matter (which I assume includes all human history, both real and feigned) and the vertical of Christian matter (Milton's protestant theology). Stance in any particular work can also be referred to the image of the perpendicular; for example, "In the Ludlow masque, the aspiring human being was aided by the rising Sabrina and the descending Attendant Spirit into freedom from his lateral wild wood and immobility. By means of that aid and his own assay, he in effect climbed vertically 'Higher than the Sphery chime' to attain the stance of the Attendant Spirit." And finally, it is against this pattern of the perpendicular, where the horror of man's history constantly is at every point touched by the love and providence of the Father, where matter and time touch spirit and eternity, that Milton stages his *methexis*.

For a study designed for the "general reader," this is indeed a cumbersome framework with a good many terms to keep in mind; but Lawry's promise is that the methektic participation of the audience in the poem will span the gulf between Milton's protestantism and our own century: "To see *this* matter, for *this* stance, in both of which we ourselves are included, we with Milton therefore enact Adam or the other Son, at Eden or on their high mounts or in their tombs. By our participation, we confirm and recognize act and meaning as both

theirs and ours, and also those of all men." Lawry in part fulfills his promise and in some of his discussions the results are splendid. His reading of *Comus*, for example, develops quite effectively from his critical apparatus. *Comus* draws the audience into three stances: the first is that of the Attendant Spirit who represents the vertical of the perpendicular; the second is that of Comus, who operates in the principle of darkness and smoke on the lateral line. The third stance, which the audience eventually must share with the Lady and Sabrina, involves a choice between the Spirit and Comus, between the two possibilities of human nature that they represent. Lawry's reading, based on this paradigm, is subtle and provocative. In another instance, he demonstrates that Milton's manipulation of matter and stance forces the audience to a choice in Book III when God speaks in what may seem in human words like "dry platitude at best, or the viciousness of an almighty executioner at worse." Milton has intentionally made uncomfortable the reader's stance and his reaction to the dialogue in heaven:

> If Satan (like Faust's Mephistopheles) seemed to us approachable, easy to describe and comprehend, surely it is Milton's direct purpose that we confess our warm attraction to Satanism, warm as our passional human blood, much as in the poem we first experienced Hell rather than Heaven. Similarly, we must confess our hostility to God and to the clear light of free reason, much as Eve confesses her preference of narcissistic softness to Adam's reason. . . . From our own resistance to God we learn why Satan and Eve wandered into disaffection, thereby realizing within ourselves the springs of inanity and hatred.

I find Lawry's analysis of the dialogue a convincing and shrewd defense of a part of *Paradise Lost* that has been roughly handled by a number of critics.

As these two examples suggest, throughout his study Lawry attempts to describe a general response to the many stances into which Milton forces his readers in his poems. But no matter how carefully Lawry has weighed his own methektic participation in the poetry, one is led to a crucial question: can it justly be said that he has discovered the reaction of the majority of Milton's readers and does the book finally develop a general critical statement about Milton's art? Although, as I have suggested, Lawry's insights are sometimes provocative and right, too often I find that his reading stands between me and the poetry and that our co-ordinates on the grid of lateral and vertical lines are far apart. This point can be illustrated by looking at another reading of Milton, Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (New York, 1967). Fish's approach is the same as Lawry's: "My subject," says Fish, "is Milton's reader, and my thesis, simply, that the uniqueness of the poem's theme—man's first disobedience and the fruit thereof—results in the reader's being simultaneously a participant in the action and a critic of his own performance." Let us consider how the two critics regard the same subject, Eve's dream, inspired by Satan when he sits "Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of *Eve*."

I confess at the outset that Lawry and I part company in his analysis of Eve's character before the fall. Eve's account of her dream in Book V worries Lawry and he suggests that it should worry us, too: "Her account increases audience fears, though not her own knowledge." Adam's explanation of fancy, evil, and reason do not allay the fears: "The possible choice for error having been cor-

rected by Adam's reason, the audience vision now is shifted from Eve's dangerous dream to the renewal that each day offers in Paradise. The audience cannot avoid a lingering fear that the reconciliation of Adam with Eve has been too quick when the narrative confidently says, 'So all was clear'd and to the Field they haste' . . . for all pastures new bring only repetitions of choice." Later, Lawry still refers ominously to "suspicious shadows of turning." The argument for Eve's guilt was not particularly convincing when it was put forth by Millicent Bell in "The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*" and by E. M. W. Tillyard in *Studies in Milton*, and it is not appreciably strengthened by Lawry's treatment. Fish takes an opposite position and sees finally nothing to worry about in Eve's account of her dream. "The episode," he concludes, "is meant to show what Adam and Eve are capable of doing, rather than what they must inevitably do. The reader who makes the dream a cause or even a prediction of the Fall compromises prelapsarian freedom, and renders himself incapable of understanding what the loss of that freedom involves." Confronted with these two readings of Eve's dream and what it signifies, I must take a leaf from both Fish and Lawry and, as "participant" or "methektic audience," rely upon my own reading and response to the poem; given the evidence presented and my own understanding of Eve's role in *Paradise Lost*, I accept Fish's conclusion. The point is, of course, that when a critic attempts to gauge something as elusive as a reader's "response," "reaction," or whatever, the evidence must be quite forceful if the reader is to give over his own response for that of someone else. Part of the problem may lie in Lawry's method; he takes great pains to record only his own reading and to exclude the opinions of other critics. He has read widely and there are many notes in his study, but he seldom calls other scholars to the defense of his interpretations. Fish, on the other hand, senses the objections which might arise in his readers and judiciously draws upon seventeenth-century writers and contemporary critics to buttress his analysis of the reader's role in *Paradise Lost.* I would perhaps have found Lawry's arguments more persuasive had he employed a method more like Fish's.

Readers of *The Shadow of Heaven* should be aware of one major source of confusion in the book. An entire section deals with "typic choices and related stances" in Books I-IV of *Paradise Lost*, and Lawry frequently refers in passing to typology. One is never sure, however, that he really understands what the term "typology" meant to Milton. Unfortunately, Lawry did not have access to William G. Madsen's excellent study *From Shadowy Types to Truth*, which also was published in 1968. Madsen clearly teaches us that "archetype" and "typic" are not synonymous with "type" and "typological" and that necessary and careful distinctions in these terms will reward our efforts; the differences in these terms, Madsen demonstrates, relate not only to Milton's poetic technique in *Paradise Lost*, but ultimately to his views about the ways in which the account of the fall foreshadows rather than reflects heaven and the story of human redemption. In one instance Lawry correctly calls Adam in Books XI and XII a type of Christ, but in the same sentence he shifts his definition when he refers to the agony and resurrection of Christ as a type of the general human condition. Again, he refers to types from myth or "Biblical parahistory," which runs counter to the seventeenth-century—and modern—use of the term, unless one develops a theory of "typological symbolism" such as Madsen does for his reading of *Lycidas.* Many inconsistencies in the use of typology appear in Lawry's study

and the reader must take pains to sort out his terms. Much of the cloud could have been lifted from Lawry's discussion of types if he had studied Madsen's essay "From Shadowy Types to Truth," which is included in *The Lyric and Dramatic Milton* (1965) and cited in his bibliography.

Despite my reservations about Lawry's book—reservations occasioned for the most part by the approach he takes—I recommend reading his rich, complex study. His enthusiasm and his sensitivity for Milton's poetry alone make his book worthwhile, but more importantly he forces us to read Milton as closely as he does. He invites us as participants in Milton's drama of loss and restoration to respond not only to ideas, but to action and character as well. Too seldom, I think, are we asked to examine our emotional reactions to poetry—and to Milton especially—and the exercise is a healthy one.

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Coleridge and Christian Doctrine by J. Robert Barth, S. J. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969. Pp. xi + 215. $7.50.

Father Barth's impressive and distinguished study adds significantly to our understanding and appreciation of the range and acuity of Coleridge's mind. He draws together various elements in the religious thought of Coleridge after the period of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), provides clear and incisive commentary on such writings as *Aids to Reflection* (1825) and *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1840), and presents an exhaustive selection of materials from as yet unpublished manuscripts and notebooks, particularly those in the Victoria College Library, Toronto. The work begins with a brief discussion of Coleridge's early religious development and his well-known rejection of Unitarianism. Fr. Barth then provides intensive examinations, arranged topically, of Coleridge on the nature of faith, the scriptures, the Trinity, original sin, redemption, sacraments and eschatology; the study concludes with a short epilogue pointing out modern aspects of Coleridge's religious position. None of the excellent works by Fr. Barth's major predecessors approaches Coleridge in quite this manner: John Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (1930), C. R. Sanders, *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement* (1942), D. G. James, *The Romantic Comedy* (1948), and James D. Boulger, *Coleridge as Religious Thinker* (1961). The strength of analysis, the nature and kinds of writings surveyed, as well as the scrupulously documented bibliographic information make this a helpful work for the serious (and ambitious) beginning student of Coleridge and a valuable resource for the seasoned scholar who has been waiting for a comprehensive synthesis of Coleridge's religious views.

Particularly well done are the succinct discussions of original sin (all sin is *self* originating—thus it is tautologous to speak of "original sin"); of the distinction between inspiration and revelation (while all scripture is inspired, God communicates only some parts directly); and of Kant's practical reason (Coleridge identifies it with will, faith and conscience). Chapter IV, "The Redeemer, Redemption, and Justification," offers the fullest and best exegesis I have seen of Coleridge's conception of Christ and the Logos. Another merit of the work

lies in Fr. Barth's practice of establishing Coleridge's exact position in relation to other theologians such as St. Augustine and Martin Luther. The footnotes deserve special mention, for they often contain extensive citations. For example, on pages 38 and 83, Fr. Barth lists seventeen and fourteen references (not discussed in his text) where one can find more of Coleridge's comments on miracles and the scripture/tradition problem.

As Fr. Barth notes, the later Coleridge's concerns are more with religion and philosophy than with literature and criticism. Still, the latter continue to figure in Coleridge's writings and comments; thus it might have been useful to include more references to these in so far as Coleridge appears to adapt the language of criticism to the rhetoric of religion. Discussing Coleridge on "objective" and "subjective," Fr. Barth speaks of Letter VII in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* and of a similarity in the Shakespearean criticism; he concludes, "as in poetry so in religion . . . we find . . . that religion has 'its objective, or historical and ecclesiastical pole, and its subjective, or spiritual and individual pole'"; the rest of Coleridge's quote, cited earlier, says that "all Power manifests itself in the harmony of correspondent Opposites, each supposing and supporting the other." In addition to the similarity, it seems worthwhile to point out specifically that Coleridge informs the religious discussion with terminology drawn from his description of the imagination's activity. Again, Fr. Barth's extremely illuminating analysis of personeity (concerning the resolution of the independent Self into Absolute Will) might be enhanced by considering "individuation," a theory developed in *Hints towards the Formation of a more Comprehensive Theory of Life* (Appendix C of *Aids to Reflection*). Both the resolution of individual and all-powerful wills and the interaction of oneness and allness in life proceed in a synthetic manner akin to that followed by the imagination. It seems relevant also to mention that Coleridge twice expresses interest in someone writing an epic poem of concern to "all Christendom" on "the destruction of Jerusalem" (*Table Talk* in 1832 and 1833).

Some minor points: Fr. Barth's remarks on Coleridge and the great chain of being need to be qualified with specific quotations showing that Coleridge has something different in mind than the eighteenth-century version of the concept. More might be made of Coleridge's antipathy to David Hume. And there is one lapse in emphasis. In the preface, Fr. Barth implies that he will devote some attention to "a deep religious experience which took place during the closing weeks of 1813" (p. viii). But he relegates the experience to a footnote containing extracts from three letters (p. 24).

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On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems by Helen Hennessy Vendler. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969. Pp. 314. $7.50.

As early as 1957, Irving Howe warned of "the peril of regarding Stevens as a shuffler of epistemological categories."[1] Yet critics continued to document the

[1] "Another Way of Looking at a Blackbird," *The New Republic*, CXXXVII (November 4, 1957), 16. Reprinted in Howe, *A World More Attractive* (New York, 1963).

shuffling—and Stevens did indeed shuffle—and, as they overinterpreted his mild, unsystematic philosophical interests, they strayed farther and farther from the poetic core of his work. This book serves as a corrective; as Mrs. Vendler says, "If I seem to neglect the poet as philosopher, it is because I believe he has often been badly served in being considered one" (p. 9). So here is a book that documents not epistemology but the temperament of a poet: his changing responses to the world, his changing styles. Despite the volumes of criticism to the contrary, Stevens, says Mrs. Vendler, was a man "thinking less of doctrine than of feeling" (p. 10).

But he was not, at any stage of his career, a hedonist. Mrs. Vendler insists that from the beginning he was "an ascetic by nature and temperament" (p. 10). In his early poetry, to be sure, "he felt obliged to pretend an instinct for the fertility of earth," but nevertheless "his true instinct was for its austerities and delapidations" (p. 45). He felt repugnance for the tropics—and even for Crispin's four daughters; they were part of "the proliferation of life," a revulsion from which is "subliminally ever present throughout Stevens" (p. 43). These are new ideas that Mrs. Vendler is presenting, and they are important and accurate; they arise from a sensitive reading of the poetry. She continues her unorthodoxies:

> The lively things of this world—human, animal, vegetable—do not touch him as they did Keats or Wordsworth. . . . The natural cast of his eye is upward, and the only phenomenon to which he is passionately attached is the weather. (p. 47)

Critics will not quibble with the remark about the weather, but the disclaimer of association with Keats or Wordsworth is somewhat heretical, as is the imputation of the naturally upward glance. Yet these judgments are valuable. It is indeed true that the "hedonist" of *Harmonium* is basically a Prufrock figure trying to stimulate his underdeveloped sensibilities—and that he soon gives up the effort; fairly early in his career, in fact, he returns to the New England landscape, which he loves, as Stevens says later, "precisely because of the spare colors, the thin light, the delicacy and slightness and beauty of the place."[2]

Mrs. Vendler speaks, then, of the poet's "wintry temperament," and she notes his "naturally elegiac style." Her comments on style, in fact, are important, including as they do a listing of stylistic types reminiscent of J. V. Cunningham's catalog in his recent iconoclastic article (*Denver Quarterly*, Spring, 1966). Stevens has four styles, Cunningham had said—imagistic, mannered, nineteenth century rhetorical, and plain—and he cited examples. This was refreshing; it cut through pieties. Yet Mrs. Vendler's delineating of three "manners" is probably more meaningful:

> The first, in an ecstatic idiom, proclaims, sometimes defiantly, the pure good of being, the worth of vigorous life, the earthy marriages, the secular joys of ploughing on Sunday. The second, despairingly and in tones of apathy, anatomizes a stale and withered life. The third and most characteristic form is a tentative, diffident, and reluctant search for a middle route between ecstasy and apathy, a sensible ecstasy of pauvred color, to use Stevens' own phrase. (p. 13)

[2] "Connecticut," *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York, 1957), p. 295.

This is the best summary yet. Her sensitivity to style, in fact, helps her to see the later poems without the usual claims to philosophical grandeur. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," for instance, she considers a poem motivated by "exhaustion and despair," in which the poet, "himself a skeleton, examines the bare possibilities of a skeletal life." Mrs. Vendler is correct, as any purely receptive, non-thesis-pushing reading of the poem would reveal immediately. Mrs. Vendler continues about the poem: "One wants it to have succeeded totally, to have proved that Stevens could find, in life's most minimal offering, something that would suffice" (p. 269). She finds more actual hope in other late poems, yet all her readings of the later work are far different from grandiloquent statements about Stevens' creating himself and his world—or about his work being the culmination of American egocentric, or "Adamic," poetry.

Mrs. Vendler, then, is sensitive and responsive to the text; these qualities give her distinction. Yet there are other fundamental issues of poetry criticism that must now and then be raised. What goals, for instance, should poetry criticism pursue? What type of prose—it must, after all, be written in prose—is most suitable for these pursuits? One goal of poetry criticism is straightforward explication; the problem is that it is dull—and paraphrase, the usual fruit of explication, is heresy anyway. The opposite goal is to prove a thesis by means of selective quotation; this can be—and, particularly in the case of Stevens criticism, has been—howlingly wrong. Most critics, then, including Mrs. Vendler, settle for somewhere in between. Yet there are problems: If the whole of a poem is not explicated, how does one decide which parts to single out? On the basis of difficulty? On the basis of relevance to what is, after all, a theme? Or just at random? On the other hand, if one avoids doctrinaire thesis-pushing, how does one keep from being simply vague? How does one provide intellectual control? Mrs. Vendler's organizational device is to deal with one long poem, occasionally more, in each chapter; but that is not sufficient. Her treatment of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* is illustrative: she expects familiarity with the poem—which is a legitimate expectation—but then she skips impressionistically through the cantos, making individually interesting statements on some. But why these cantos? why only these? In fact, just what *is* the point of the chapter on *Notes*? This type of criticism might be called the Genre of Imitative Form; the critic discusses musing, non-logical poetry in musing, non-logical prose. She has avoided the systematizing of pure explication or pure thesis-peddling, but the writing is deficient in the order and clarity normally expected of prose.

The Genre of Imitative Form has other manifestations: in the language itself. Poetry criticism, as said before, must be written in prose—but what kind of prose? Poetry has metaphor; yet how many metaphors of the critic's own are permissible? Poetry is associative. Poetry does not follow standard syntax or idiomatic usage. Yet can poetry criticism be "poetic" in these ways? A brief illustration of the problem might come from Mrs. Vendler's concluding remarks on *Notes*, in which she praises the poem's "wide embrace of extremes into a center" (p. 205). "Embrace . . . into"? Is this "poetry" or simply poor English? To put it another way, does the fact that she is writing poetry criticism give her license to employ unidiomatic English? Perhaps it does. Of course, the problems of what to say and how to say it are ultimately inseparable; if non-logical musing is the prevailing pattern, it is easy to fall into a kind of writing-around or writing-up-and-down-and-around. One further example should suffice—

a sentence describing the canto which begins, "Two things of opposite natures seem to depend/ On one another" (II, iv):

> The minimal but progressive nearings of relation as the lyric moves from line to line press on to warrant the identities at the close, and though this engulfing is perhaps not Stevens' most unforced version of the soul's place in the world, the gradual accelerations from hypothesis to feeling are not thrust on us bluntly, but strongly based and carefully prepared, and are, in their triple structure, exquisitely suited to the triads they inhabit. (p. 182)

The sentence is unnecessarily long and opaque, of course. But, more important, does it enlighten? Does it make the poetry more understandable, more meaningful, more moving? Does it justify the practice of poetry criticism? The sentence has, to be sure, been taken out of context; in context many of the opacities have resonances in surrounding sentences—the chief effect of which, however, is to multiply the instances of opacity although decreasing the recalcitrance of each particular example. There is nothing unique, of course, about this kind of prose in poetry criticism; readers are conditioned to it, and they accept its obscurities as part of the select world of poetry. But must it be so?

Yet, as said before, her insights are excellent. Mrs. Vendler has said things that are new. What she has introduced, moreover, can be developed further—for instance, to the placing of Stevens in intellectual, not purely literary, history; this is a task that has not yet been done. Stevens' artistic heritage from symbolism and imagism has been defined, but other characteristics—shared with other inheritors of the same tradition—have been generally ignored. His temperament, his cultivated-aestheticism turned natural-asceticism—as well as his discomfort amid what he considered artistic and human vulgarity—put him in the company of many artists of the first half of this century who, like him, had a taste for political and social conservatism.[3] It should be pointed out, among the interrelations of literary and intellectual history, that this man who disliked "the sundry of the world" was, of course, not only the heir of *fin de siècle* aestheticism but also the sharer of the elitist social viewpoints of Pound, Eliot, Yeats, and—to be sure—H. L. Mencken.

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Norman Mailer: The Countdown (The First Twenty Years) by Donald L. Kaufmann. With a Preface by Harry T. Moore. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969. Pp. xvi + 190. $4.95.

As Harry T. Moore rather helplessly observes in his short preface to Donald Kaufmann's *Norman Mailer: The Countdown*, "the reader will of course note that, in countdown fashion, the ten chapters are numbered in reverse order."

[3] *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (New York, 1966) has clearly documented conservative political and social beliefs that a close reading of the poems also reveals.

As if this little affectation weren't enough in the way of initial discouragement, Mr. Kaufmann leads off his own introduction (Maileresquely titled "Advertisement for Intent") with perhaps the worst opening sentence ever published by the worthy press of Southern Illinois: "On the current American scene, Norman Mailer sticks out, alone, with his knack for controversy, even far out of the literary scene."

The subsequent countdown develops as follows: In the first two chapters (10 and 9) Mailer's images of the "political" degeneracy of our civilization are examined, with special emphasis on the motif of bestiality, in *The Naked and the Dead*, *Barbary Shore*, and *The Deer Park*. In the third and fourth chapters (8 and 7) *An American Dream* is analyzed as the novel in which, both as an intellectual and as an artist in search of form, Mailer moves through landscapes of "dream" toward the realization that it is time, historically, to renounce "politics" in favor of "magic" as the instrument of creation. The fifth chapter (6) is a discussion of the relation of Mailer's *credo* essay, "The White Negro," to this change. Chapter the sixth (5) is a brief and pleasant intermission given over to the subject of "The Jew as Literary Drop-Out," which is meant to mark, perhaps, the point where Mr. Kaufmann himself "drops out" as conventional literary critic and carries his argument across the line of demarcation which has been traditionally maintained between concern with the substance of "art" and concern with its roots in the creating artist's life. Kaufmann's new direction at this point is dictated by the shift he sees in Mailer's work at mid-career: his abandonment, in existential disillusion, of art and politics as traditional instruments of human self-realization which are no longer viable in our moribund culture, and his affirmation of ecstasy and magic as appropriate options in a time of apocalypse. In the next three chapters (4, 3, 2), Kaufmann continues his examination, *via* several motifs and themes, of Mailer's new vision in *An American Dream*, declaring finally, just before reaching ground zero, that Mailer appears to be "headed toward mysticism." In his final chapter (1) Kaufmann makes some small, tentative thrusts toward prophecy: Mailer has "evolved into an American Jeremiah in search of a voice that would justify his role"; Mailer is "a kind of Coleridge or Byron in the raw and on the loose in the computer age—a modern Hawthorne faced with a time when letters all run from A to Z in toneless grays." In such passages as these Mr. Kaufmann seems to be having some trouble managing his own voice. But even so, his point is pretty clear: Mailer must find a unitary, unifying, "omniscient" voice if he is to do justice to the vision to which the power of his imagination has finally brought him.

There is a logic to this argument, considering the pattern of Mailer's development during "the first twenty years" of his career. I think I might have been struck by the perception contained in this logic back in 1966, which is the year in which Mr. Kaufmann's study takes leave of Mailer. But now, in 1970, several books and lots of other things later for Mailer, the world, and ourselves, it seems singularly uninteresting to play the game of matching Kaufmann's predictive reasoning against Mailer's actual productivity and our actual response to it. Are D. J. Jethroe of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and "Mailer" of *Armies of the Night*, *Miami and Chicago*, and the Apollo 11 pieces written for *Life* evidence that Mailer is moving toward "omniscient" vocalization of his vision? Or are they evidence of the opposite? I think they might be evidence of the opposite. But I am not sure, and I really don't care. And the reason I don't care is that

whether or not Mr. Kaufmann's book may be correctly prophetic of Norman Mailer's development, it is a book that, notwithstanding its built-in apologia to the contrary, was already very much out of date on the day it was published. The curious reader who knows next to nothing about Mailer coming to Kaufmann for guidance in 1970 will be seriously misled (even the bibliography, which is quite detailed, stops at 1966) by the absences, by what is not in the account. The reader who has read a substantial amount of Mailer is likely to feel that Kaufmann's book tells him, with a somewhat irritating insistence on the indispensable originality of its insights, what he has already discovered for himself—that Mailer's career has been developing a certain moral shape, that the arc of its progress seems to adumbrate a certain tentatively identifiable target area of the spirit.

If all this is so, how did Kaufmann's book come to be published? It seems likely that his having written a good academic thesis on Mailer dovetailed with Southern Illinois' desire to have a continually expanding coverage of recent and contemporary writers in its *Crosscurrents* series of "Modern Critiques." Perhaps because the process of academic publishing is slowed to a paralytic crawl by the fact that "professional" and institutional rather than individual will must originate publishing decisions, Mr. Kaufmann's work on an ultra-contemporary writer like Mailer must appear at some considerable disadvantage just now: it comes too late with too little. Yet for people who have a high regard for Mailer's work this publication of Kaufmann's book is gratifying as yet another recent sign that Mailer is having at last a well-deserved impact on our time.

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