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Book Reviews

"The Greening of Charles Olson" by Marjorie Perloff

Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael by Paul Christensen. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1978. Pp. xi + 244. $12.95.

Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art by Robert von Hallberg. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1978. Pp. ix + 252. $14.00.

Olson's Push: Origin, Black Mountain and Recent American Poetry by Sherman Paul. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978. Pp. xviii + 291. $14.95.

This is, as everyone has remarked, a vintage year for Charles Olson studies; aside from the three books under review, there is George Butterick's monumental *Guide to the Maximus Poems* (University of California Press, 1978). Four scholarly books, then, on a poet some believe to be, as does Sherman Paul, the central poet of his time, the rightful heir of Emerson and Whitman, while others, like Harold Bloom, have given Wallace Stevens, a poet as antithetical as possible to Olson, the very same title. Still others, most notably the post-Structuralists, whose eye is turned not to Emerson but to the continent, barely seem to know of Olson's existence. We thus have a peculiar anomaly. A byword in the pages of *Boundary 2, a Journal of Postmodern Literature,* Olson's name does not so much as appear in the index to Matei Calinescu's recent *Avant-Garde, Decadence, and Kitsch* (Indiana University Press, 1978), a book which is also about postmodernism. Whose postmodernism is the real thing? Is there a real thing? Olson's poetry and poetics raise some of the most interesting theoretical issues confronting us today and it is these issues, rather than the specific interpretations of Olson texts found in the three books under review, that I wish to discuss here.

Paul Christensen's stated premise is that "the essential Olson lies somewhere in a momentous rejection of a culture, a civilization, the values and philosophy of which have gradually diminished the unruly vitality of human awareness. Everything Olson wrote—the essays, the poems, the rambling harangues—speak to this one concern: how to restore to human beings their own primal energies" (pp. 21-22). The same prophetic thrust is admired by Sherman Paul:

> . . . there was a hiatus between the wars and the 'advances' of the innovators, especially Pound and Williams, were not carried forward until Olson and the writers of his generation recovered that ground and began to build on it. The recovery and redirection of the poetic tradition—and it reaches back beyond Pound and Williams to Emerson and Whitman—is one measure of the importance of Olson's work. It is part of a new sally of the human spirit. . . . (p. xvi)

Projective verse, as Olson conceived of it, is, for both Paul and Christensen, " a poetics of present experience, of enactment. It replaces spectatorism with participation, and brings the whole self—the single intelligence: body, mind, soul—to the activity of creation " (Paul, p. 39).

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Robert von Hallberg, whose book is the most challenging of the three, is more cautious about the Great Tradition: "The premise of this book is that Olson deserves close attention precisely because his poems do not conform to what modern critics have argued is essentially poetic" (p. 2). Olson's is an expository poetry, designed less to delight than to teach; it is "offered as explanation and understanding, not as expression" (p. 3). Accordingly, there is no point in submitting this poetry to formal verbal analysis, to look for "delicate shades of irony," metrical niceties, or constitutive image patterns. Like Hesiod, whose *Works and Days* and *Theogony* stand squarely behind Olson's work, he regards his role as essentially didactic.

Both von Hallberg and Christensen trace Olson's origins as a poet back to his withdrawal from government service at the end of World War II, a withdrawal prompted by his disillusionment with "postwar American imperialism" and "hypocrisy" (H, p. 12), and his consequent search for a new frontier, first in the American past (See *Call Me Ishmael,* admirably elucidated by Christensen), and then in such historical and cultural outposts as those of the Maya and the Sumerians. How the matter of Sumer and the Yucatan rather than the matter of Greece and Rome (cf. Pound) is assimilated into the epic of Maximus—postmodern man in search of the new *polis* in his native Gloucester, Mass.—is a major concern of all three studies, and it should be said at once that, despite all their talk of "field composition" and "projective poetics," Christensen and Paul are at least as concerned with content as is von Hallberg. Indeed, all three studies are essentially explicative: they analyze what Olsen *says*, both in his poems and in his difficult prose, and trace the sources of his "philosophy."

To see what such exegesis can and cannot do, let me summarize the three readings of "The Kingfishers," a poem which Guy Davenport has called "the most energetically influential text of the last thirty-five years," a text that "divides decisively Modern from Postmodern poetry."[1]

Sherman Paul devotes the better part of his first chapter to "The Kingfishers," which he calls "as important to Olson's work as 'The Second Coming' is to Yeats's" (p. 8). In this "Poundian poem," collage is the structural principle, and so "we should no more be surprised to find a transposition from the article on kingsfishers in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th edition) than to find Mao's words" ("The light of the dawn is before us").[2] But, unlike Pound, Olson stresses forward movement:

> "What does not change/is the will to change" becomes "When the attentions change/the jungle//leaps in"—the slight alteration, the break after "jungle," owing to Olson's wish to enact the leap. (p. 19)[3]

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[1] "Scholia and Conjectures for Olson's 'The Kingfishers,'" *Boundary 2*, 2 (1973/1974), 251; "In Gloom on Watch-House Point," *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, 4 (1976), 253.

[2] For the text of "The Kingfishers," see Charles Olson, *The Distances* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 5-11.

[3] Since Olson frequently uses the slant line (/) within a line, I follow Sherman Paul's practice of marking line breaks by a double slant line (//).

Whereas Pound looked to Classical civilization for the sources of renewal, Olson turns to Amerindian and Eastern culture, deploying images like the "E on the stone " and the Aztec burial mound so as to show that only by going outside our own civilization can there be hope for renewal. Further, Olson contrasts the evil change embodied in Cortez's conquest of Mexico (or of warfare in general) to change-in-process: Ammonius' speech in Plutarch's "The E at Delphi" that "Into the same river no man steps twice." Ultimately, the poet turns from Pound ("I am no Greek: hath not th'advantage") to Rimbaud:

> si j'ai du goût, ce n'est guères
> que pour la terre et les pierres[4]

Paul glosses these lines by a passage from Olson's *The Special View of History:* "It is this which Heraclitus meant when he laid down the law which was vitiated by Socrates and only restored by Rimbaud: that man is estranged from that [with] which he is most familiar" (p. 28). One must learn to be at home in the physical world. And so "The Kingfishers" concludes with the poet hunting among stones, "in order to receive . . . some valuable lessons of renewal" (p. 28).

Paul Christensen's reading of "The Kingfishers" pursues similar themes. After describing the poem's structure as that of "*montage* or *collage*," Christensen observes:

> Each of the three main sections of the poem builds on the accumulation of detail which the previous section introduced. . . . The E ("on the stone") refers to a cultural order that has disappeared in the historical process: reduced, possibly, to a mere character, but expressive of a civilization, a *polis* that had at one time achieved a high level of integrity and etched its mark upon the center of its defined world, on a navel stone. Mao's words depict a world fallen into corruption, the state of cultural disintegration from which he must now rise, looking into the rising sun as a complex symbol of renewal and illumination. (p. 96)

And the kingfisher itself becomes "the central metaphor of change itself; for its constancy is composed of the rhythms of renewal and decay." In Section III, the speaker discovers his kinship to the conquered Aztecs and rejects the Greco-Roman heritage in favor of the Indian; he rejects "the status quo, which he has already described as a 'pudor pejorocracy'" in favor of his will to "hunt among stones." The poem, concludes Christensen, "communicates concretely . . . the anxiety of the speaker to find a culture in which change is understood, not fought or ignored to some tragic or brutal end" (p. 99).

Von Hallberg comments chiefly on the function of Mao in the poem and then argues that "Olson's freedom from history allows him to shift idioms abruptly, without warning, without explanation:

> I am no Greek, hath not th'advantage." (p. 19)

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[4] The source is Rimbaud's "Fêtes de la faim"; Wallace Fowlie translates the lines: "If I have any taste, it is for hardly/Anything but earth and stones." See Wallace Fowlie (trans.), Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1967), pp. 146-147.

Von Hallberg notes: "The poetic advantages of this posthistorical language are clear, especially in American poetry: the poet can go outside his tradition, without apologies, to get what he wants." But he adds with slight asperity, "The cost is no less high, however. This hodgepodge of diction can cohere only with the force of a strong but still individual voice." Presumably the voice of "The Kingfishers," if not of certain other Olson poems, meets this test. The important thing, in any case, is the poem's lesson which is that "Change itself is the goal." Mao, for that matter, functions less as specific Communist revolutionary than as the incarnation of "the will to change."

There is, one concludes, general agreement as to what "The Kingfishers" means; on this level, Sherman Paul's careful analysis is especially persuasive. But Paul and Christensen, and to a lesser extent von Hallberg, regularly jump from such semantic analysis to conclusions that seem to have less to do with the texts under discussion than with Olson's repeated insistence, in his essays and interviews, that he was doing something *new*. Indeed, here, as in almost all critical discussion of Olson by his adherents, an old-fashioned intentionalism clouds the real issues. Let me elaborate.

(1) It is regularly assumed that "The Kingfishers" marks what Robert Duncan has called "the opening of the field," the move away from "the formalist (New Critical) closed conception of the poem and with it a cosmology and epistemology of the kind that underlay symbolism" (Paul, p. xvi). "'The Kingfishers,'" says Paul, "is an open form permitting the poet, as Allen Ginsberg says, to score the development of his ideas"; it is "above all... an action" (p. 11). Olson's essays make clear, Paul argues, that "true poetry . . . is not symbolist, and he invokes the dance not in the service of the transcendent but of the immanent, as a practical discipline of body consciousness—of proprioception.... he speaks always as a participant and not as an observer" (p. 88).

Von Hallberg has a subchapter called "Anti-Symbolism," in which he quotes such famous Olson statements as "It doesn't take much thought over Bill [Williams'] proposition—'Not in ideas but in things'—to be sure that any of us intend an image as a 'thing,' never, so far as we know, such a non-animal as symbol" (H, 45).[5] Allegiance to Williams' dictate means "absolute opposition to Eliot, whom Olson recognized to be in the Symbolist tradition" (H, p. 45). For "the Symbolists aspire to an order of reality beyond the mundane experiences of actual people, beyond what Mallarmé calls 'ici-bas.' The function of this non-mimetic art is to express the yearning to transcend. Olsen, though, had no desire to write off the mundane and the actual" (H, p. 46). In the same vein, Christensen sees Olson's poetry as essentially "logopoetic" rather than "imagistic" and talks of his rejection of Eliot and the Imagist Pound (pp. 78-79). "'The Kingfishers,'" he writes, "is a model of the projectivist poetic executed successfully," a work that shows "not the image but the forming of the image in the mind of the observer" (p. 99). Like Paul and von Hallberg, Christensen relates this and other poems to the famous manifesto "Projective Verse," with its call for "FIELD COMPOSITION," poetry as "energy discharge," the credo that

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[5] See "On Poets and Poetry," *Human Universe and Other Essays*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 65. Subsequently cited as HU. Note that Olson misquotes Williams' famous "Not ideas but in things!"

"ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. . . . get on with it, keep moving . . . USE USE USE the process at all points."[6]

But the readings of "The Kingfishers" which I have cited above give us little sense of the poem as open field, as process or energy discharge. If the opening line, set off by itself, is, as Paul says, "a text for meditation. containing the poem that activity of thought unfolds" (p. 11), one could argue that, Olson's poetics to the contrary, "The Kingfishers" is the perfect example of a closed poem. Olson knows from the beginning precisely where he is going; he marshals his properties–symbolic birds, the "E on the stone," "what Mao said," the Aztec burial mound, the plunder of Cortez, Fernand talking "lispingly of Albers and Angkor Vat"–and orchestrates them so as to create a very definite dialectic. Thus, as Christensen notes, "The loot taken by Cortez in his conquest of Mexico is listed carefully as a preface to the last" (p. 97); or again, "the feed-back is/the law" (I, 4) leads to the search for a usable past in Part II (P, p. 23). Olson, according to von Hallberg, "had no desire to write off the mundane and the actual," but do we in fact find more "mundane" or "actual" images here than in, say, *The Waste Land?* Or, for that matter, in what sense is "The Kingfishers" more of an energy discharge than Eliot's great collage poem with its sudden cuts from "I read much of the night, and go south in the winter" to "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/out of this stony rubbish?", or from the "broken fingernails" of the girl "On Margate sands" to the fragment "To Carthage then I came" in "The Fire Sermon?"

Indeed, Olson's poetic father may well have been Eliot rather than those "predecessors" he chose for himself–Pound and Williams. Here Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence" should be taken into account. Olson, like so many poets of his time, railed long and loud against Eliot. But Sherman Paul himself points out that the kingfisher image echoes *Burnt Norton:*

> After the kingfisher's wing
> Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
> At the still point of the turning world.

He rightly observes that Olson inverts Eliot's meaning: his "secular" kingfisher becomes the symbol of change, not of the still point (P, p. 12). But the point is surely that in the "postmodern" as in the "modern" poem, the kingfishers are never primarily "the mundane and the actual"; they are, on the contrary, consistently designated as emblematic. And even Fernand, the lisping Frenchman who talks of "Albers and Angkor Vat," is quite unlike Pound's characters–"Fordie," "Uncle William," "poor old Homer blind as a bat"–characters who are recalled precisely for their individuality. The poet "thought of Fernand" because he must have, at the outset of his poem, a representative of the effete, decadent Europe, a culture that fails to comprehend the significance of the Maya.

Compare "The Kingfishers" to a genuinely postmodern poem like Ashbery's "Pyrography" or to a text like Beckett's "Ping," and the difference becomes clear. Even the allusion to Rimbaud in Part III betrays Olson's real bent. Rimbaud's "Fêtes de la faim" is not, as Paul, following Olson, seems to think, about anything so simple as the need to return to the earth, to live "the physical life." For Rimbaud, such descent into the earth is always related to thirst: the liquifaction of rock renews the poet's creative force ("la future vigeur"). But Olson's Rimbaud is a symbol of Natural Man as opposed to Cultured Man (the Pound who wants to judge our civilization in terms of Classical models). And Natural Man, in this systematic poem, must learn to hunt among stones.

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[6] See "Projective Verse," *Selected Writings of Charles Olson*, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 16-17. This text is subsequently cited as SW.

(2) Olson, the inventor of "anti-symbolist" fields of action. This is one aspect of the myth. A closely related one has to do with Olson the Objectist. The central text here is again "Projective Verse," in which "Objectism" (despite Olson's protests to the contrary, the term is roughly equivalent to "objectivism" as Zukofsky and his circle undersood it) is defined as "the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature . . . and those creations of nature which we may with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object" (HU, pp. 59-60). And in a related essay, "Equal, That Is, to the Real Itself," Olson aligns himself with Keats as a poet of Negative Capability (HU, p. 116).

Taking his lead from Olson, Sherman Paul distinguishes between the Jungian Self and Ego, as they appear in *The Maximus Poems:* "The self in its own space-time is the essential formal element of the poems, and its story, the sequence of its occasions, is the essential narrative. Not the 'EGO AS BEAK'" (p. 118). But here is Paul's comment on the passage in "I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You" that culminates in the lines:

o kill kill kill kill kill
those
who advertise you
out)

> Lear's cry of outrage . . . is the extreme expression of revulsion and identifies both an object of hate and a moral direction. . . . They [movies, magazines, radio, advertising] are plagues to Maximus . . . because like muzak, they distract us, keep us from hearing what we have just heard . . . and in his poem they name a late stage of capitalism—the consumer he opposes to the early productive capitalist of the fishery—and an action . . . which relates our estrangement from the familiar world to the misuse of language. (p. 126)

No doubt this is an accurate account of what Olson wants to convey to his reader in this, his first Maximus poem. But where is the "objectism" he has advocated? The "interference" of the ego may not be "lyrical"—it is true that Olson is not a confessional poet—but for pure unadulterated "egotistical sublime" it is hard to beat this and a hundred similar passages in *Maximus.*

Christensen and von Hallberg are more cautious: they admit that Olson's poetry does not always embody the Objectist poetic, which both relate quite rightly to Whitehead, especially to the doctrine that "the things experienced and the cognisant subject enter into the common world on equal terms." "All actual things," wrote Whitehead in *Process and Reality*, "are subjects, each prehending the universe from which it arises." Olson scribbled in the margin of his copy: "the End of the Subject-object thing—wow!" (von Hallberg, p. 113). But despite that "wow!" it is not clear to me how subject and object enter into the common world on equal terms in, for example, "The Librarian," which Von Hallberg cites as an instance of successful "objectism." It is true that in the course of this, one of Olson's finest poems, Gloucester may be said to enter the poet's mind:

> Where is
> Bristow? when does I-A
> get me home? I am caught
> in Gloucester. (SW, p. 219)

But the process of internalization does not seem essentially different from, say, the movement in Stevens' "The Snow Man" or in Lawrence's "Bat." Again, when Christensen says of *Maximus* that "The desire is to make Gloucester become continuous with himself so that there are no longer barriers of subject and object between them" (p. 121), he is simply accepting Olson's word for it and hence contradicting his own accounts of what that "subject" repeatedly *says about* the "objects" in its field. A page after the previous statement, for example, Christensen writes: And Maximus regards the people of Gloucester as having been corrupted by the commoditization of all aspects of life:

> love is not easy
> but how shall you know,
> New England, now
> that pejorocracy is here, ..."
>
> (MI, p. 3, cited by Christensen, p. 123)

Reading such lines, we do know, I think, that the "subject," Olson the Preacher, and the object, the New England "pejorocracy" as seen in the particulars of modern Gloucester, are not one.

(3) Although Paul and Christensen make greater claims for Olson as a poet than does von Hallberg, they agree with him that Olson was perhaps most remarkable as a teacher. Christensen's long chapter on Olson's influence on the Black Mountain poets—an influence stubbornly claimed by Creeley, Duncan, Dorn, Blackburn, and others, even though it is much less evident in their actual poems than in their interviews and statements of poetic—makes the case for the "enormous impact" (C, p. 161) Olson's doctrines had on younger poets. "For him," says Sherman Paul, "the true relation between people was pedagogic—and it was chiefly in the generous way of his teaching that he gave pleasure and consolation" (pp. 247-248).

What, then, does Olson teach us? Paul sees him as the apostle of Emerson's "Party of Hope," the Party of Nature versus Culture, teaching us that we can fill space with our own projections and rediscover wholeness by our contact with the Great Mother. In mapping the geography and history of Gloucester, "he showed use how to find place . . . because it has a history. . . . We repossess place in repossessing the experience of it. *Polis is eyes*" (p. 356).

In short, "an ecological vision" as Paul calls it (p. xviii). Christensen puts it a bit differently: "Olson's canon has within it a potent utterance: life is strangled by systems. Existence has an order than cannot be isolated from nature" (p. 212). The poet must be "the measure of awareness . . . that lone human figure thrust deep into the uncertainty of the real, where he lives and expresses himself joyfully and is ultimately joined by others."

No one is likely to quarrel with these generalizations. But in the course of interpreting specific poems, all three critics make us swallow any number of statements that strike a non-member of the Olson Club as misguided when not downright silly. Here are some random examples:

> . . . Olson admired Mao for insisting that the revolution be not just political or economic but above all cultural. In 1952 Olson believed that New England was to be the center of a cultural revolution.... (H, p. 21)
>
> What Olson decries is the movement away from labor, the development of capitalism. Parasitic absentee ownership is the source of corruption in Letter 3. (H, p. 60)
>
> At the moment [1951], however, one conclusion was already evident to [Olson]: Mayan art, which had sprung from sources beyond Greco-Roman influence, expressed a more intense human attention to human experience than did Western art. (C, p. 18)
>
> The issue lying beneath the surface of the letters in Book II is that while the Puritans chose to settle in New England and create "the city of God," rooted within their own devout religiosity was the impetus to succeed individually. . . . (C, p. 130)
>
> To sustain, nourish, increase, advance, make daily life a dignity—this is polis . . . The modern hero (post-Dante) lacks the first will to coherence. [In contrast to the Sumerian model described in "Human Universe"] His is a "contrary will" to dispersion, to destruction. . . . his heroism is not defined in terms of cultural achievement but in terms of the spoliation of nature. . . . (P, pp. 72-73)
>
> 450 B.C., the only date in the essay ["Human Universe"] . . . locates the advent of the Greek system, the crucial moment when logos displaced "live speech," and discourse itself became an arbitrary, closed universe. (P, p. 82)
>
> Here [Letter 13] indeed is a "dreamless present" of "merchandise men" in which it is impossible to move, in which the truth and promise of the New World has been betrayed by lies, and the Goddess, embalmed, is merely Jean Harlow (the sex symbol of Olson's youth), "As she lies, all/white." (P, p. 151)

Lest I be accused of taking these statements out of context, let me assure the reader that all are paraphrases or explanations of Olson's arguments rather than independent value judgments on the part of the respective critic. But what seems so remarkable is that the commentators consistently refer to these doctrinal statements as if they were (a) original and exciting and (b) true. This is not the place to test Olson's "special view of history" or mythology, but suffice it to say that any intellectual who is not directly involved with the study of modern American literature would probably find these notions simplistic and banal, if not just plain wrong. How can one take seriously a didactic poet who teaches us that after 450 B.C. "discourse itself became an arbitrary, closed universe," that the Sumerians or Maya should be our models for behavior, that the Puritans were just greedy and competitive capitalists? In discussing Pound, critics generally admit that the treatment of usury as the source of all evil is misguided, but how much more complex or valuable are Olson's economic and historical theories?

Von Hallberg does admit that the later Maximus Poems fall apart, that " Olson seems to have resigned himself to teaching by example rather than precept " (H, p. 42). He concludes:

> American literary culture appears to have no way of handling a poet like Olson, committed to a pedagogical and rhetorical poetics, short of labeling him a shaman, and Olson perhaps had no experience at rejecting what was, after all, flattery. If this was the case, it is not hard to see why his later poetry was egocentric, though it is depressing to witness how, almost routinely, contemporary culture can corrupt so ambitious and so American a poet. (p. 216)

It *is* depressing but the problem is larger than von Hallberg suggests. To understand the Olson cult, we must consider the increasing isolation of the poet in postwar America. Anthropologists. archeologists, historians, political scientists—these are the intellectuals who might shed light on Olson's " causal mythology." But of course they don't read Olson or, for that matter, any contemporary poetry. The literary people who do—mostly in the academy despite the claim of Olsonites to be anti-academic—are unfortunately susceptible to the large doses of anti-rationalist, primitivist doctrine in the air. It was the Literary Establishment, after all, that hailed Charles Reich as a seminal thinker.

With the demise of the New Criticism, value judgments and literary norms have become increasingly suspect; no one dares to say that a poem *should* have certain qualities or meet certain standards. At the same time, post-structuralist critics are busy applying increasingly sophisticated analytic tools to what are, in fact, certified texts—Rousseau's *Confessions*, Poe's *Purloined Letter*, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*—so that, again, problems of value don't arise. The result, for practical criticism, is defensive exposition. In this sense, the new Olson books are typical: if you already admire Olson, these books will give you reasons to admire him still more and will provide some sturdy support for your enthusiasm. If you don't, they are not likely to change your mind. The notable achievement of von Hallberg's book is that at least it raises the right questions, asking us to consider in what if any sense Olson has claims to being a major poet.

In the years to come, we will be rethinking these issues, sorting out the valuable Olson from the " plosions of obfuscatory verbiage," found all too frequently in the later Maximus poems.[7] In the meantime, we have three scholarly and valuable guidebooks that tell us what Olson's difficult poetry is all about and place it in its historical context. As a general introduction, Paul Christensen's *Charles Olson* is especially good; as a commentary on *The Maximus Poems*, Sherman Paul's *Olson's Push* is an indispensable supplement. But both books convince me that Olson was, in fact, less the father of postmodernism than he was the last of the great system-builders. Who nowadays tries to write a poetry encompassing ancient history, myth, geography, religion, philosophy, the new mathematics and physics, American politics? Our poetry has become more modest; it tries to define life as it is lived (or invented, or dreamed) rather than the abstract "human universe." Like Eliot's Hieronimo at the close of *The Waste Land*, Olson might have said: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." But in the "post-modern" universe of 1980, we are perhaps less fearful of fragments. And from this vantage point, a poem like "In Cold Hell, In Thicket" (1951) is beginning to look positively traditional.

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[7] The phrase is Hugh Kenner's; see *A Homemade World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), p. 182.

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The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response by Wolfgang Iser. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Pp. xii + 239. $15.00.

During the past ten years, American criticism has undergone a Copernican revolution. Attention has shifted from the literary work itself to our ways of perceiving it, and the autonomous verbal icon postulated by the New Critics has been displaced by theories of literary competence and reader response. As might have been expected, this shift has created as many critical problems as it has solved. Who is the reader? Like the literary work, he turns out to be either a concept (Riffaterre's "super-reader," Fish's "informed reader," Wolff's "intended reader") or a particular, perhaps uncharacteristic example (the students studied by Norman Holland, Walter Slatoff, and David Bleich). At best, he is simply a brilliant critic who caresses or mauls texts (Barthes). German theorists of reader response have pointed out that the reader and the text are both hypothetical entities: to study either apart from the other is to disregard the fact that they exist only when interacting. By basing their theories on the phenomenological tradition and studying literary experience itself, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser have avoided conceptual dilemmas evident in many American theories. Jauss's studies of literary reception (in particular *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik*, 1977) draw on the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. Iser, beginning from Ingarden's conception of literature, has during the past ten years developed what is probably the most useful theory of reader response currently available.

The gist of Iser's theory is contained in his essay "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," published in *New Literary History* (1972) and reprinted in *The Implied Reader* (1974). In *The Act of Reading*, he fills in the framework presented in that essay and shows that a number of disciplines (Gestalt and social psychology, information theory, speech-act theory, and philosophy) lend support to his basic assumptions. From Ingarden, he takes the conception of the literary work as a schematic formation that acquires a determinate structure and meaning only when a reader fills in what it lacks and synthesizes it in his imagination. In Iser's words, "the iconic signs of literature do not serve to designate a signified object, but instead designate *instructions* for the *production* of the signified" (p. 65). Since the reader produces the literary work, and at the same time the work produces his awareness of it, analysis must begin from literary experience, which empirically and theoretically precedes all subject-object distinctions.

It is impossible to provide an adequate summary of Iser's theory in this context, but its fundamental features deserve mention. Ingarden, important as he is, remained attached to a static conception of literature. Only after describing the literary work did he attempt to provide an account of how it is "concretized" in reading. Iser's most important contribution to phenomenological aesthetics is his analysis of the temporal dynamics of literary experience. As the reader moves through a fictional text, encountering a sequence of disjunct viewpoints, descriptions, and analyses, he is constantly attempting to integrate them. The synthesis achieved at any particular point, which results from his effort to fill in gaps and resolve disparities, will be altered by new information when he reads further. As a result, both his expectations regarding the outcome of the action and his assessment of what has gone before are subject to continuous alteration. This, as we know, is the *experience* of reading, but its effects and consequences have seldom been analyzed.

Emphasis on the temporality of literary experience sheds new light on traditional critical problems. Most theorists cannot provide a convincing account of why interpretations differ so radically. On the assumption that the literary work is a determinate object, they conclude that differences in interpretation result from differences in readers. But the literary work is in fact neither a real nor an ideal object, neither universally determinate nor autonomous; as Ingarden said, it is "in principle incomplete." In order to understand it, we endow its schemata with concreteness and integrate them in relation to implied frames of reference (involving motive and consequence, ethical systems, social norms, and literary conventions—the fictional "repertoire," in Iser's terminology). The "blanks" in the text—conceptual spaces between elements of the repertoire—can be filled in various ways when the reader brings the literary object into being. Several different structures of coherence can be posited for a fictional text, quite apart from the varied sorts of "significance" that result when its general meaning is attached to particular spheres of reference.

Iser recognizes that the determinacy of textual meaning is conditioned by the author's intentions and his historical situation. Didactic writers tend to foreclose options of interpretation, and the evolution of the novel has involved an expansion of interpretive possibilities. Apart from extreme didacticism, however, fiction has always made use of conflicting viewpoints that lead to a questioning or negation of accepted norms. Iser's theory of the relationship between literary innovation and the conventional "repertoire" appears to have something in common with formalist and structuralist theories of defamiliarization and deviation. Even after he has explained why such similarities are misleading, there is reason to think that structuralism and semiotics are not incompatible with his theory and might in fact adapt it to their ends. In doing so, they would free themselves from static frameworks and reductive descriptions. At the same time, they might make Iser's account of the "repertoire" of fiction more precise and aid him in defining the relationship between "background" and "foreground" in literary texts.

Unlike many theories, which merely serve to justify the activities of the critic who proposes them, Iser's account of aesthetic response will prove generally useful. Although he has not resolved all the issues that he considers relevant to his theory (his discussion of the "image," for example, seems dated in relation to current research), he provides a reasoned foundation on which others may build. For those critics who believe that there is a categorical distinction between literary and non-literary texts, that literary meaning is in some sense transcendent and uniquely valuable, and that literary analysis can be intellectual without being reductive, Iser will prove a useful ally. In other words, he deserves the careful attention of American critics who oppose deconstruction but wish to revitalize the fundamental assumptions of the New Criticism. He himself says nothing about deconstruction and, despite his recognition of the negativity underlying literary production, he leaves himself particularly vulnerable to deconstructionist assaults. Quite apart from polemics, however, *The Act of Reading* is one of the few recent books on critical theory that will repay the attention of scholars and teachers who seek a useful account of the reader's role in the creation of literature.

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The Failure of Criticism by Eugene Goodheart. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1978. Pp. 203. $13.50.

What is Literature? edited by Paul Hernadi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978. Pp. 257. $12.50.

What is Criticism? What is Literature?

The books under review ask the two fundamental questions which literary scholars must deal with, implicitly or explicitly, both as researchers and as teachers. The title of Eugene Goodheart's essay implies an even more vital concern, since "criticism" must here be taken to mean "humanism" (p. 27). Goodheart explains his title in an Introduction which is then followed by nine loosely-related essays whose chapter headings will help us summarize the book's intent: Modernism and the Critical Spirit; English Social Criticism and the Spirit of Reformation; The Reality of Disillusion in T. S. Eliot; The Organic Society of F. R. Leavis; A Postscript to the Higher Criticism: The Case of Philip Rieff; the Formalist Avant-Garde and the Autonomy of Aesthetic Values; Aristocrats and Jacobins: The Happy Few of [Stendhal's] *The Charterhouse of Parma*; Flaubert and the Powerlessness of Art; The Blasphemy of Joycean Art. There is no Conclusion since, I suppose, an essay has no thesis to prove but the assertions of an Introduction to illustrate.

Professor Goodheart's book is moderate in its rhetoric, intelligent and balanced in the condemnation of "modernism." He is well aware that "the decline of critical standards can be dated no more precisely than the fall of man" (p. 1). Yet, despite such disclaimers, the book is built upon certainties buttressed by casual observations of the impressionistic, "humanist critical" type. The book takes for granted what surely must be seen as a series of bold working hypotheses which, *at best*, may partly apply to a significant number of important authors:

> I have followed the suggestion of Carlyle and Arnold that literature is a branch of religion and revised Eliot's statement that a key to an understanding of most contemporary Anglo-Saxon literature is the decay of Protestantism. Modern literature can be fruitfully viewed as a dialectic between the Protestant-inspired, largely English tradition from Carlyle to Lawrence and the Catholic-inspired literary modernism of Flaubert, Joyce, and Eliot. (p. 6)

The book continues with this dismaying love for generalizations, with a lack of social or historical seriousness and an assumption that someone's "suggestion" need only be taken up and followed through, not tested or questioned in some way. I suppose that being systematic and sparing in one's hypotheses would be boring, unhumanistic and above all disquieting. The world would turn out not to be amenable to such sweeping statements. But, whether the generalizations are right or wrong is not even to the point: they are meaningless since I cannot possibly begin to check them. I am reduced to taking them on faith, to accepting them through prior knowledge or prejudice, or to rejecting them just as gratuitously. Or, as I am attempting here, to discuss the very conditions which govern Professor Goodheart's discourse: his principles, his presuppositions.

This problem is not typical of Goodheart's work only, but characterizes all the "critics" he himself studies and is the hallmark or rather the failure of humanist criticism. But what is humanist criticism?

> The most impressive expression of humanist criticism occurs in nineteenth century England. The work of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold has as its major theme the spiritual consequences of the new mechanical civilization and the French Revolution. It is a criticism inspired by a positive order of values, nourished by a moral understanding of the religious tradition and by a profound appreciation of the works of art and intellect of past and present, in Arnold's words, "the best that has been thought and known." Its principal expression is the essay [where one can be arbitrary with impunity for the genre does not require rigor, rules of evidence, explicitness, completeness; one can merrily pick and choose], but it may express itself as a novel or poem. (p. 8)

Yet Arnold, in his *Discourses in America* (1883-1884), responded to Thomas Henry Huxley by redefining "the best... known" to include *science*. The only problem is that Arnold and his followers never let scientific method, explicit model building and testing enter the charmed world of their critical practice. This is not to say that, as a preliminary exercise, I do not see room for unsubstantiated ideas both in literary studies and in science. But humanist critics (see for instance Cleanth Brooks in *Mosaic*, 8 [1975], 2-11) deal with ideas *only* in this way and, further, they do not like to separate—as is clear from Goodheart's last clause—the experience of literature from the study of literature. It is somehow morally wrong to study literature as an "object." Thus Goodheart's objection to Structuralism (and semiotics, and science). He does not bother to distinguish his definition of "criticism" from the one evolved among the community of poeticians and summarized in Todorov's *La Poétique* (Seuil, 1973). He prefers dealing in personalities: Barthes, Derrida, et al. Yet poetics and applied poetics (what literary semioticians would call criticism) belong to a sufficiently different world from Goodheart's brand of "criticism" for some kind of *entente cordiale* to be possible, as pointed out by Jules Brody (*French Forum*, 1 [1976], 177-184). On the other side, Jonathan Culler, in his Preface to *Structuralist Poetics*, makes a powerful case against the deluge of narrowly interpretive essays:

> Citing no special knowledge which it deems to be crucial and from which it might derive its authority, interpretative criticism seems best defended as a pedagogic tool which offers examples of intelligence for the encouragement of others. But one needs only a few such examples.... Rather than a criticism which discovers or assigns meanings [we need therefore] a poetics which strives to define the conditions of meaning (Cornell [1975], p. viii).

Naturally, the problems raised by Goodheart also correspond to the Edenically ignorant world of the *honnête homme* who (supposedly) needed nothing but a sharp mind to understand life—Arnold's "sense for conduct" and "sense for beauty." I suppose we know about beauty and conduct in the same way as we know the English language. But the speculative History of Aesthetics (to use the title of W. Tatarkiewicz's monumental study [Mouton, 1970]), for well over twenty centuries, has hardly progressed at all as compared to the infant science of experimental aesthetics (D. A. Berlyne, *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* [Appleton, 1971]). Similarly, although we know English, we cannot describe it: so why should we be able to describe the immensely more complex system of literature and its relationship to society, religion, morals—merely with the help of a few generalizations? Scientists do not have this kind of arrogance: they believe in modest but cumulative work and in the achieving of one's aims through cooperative effort. There *is* an Arrogance of [scientific] Humanism (David Ehrenfeld [Oxford, 1978]), but it is heuristic: one dares assume that solutions will be found if one admits ignorance as a starting point. Herbert and Eve Clark show, for instance, how much can be achieved in this way in their survey of *Psychology and Language* (Harcourt, 1977). I need hardly stress that scientific procedures are no panaceas. But humanist criticism is so constantly flouting rigor and the controlled use of imagination in its "model building" that the problems of scientific hypothesis and theory making or testing seem puny by comparison. Humanist criticism is not anti-empiricist and pro-rationalist as Noam Chomsky or even Claude Lévi-Strauss are. Humanist criticism is a-theoretical or anti-theoretical and its scope is too broad ever to make precise and therefore meaningful claims. (Compare with John Ellis, *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis* [California, 1974], p. 97.) One experiences humanist criticism as one experiences literature: neither can or should aim at contributing directly to the slow accumulation of knowledge.

I might seem to be blind to the intelligence of Goodheart's arguments, so praised by the bookjacket comments of Wayne Booth and Geoffrey Hartman. Let me therefore give an instance of Goodheart's qualities in a comment on the *Waste Land*:

> There is, to be sure, a distinct aesthetic pleasure produced by the poem related to but not identical with its meaning. The impressions of montage, of the fusing of incongruent elements, of the striking of notes that are dissonant have a richness and excitement that run counter to the mood of despair or of disillusion which informs the poem....But one simply wills away an important aspect of the experience of the poem by denying "its bitterness and desolation." (p. 61)

The final reproach is, in a sense, well taken, but it presupposes that we can and should look at form and content not as one (see Ellis on "style" as a logically incoherent notion, pp. 158 ff.), or even as organically united, but as "things" which, moreover, can and should be separated. Second, Goodheart's categories for reading are too general and operationally vague. Presumably, he depends on a communality of intuitive knowledge and he only wishes to convince those who share his basic outlook. He would insist that the pertinent experience is "meaning," the general world-view inherent in the *Waste Land.* But meaning, even if we do not deal with irony, is a tricky (ecosystemic) notion. For instance, in Samuel Beckett's presumably also "desolate" and "disillusioning" *Waiting for Godot*, the dialogue does not owe its hypothetical uplifting character to Aesthetic qualities only, but to its being framed by a unique situation whose meaning belies a facile view of the play's content. We are faced with two human beings who are tied together by friendship or love and who share food, small sufferings and great, childhood and metaphysic thoughts; we come to feel for them and with them; we come to value their strong bond of friendship. To me, this is the kind of "positive order of values" which Goodheart seeks out (p. 8)—but which he would not (I believe) have cared to find in *Godot* because he would have treated the play as a straightforward absurdist drama. Similarly, the complex frameworks through which a poem communicates deserve serious attention: the "bitterness and desolation" must be seen as part of the total effect, not isolated from it or, independently of context, attributed to Eliot.

What is Literature?

One gets little sense, on reading Goodheart, of the diversity of contemporary critical thinking—even among humanist critics. Similarly, literature seems to mean a few great authors like Flaubert, Eliot or Joyce. Reading the eighteen selections edited with an Introduction by Paul Hernadi, on the other hand, makes me better understand my dissatisfaction with Goodheart. He lives in a universe where all the important questions received revealed answers long ago. Hernadi's book is a Book of Questions:

> Given the conflicting plurality of contemporary notions about literature in any one country, some essays will at first seem especially pertinent to some readers and quite wrongheaded to others. Perusal of the entire volume will, I hope, lead to a careful review of such initial attitudes.

> Repeated consideration of all included papers has certainly influenced my own views. (p. xvii)

René Wellek deals with "Literature"—word and concept. He shows how "in antiquity and in the Renaissance, literature or letters were understood to include all writing of quality with any pretense to permanence" (p. 20). This is a notion, oddly enough, not unlike Roland Barthes' "écriture" which, of course, Wellek castigates, along with other aspects of "French Structuralism," for its devaluing of the very concept which he himself could not but define in the same way!

E. D. Hirsch (p. 26) reminds us of Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances" which Charles Altieri also develops as a procedural definition:

> For terms like *literature* are terms we know how to use but not to define. We learn to apply such terms through the experience of reading certain kinds of texts, and the general term is in effect a cluster-concept that suffices when some of a wide variety of "family resemblances" are present. (p. 64)

The idea of clusters of components or features as used to define literature is, in fact, of *general* relevance to all categorization in language or cognition. As Hirsch notes, the problem is similar to the category of chair "fad[ing] off into sofas and ottomans on one side and stools on the other" (p. 25). This important argument is an implicit or explicit one in many of the selections in Hernadi's collection. It only suffers from the usual disregard for experimental evidence which, in this case, confirms and makes precise the conditions of application of the featural approach (see H. and E. Clark, pp. 464-467).

Surprisingly, however, neither Ellis's nor Todorov's books or the latter's 1973 discussion of "The Notion of Literature" (*New Literary History*, 5 [1973, 5-16] is adequately criticized or elaborated upon in this connection. Ellis's logical analysis cannot be dealt with here; Todorov distinguishes between a structural and a functional view of literature, noting that structurally literature as *one* entity cannot be said to exist. Since, in Hernadi's words, "two particular members of the 'family' [can] happen to have no single specific trait in common" (p. xii), the notion of family resemblances could avoid this kind of embarrassment for the typology of literary discourses.

Several papers, in fact, rest on the assumption that literature can be in the eye of the beholder (Hernadi, p. xxi). Norman Holland, for instance, starts with this distinction as formulated by Stanley Fish:

> "Literature is language around which we have drawn a frame, a frame that indicates a decision to regard with a peculiar self-consciousness the resources language has always possessed. What characterizes literature then is not formal properties but an attitude." (p. 207)

(If one replaces "language" by "language and nature [or society]," this will sound less like a definition of poetry and more like a definition of literature.) Holland, seeing "Literature as Transaction," insists that "*literature is not things*," or relationships between things, "*but a way to comprehend things*," or their interrelations (Holland's emphasis, p. 207). What is most pertinent, then, is our decision or capacity to transact or not to transact literarily. We will, I assume, be tempted to transact more if there are more family resemblances. Moreover, through a kind of snowball effect, we will seek out and *create* more features since it is impossible not to find a common semantic or logical trait between any two items and since, e. g., due to the small number of phonemes, language cannot but be repetitive and provide, in any text, rhymes and alliterations. As a consequence, Holland's conclusion that "*literature is transacting literarily, which is rewarded*" (his emphasis, p. 216) is too powerful. As Morse Peckham and Holland himself had pointed out in earlier books, and as avant-garde poetry has shown, *any* text can be categorized as literature and read as such. What Holland might have meant but did not like saying (it sounds too quantitative?) is that there are degrees of literariness: the more one transacts and is rewarded, the more the text is literary. Yet this is an important aspect of the definition of literature since the categories studied by Rosch and her colleagues (in Clark, pp. 527-530) possess well defined central representations understood in terms of the number of features shared (and their nature). There is therefore a model which can test and account for Hirsch's intuition that "we could all agree that [an experiment] probably could be performed successfully if, for instance, the pairs of examples always consisted of poems by Keats, technical reports from *Science* magazine [etc.]" (pp. 24-25). The irony of Hirsch's position—and of the humanist's in general—is that though he has not "troubled to perform" the experiment, it would certainly be worth performing since it would provide a piece of information somewhat distanced from the critic's preconceived notions of what is obvious or not. Literary studies could then begin to be cooperative, cumulative, less individualistic and more humane in their search for understanding through knowledge. Speculation would not constitute the whole of literary studies: it would have more importance in applied poetics (criticism) than in poetics where it would only be, as in the other sciences, part of the preliminary work (see F. S. C. Northrop, *The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities* [Macmillan, 1947], or Ellis's view of the cycle of inquiry, pp. 195 ff.).

Todorov's functional-structural perspective contains an insight which must still be considered here: one can establish two typologies closely paralleling each other. This accounts for the fact that we notice systematic structural similarities between literary (a lyric) and non-literary forms of discourse (a ritual, a prayer), or that Michelet's historical studies can easily be read as historical novels. Robert Scholes insists on this aspect in Hernadi's book when he reminds us that the Prague School and especially Roman Jakobson were interested in the notion of *literariness in language* rather than in *literature* (p. 233). The concept of family resemblances, then, functions on two axes: horizontally, within each one of the parallel typologies and, vertically, between non-literary and literary forms of discourse. If we accept the pertinence of this bi-axial viewpoint, it is clear that several of Hernadi's collaborators are not defining literature (the first axis) but aspects of literariness (both axes). Literariness will be found in literary or non-literary texts and, conversely, some features of it will sometimes be found elsewhere yet not in some literary texts. The functional-structural problem involved in a definition of literariness, however, is identical to the one involved in the definition of literature (see Ellis). I can, therefore, only point to some of the aspects of literariness which have preoccupied the contributors. Hirsch tends to identify literariness with "humane education" (p. 34) and seems close to Arnold's or Goodheart's position; Morse Peckham and Monroe Beardsley as well as Robert Scholes seem interested in the notion of fictionality as it relates to literariness; Robert Brown and Martin Steinman insist rightly on genre rules and speech acts; Charles Altieri also mentions the importance of the situational context of communication. Altieri notes, for example, that

> we tend to define literature as discourse where implicit meanings predominate since the utterances are freed from normal illocutionary work and thus invite us simply to contemplate the complexities of the experience presented. (p. 68)

One could also mention the contributions of such well-known scholars as James Wimsatt or Murray Krieger, but I prefer to conclude on Richard Ohmann's attempt at discovering how novels become best-sellers—that is his defining literature in its social context.

In short, Hernadi's collection is too rich and diverse for a detailed review. It certainly is the best collection on the topic and, read in conjunction with Ellis's and Todorov's books, its qualities stand out along with its insufficiencies: though broad, its scope is not wide enough since certain contemporary trends are only marginally represented (literary semiotics); it is speculative, never quantitative and experimental; the social aspect is represented only by Ohmann's very special viewpoint. But such failures are inevitable in a relatively short book written by literary critics. For if Hernadi's co-workers have tried to take into account Arnold's "best . . . known," and have opened up their inquiries to philosophical, linguistic, semiotic, sociological, and psychoanalytic perspectives, they are essentially not, themselves, practitioners of the social sciences, but humanists using them. This is a giant step beyond Goodheart's practice, but it leaves literary studies (poetics) in the absurd position of being an eternal borrower, of extrapolating, rather than being a discipline which imaginatively plans its own experiments. Like psychology, for instance, literary studies can and should not only be clinical (case studies are homologous to criticism) and rationalist (speculative), but empirical; it needs to take into direct account its interdisciplinary nature, operationalize its models and test them—not let other social scientists do it for them. As Northrop and Ellis show, there are not two cultures, but two stages of inquiry. Why should humanists be so eager to stop at the first stage?

Like the scientific study of the human body then (Todorov, p. 22), literary studies cannot but be a confluence of disciplines: first, erudition (establishing texts or bibliographies); second, poetics, which is a branch of each one of the social sciences (psychopoetics, sociopoetics, literary history, etc.); third, applied poetics, or criticism I, which is of pedagogical value and of importance as a means of testing out working models of the literary process; and fourth, for a general audience or for different categories of students, the essay-like, Arnoldian criticism II. Erudition and criticism II have dominated the study of literature too exclusively (see Culler's remarks above); they should be understood as belonging to a wider framework. Clearly, as Colin Martindale suggests, it is high time to *also* "sit with statisticians and commit a social science" (*Poetics*, 7 [1978], 273-282).

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The Sceptical Vision of Molière by Robert McBride. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1977. Pp. xii + 250. $19.50.

Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature 1610-1652 by Ian Maclean. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. xv + 314. $27.50.

Robert McBride intended his study, *The Sceptical Vision of Molière*, to deal in a balanced way with both the playwright's philosophical world-view and his comedies. We begin with the contention that Molière's thought is profoundly paradoxical—the book's subtitle is *A Study in Paradox*—and expresses itself in the tense interplay between mutually incompatible elements giving the total *oeuvre* its highly idiosyncratic dramatic texture. It is further suggested that this "double-minded state" in Molière's work offers readers an effective entry into a critical evaluation of the comedies, providing as it does a grasp of the artist's mind and his art, the primal and the intellectual, thinking-theatre and fun-theatre.

Starting with the lesser plays before 1664, the author traces an evolution in Molière's thinking from a guileless perception of the illusory nature of appearances in the early 1660's (*Sganarelle* and *Dom Garcie de Navarre*), to a deeply sceptical *vision du monde* by the time of the "problem plays" around 1665 (*Tartuffe*, *Dom Juan*, *Le Misanthrope*). This philosophical stance is confirmed in later plays and is particularly manifest in the necessity Molière's characters feel for role-playing and manipulating *être* and *paraître*. Interacting in endless parodoxical situations in which reason is often made to stand on its own head, the comic characters fall into three groups: the Fools (Arnolphe, Orgon, Alceste) who assume they are more reasonable than anyone else and accordingly dream naively of adjusting the world around their fixations; the Knaves (Tartuffe, Don Juan, Trissotin, the Doctors), inveterate players trying constantly to dupe others but who are done in at the end by their exaggerated self-confidence; the Wise Fools (Ariste, Chrysalde, Cléante, Philinte, Sganarelle, Sosie) who occupy the supreme vantage point overlooking the entire comic scene and who survived intact by being the most lucid about the schemes of the Fools and the tricks of the Knaves. In terms of dramatic structure, the Fools provide the original comic impetus by their fantastic pipe-dreams, the Knaves sustain the comic action by their connivance, and it is invariably the Wise Fools who implicitly or otherwise draw the moral of the story, usually to the effect that "since reason is an impossible absurdity, it is better to participate in the comedy of social life" (p. 215).

It is in the elaboration of this point of view that problems begin, especially in the two long chapters on *Tartuffe* and *Le Misanthrope*. Beginning with the first *Tartuffe* in 1644, for example, we are to believe that Molière was seized by a "constant preoccupation...with the reality of evil in the form of concerted hypocrisy" (p. 45), and a realization that comedy in its traditional form is powerless against "irreducible moral evil" (p. 46). According to McBride, the crisis brought on by this meditation on evil linked Molière to the sceptical thought of the then well-known philosopher, La Mothe Le Vayer, and the two "friends" (proof?) shared a religious sentiment defined as "humanist *libertin érudit*," a familiar idea in Molière studies advanced in the past by such critics as Sells, Jasinski, Cairncross, Adam, Calvet and others. Familiar too are certain key ideas on *Le Misanthrope* such as the notion that "the relative nature of man and life" (p. 118) wins out over absolute and universal values, and the proposition that Philinte is the true hero of this play because, wise fool, he alone knows one must play a role in order to balance one's nature in the complexities of the world. Other characters like Sganarelle of *Dom Juan* and Sosie of *Amphritryon* also tend to be seen as the primary heroes and the fact that many of these characters who bear so much of the intelligence of the play are either naive (Sganarelle, Sosie) or bores (Philinte, Chrysalde, Cléante) seems not at all to bother McBride. Many readers of Molière may also remain unconvinced by a method which groups in the same category such diverse characters as Cléante, Philinte, Sganarelle and Sosie, or Tartuffe, Don Juan and Trissotin, or Arnolphe and Alceste. One could also wonder about a study that makes more of marginal works such as *Sganarelle* and *Dom Garcie de Navarre* than of *L'Ecole des femmes* and *L'Avare*. There is a lot in this book that suggests the victory of method over common sense, which is especially disappointing because the author is clearly an astute critic who worked hard to be convincing and helpful and to avoid the shop-worn commonplaces in Molière criticism.

But any honest book is more than merely the sum of its contestable parts and McBride has some excellent insights as well. Particularly noteworthy are the idea of Sganarelle as the "ironic and burlesque spectator of the master" in *Dom Juan* (p. 92), the expanded treatment of religious attitudes during the time of the three versions of *Tartuffe* (pp. 60 ff.), the philosophical implications suggested by the ironic mirroring effects in the chapter on *Amphitryon*, the notion of the *folle sagesse* ("folly of reason and reason of folly") as it operates in Orgon (p. 59) and *les femmes savantes* (p. 191). Good perceptions too on the infinite complexities of molièresque comedy although too often "the reason of comedy...coincides with the reason of Le Vayer." Unfortunately the overly systematic method delving consistently into seventeenth century philosophical and religious issues will exclude the general reader from this book and it is he who might have profited most from it. The specialists, alas, may be disappointed.

Ian Maclean's *Woman Triumphant* is a detailed account of the first stirrings of feminism in French writing and iconography, roughly from the Renaissance to the mid-seventeenth century. The *querelle des femmes* in the early years of the century did little to alter entrenched ideas and attitudes toward women. The most interesting period is 1630-50 and the book deals in considerable detail with such authors as Jacques Du Bosc, Pierre Le Moyne and François Grenaille. At the mid-century the *précieuses* in their salons helped to promote the acceptance of education for privileged women with unlimited leisure time and gradually, through the taste and sensibilities of this group, there emerges in pastoral novels like *L'Astrée* "a feminine universe built around feminine sensibility and subservient to feminine discipline" (p. 171). Maclean argues further that the very nature of the traditional, paradoxical attitude toward women—angelic/demonic, beautiful/ugly, pure/unclean, etc.—lent itself to the baroque imagination in the literary and visual arts but after two chapters the author can only conclude timorously that the unending mannerisms of the baroque make it difficult to determine the style's actual contribution to feminist thinking. Finally then, the promises implicit in the book's title are unfulfilled. This is an uneventful period, barely a cautious testing of the waters with no real progress in feminist matters. "French literature" is only cursorily discussed in favor of endless tracts and minor moralist writings. And to call woman in France in the early seventeenth century "triumphant" is cruelly ironic, especially when one recalls that universal suffrage came to "la douce France" only in 1946.

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The Subterfuge of Art: Language and the Romantic Tradition by Michael Ragussis. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Pp. xii + 243. $14.50.

In *The Subterfuge of Art* Michael Ragussis sets out to combat the canard that literature is wish-fulfillment. Taking texts by Wordsworth, Keats, Yeats, Forster, and Lawrence, he demonstrates that they criticize the archaic desires they recapture and represent. "The work of art is the labor of self-education," its end a confrontation with recalcitrant reality. The strongest art is that which unmasks its own comforting promises: "the work of art has the power to engage us in the magic of illusion, and thereby use its power of subterfuge, only to turn on itself critically and in this moment to show how it is one step ahead of us. It shows how we as readers are its dupe, in need of art to teach us the consequences of daydreaming: art contains within itself a warning against some of its most potent powers." By careful close readings Ragussis illuminates the self-critical techniques developed by his authors, the styles that attain "the dialectic of speech, of dialogue really." To call Ragussis' subtle commentary "close reading," however, is to make his accomplishment appear less than it is. Yeats's "Her Vision in the Wood" is placed in a framework that draws on Nietzsche, Sir James Frazer, and Jane Harrison, and the discussion of the possibilities of knowledge in *A Passage to India* gains by its context of Plato, Bacon, and Einstein. The consideration Ragussis gives to the connection between ellipsis and the themes of vacancy and vision in that novel is perhaps the best illustration of the ease with which he moves between meticulous stylistic analysis to the broader issues of his title.

How any reader judges the success of *The Subterfuge of Art* as a whole is likely to depend on how strictly he demands that the expectations aroused by the subtitle, "Language and the Romantic Tradition," be met. Whether there exists anything so continuous, self-conscious, and unique in the relationship among these authors as to warrant isolating as a "tradition" is a question Ragussis explores insufficiently. The criteria for inclusion or exclusion are scarcely stated: Byron's *Don Juan*, for instance, would seem useful to any study of Romantic poetry's instructive exposure of its own fictions. Other works will occur to other readers; each would complicate our sense of "the romantic tradition."

Indeed *The Subterfuge of Art* is unified not by its establishment of an historical tradition, but by the consistency of its own critical method, a different but not necessarily lesser thing. It unfolds under the double aegis of Lawrence and Freud, or, to put it more faithfully to Ragussis' practice, of Lawrence, and Freud as seen through Lawrence. The chief rubric is from Lawrence: "One sheds one's sickness in books, repeats and presents again one's emotions to be master of them." Ragussis continues: "Lawrence in fact imagines this curative process to be like the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis, which posits as a cure the coming into full consciousness . . . of one's deepest emotions and thoughts. Freud and Lawrence even use the same term—'verbal consciousness'—to describe this process." The Freud of this description, however, is the Freud of the earliest days of psychoanalysis, not the persevering investigator who traced the protean tenacity of the resistances until he became less sanguine about the notion of cure.

The partial view of psychoanalysis as a "talking cure" bears directly on Ragussis' approach. Throughout the study the word is potentially The Word, if with diminshed confidence as the century progresses, and the artist a privileged figure, a truth-teller whose "mastery" is not brought under scrutiny. Ragussis concludes a fine essay on "The Eve of St. Agnes" by praising Keats's "uncompromising truthfulness" in renouncing the romance he elaborates: the significance of Keats's career-long repetition of this pattern, or of the maleficent aspects of women in his work, interests him less. Similarly, Yeats's program of impersonal poetry is characterized almost at face value, rather than as a strategy itself susceptible to analysis. The concentration on "verbal consciousness" also narrows the chapter on Lawrence: an examination of key terms in *Women in Love* almost apart from the passions that drive the plot risks fussiness. Ragussis depicts Wordsworth in a fashion that minimizes the anxieties that give him force. He reveals the import of the generally ignored mythological allusions in the Arab Dream in Book V of *The Prelude*, but his reading of the episode as a parable of salvation remains unconvincing. He does not comment on Wordsworth's declaration that he awakened from the dream "in terror," nor on the tensions *The Prelude* manifests between his desire to believe that love of nature leads to love of man and such apocalyptic temptations as the Arab presents. Wordsworth is a more troubled writer than Ragussis shows, one perhaps threatened most of all by his own "solutions," the very "cure" Ragussis affirms.

The Subterfuge of Art might have been more searching had Ragussis tested more strenuously the ideas of tradition and of "verbal consciousness" which inform it. Nonetheless, each separate study is enriching, and amplified by comparisons developed as the book advances. Its range is impressive, and its writing lucid. In focussing on the powers accorded language Ragussis has raised queries central to literary criticism, and developed them with suppleness.

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Dickens and Phiz by Michael Steig. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978. Pp. x + 340. $12.50.

Dickens and Charity by Norris Pope. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Pp. xi + 303. $15.00.

Here are two new books of interest, each illuminating a part of the periphery of the great achievement of Dickens' fiction, both suggesting that light at the edge reaches to the heart of the achievement. Neither quite succeeds at that, though Mr. Steig's ray reaches a bit farther, I think, than Mr. Pope's.

Both books stake rather modest claims to our attention not for startling originality but for synthesizing or extending arguments about, or approaches to, Dickens with which we are generally familiar. Thus Michael Steig's book on Dickens and Phiz acknowledges and continues the work of John Harvey and Robert Patten in demonstrating the relationship, mutually creative, of illustrator and author. And Norris Pope's invocation and exploration of the actual world of Victorian religious and socio-political philanthropy behind Dickens' fictional portrayal of that world, slightly misnamed *Dickens and Charity*, proceeds as he says from Philip Collins' models, *Dickens and Crime*, and *Dickens and Education.*

Steig's book, at once irresistible and aggravating, is one of those texts you need three hands and two minds to read. Its bouquet of 126 illustrations, gathered towards the end of the book, requires to be sifted through twice: once piece by piece while triangulating Steig's argument about Phiz's emblematic contribution with Dickens' text and Phiz's illustrations; a second time following the technical and creative development of the illustrator himself, with the help of illustrated "quotations" supplied from Hogarth and Cruikshank and from Phiz's non-Dickensian work.

On this latter point, Steig gives a poignant account of an able craftsman, Hablot Knight Browne, catapulted by the suicide of a fellow craftsman, Robert Seymour, into sudden relationship with the premier imagination of the age, whose first novel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, changed in the very doing from an almost random assembly of incidents and characters into a system, and then into a living fictional world. As the writer's imagination took hold in this way, so did the illustrator's, as Patten's work, and now Steig's, shows.

Browne's work we see, like Dickens', perfected during the 1840's and early 50's a world crowded with emblematic significance, and then shifted, through greater attention to the non-caricatural differentiation of characters and to the fundamentals of light, perspective, and surface design, to still more powerful evocations of psychological mood and meaning. Browne was the only illustrator to realize more than one of Dickens' novels all the way through; he worked with the novelist during the most productive years of his life, and it is difficult to escape the impression, chaste as Steig wants to be about this, that the severing of relationship with that impatient and contradictory genius, after excellent work for *Little Dorrit* (1856-58) and a considerable falling off in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), contributed to the unhappy conclusion of Browne's career in a decade of hackwork, the man "gradually deteriorating as an artist" (p. 312) even before an illness in 1867 partly paralyzed his hand and led to a final decade of often "pitiable" (p. 314) work.

It is, Steig says, no longer a "brand-new idea" that the illustrated novel is in some important respects an independent subgenre, but *Dickens and Phiz* does excellent service in showing as well as telling us how this is so. Two points stand especially well demonstrated here: the importance of consistent visual characterization and visual reinforcement of theme in establishing continuity over the original 18 to 20 months of a novel's parts publication, and the subtle, probably intuitive and unspoken assignment of much of the heaviest moral commentary of the novel to the realm of emblematic visual detail, away from the riskier field of authorial rhetoric.

In both these senses, Steig argues provocatively that the illustrator often goes somewhat beyond either the spoken instructions of Dickens or the surface allowance of the text being illustrated, to emphasize figures and problems that might otherwise remain hidden in Dickens' crowded world. One convincing example is Phiz's Quilp, the dwarf-menace of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, whose physical, and as Phiz draws him, sexual, potency gives him a statistical (16 cuts—close to half the total number of drawings for the considerably longer novels in monthly parts" [p. 57]) and hence psychic dominance which he does not have in the text. Thanks to these and other illustrations which portray with little emblematic criticism the "unruly energies" of the novel's lords of misrule, Steig argues, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is "dominated by these energies rather than by the idealizing and religious sentiments which Dickens himself evidently wished to consider the main thrust of the work" (p. 57).

On the other hand, the extra spaces of the illustrations allow for a multiplication of the moralizing commentary, cooled off, in a McLuhanesque sense, from the narration to the picture, which is right at the surface of the text. Thus the thundering denunciations of *Bleak House*, the despairs and the luminous hopes of *Little Dorrit*, are continued, safely, and even expanded in the illustrations' powerful images of piercing light and encroaching shadow, of sharply-angled tentative support and coming collapse, images which "sometimes convey meanings which might be maudlin or too glaring if included in the text itself" (p. 157).

Emblem-hunting with Steig is a fine art, and an exciting enterprise as well. Holmesian magnifying glass in hand we discover, for instance, that Murdstone himself is staring at David Copperfield and his mother in "Our Pew at Church," holding his prayerbook open, like the drowsy maiden in Hogarth's "The Sleeping Congregation" whom Steig thinks Phiz is drawing upon here, at the marriage service—"in one of the steels the letters 'MARR' are clearly discernible" (p. 115). Murdstone was not mentioned by David in the moment being illustrated: this leads Steig to suggest an elegant complication of repressions in both the child and the adult David's memory of Murdstone, very satisfying as criticism.

Even a microscope doesn't help much with some of the astonishingly evocative figures to which we are led in Steig's book, however, especially in the almost Boschian world of the Covers. What, for instance, to make of the fox which confronts Esther "in a supplicatory or anticipatory posture" (p. 314) on the Cover of *Bleak House*, or the coin into which the man "born in misery-dying in obscurity" seems fading in the Cover of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, suggesting, in ambiguous final detail, that those are coins which were his eyes?

Following Phiz through *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*, novels crucial to certain turns and consolidations in Dickens' vision, Steig sees something at variance with the apparent themes of the text, and proposes an important emendation to our understanding. Of *Dombey* he notices that despite the explicit themes of pride, money, and power, of predatory men and victimized women, despite the dominating textual and visual presence of children and the apparent relegation of women to parental and service roles, the illustrations themselves, powerfully enlarging the presence of Mrs. Pipchin, Susan Nipper, Mrs. Skewton, and above all, Edith Dombey and Alice Marwood, "bring out strikingly that *Dombey and Son* is populated by a large number of monstrous or dangerous women and that sexual hatred and frustration lurk not far below the surface" (p. 92). The text unmistakably identifies with the overpowered and fallen women (or, one may argue, desperately flees from identification with the overpowering and destroying male). But Phiz's imagination, Steig shows, seems less afraid of the paradoxes of sexual conflict, and emblem after emblem in the plates, Medusas, chastizers, amazons, suggest that in the ferocity of that conflict, driven to the wall, woman is at least a match for man.

Turning in that light to *David Copperfield*, Steig notices that the illustrations continue to emphasize the "fallen-woman topos" despite the drive of the text to establish the gentle and thoughtful Agnes Wickfield as the dominant female force in David's life. Here the emblematic imagination of Phiz seems to be following the almost conscious choice of subjects by Dickens: only half a dozen plates include or refer to Agnes, ten to the thoughtless but somehow spellbinding Dora, and twelve to the fallen and tragic Emily, an indication perhaps of the intense hold these darker obsessions still have on David's unconscious.

Steig's arguments send us, as he says, back to the texts, with renewed interest, with some preconceptions challenged or removed. He offers us a way to change or refine our understanding of things at the heart of Dickens' achievement. Norris Pope asks an intriguing question which promises such renewal too; but the terms of his study preclude, I think, his carrying his argument to the heart.

The question in *Dickens and Charity* is: given that Dickens actually knows a great deal about the genuine contributions of Evangelicals and evangelical feeling to the public weal, given that he felt equally strongly about the Nonconformist, Roman Catholic, or Anglican contributions to religious humbuggery, why is the picture of organized religion and religious philanthropy that emerges from the novels almost exclusively Evangelical, and almost entirely negative? Pope's book surveys Dickens' complex involvement in, and his wide-ranging understanding of the contributions of religious feeling to domestic and foreign missions, the Sanitary movement, the Ragged School and Anti-Sabbatarian conflicts, Victorian reformisms of all kinds, and succeeds wonderfully in establishing those "givens," in showing us what he knew as an engaged thinker and editor. But there is, Pope remarks at the start, "sometimes a sizeable gap between what he knew and what he wrote in his novels" (p. ix), and the book describes that gap without fully explaining it.

We can see at once a few explanations for the dynamic presence of Evangelical hypocritical philanthropy in the novels, and for the "suppression and omission of surrounding detail" from them (p. 198) which would favor the Evangelical attitude, or balance the picture by recording with equal power the flaws of other religions. Dickens, like most social liberals of this time, saw environmental forces at work causing poverty, disease, and crime, and favored centralizing and interventionalist public policies to encounter them: Nonconformism located the cause of public distress essentially in the sinful private heart, and feared losing its hard-won autonomy to centralized bureaucracies. Dickens strongly disapproved of "religious exclusiveness" (p. 113) and recoiled from the "austere and wrathful" tone of religions like that of the Murdstones or the Clennams, both of which tendencies he traced to the Dissenting attempt to recover the spirit and the role and the chosenness of the Old Testament, while underrating the New Testament which Dickens thought "a sufficient guide in itself." Added to these reasons for making his fictional portrait of "godly philanthropy" less humane, less complex, even less successful, than he knew it to be, is surely the overwhelming appeal of Evangelical rhetoric, outclassing any other religious language as an instrument, whether for a preacher or a satirist. And finally, as Pope notes, a professional opposition to the anti-fiction propaganda of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Methodism certainly contributed to Dickens' uncharitable, but effective and in their way profound, analyses of selfishness operating under the mask of selfless charity in the portraits of Stiggins, Chadband, Honeythunder, Mrs. Pardiggle, Mrs. Jellybe and company.

But a deeper analysis, not just of philanthropy but of *charity* and Dickens, would require more subtle treatment of such conundrums as Pecksniff and his daughters Charity and Mercy, or of Harold Skimpole, or of Dickens' use of such profoundly New Testament figures of charity as the Magdalene. This kind of treatment is outside the boundaries of Pope's study. Welcome as it is in its illumination of the "real" Victorian world of charities, it stops short of exploring the "complex set of feelings" (p. x) which allowed Dickens to support "charity," of course, and yet to create a fictional world where it seemed almost impossible, morally, to do or to accept charity.

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Nikolai Leskov: The Man and His Art by Hugh McLean. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1977. Pp. xvi + 780. $30.00.

The Russian writer N. S. Leskov (1831-1895) stood in need of a good, intelligent, objective (i. e., not politically biased) modern monograph. Innumerable books have been produced on his contemporaries in Russian literature (Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov), but Leskov has been waiting too long for an adequate extensive study. In Russia the huge biography by his son, Andrey Leskov, was published posthumously in 1954 after many peripeteia. Since then, at least five monographs have appeared in Russian, none of them comprehensive or of outstanding scholarly quality. In the United States, some noted slavists wrote on Leskov (V. Setschkareff, W. Edgerton), but only now a work has appeared to which the hackneyed praise is fully applicable that it will remain for many years to come the definitive word on Leskov.

In 640 pages the author, Professor of Slavic languages and literatures and Dean of Humanities at the University of California, Berkeley, presents a chronological survey of the traditional "Life and Works" type in four parts with a wealth of information, illuminating insights into Leskov's psychology and analyses of all his writings. There is an extensive apparatus of notes—often interesting reading in themselves—and a list of Leskov's fiction. Instead of a bibliography, which we actually would expect in a work of this size and stature, there is only a four-page bibliographical note in which the main Leskov studies are mentioned.

The psychoanalytical deliberations in the first chapter are not always fully convincing, and some of the stories are quoted without mentioning titles or dates (but in the later chapters the writings are always identified and discussed in close conjunction with the progression of his biography). Gradually the book acquires more depth and becomes more absorbing. We are impressed by the objective spirit in which McLean conducts his investigation of Leskov's motives and inspirations, his frustrations and "paranoid tendencies" (p. 84). There are revealing discussions of Leskov's large body of prose works, of his only play, and of his non-fictional output as well, mostly from the "psychobiographical" (p. 112), but also from a socio-historical point of view. This is not a monument of praise, for McLean is realistic enough to recognize Leskov's shortcomings as a writer, his unappealing sides as a human being.

At the same time McLean is, of course, fully appreciative of Leskov's gifts as a writer. Leskov has earned his special place in Russian literature and his popularity among Russian readers thanks to his sparkling narrative talent, which he mostly displayed in short stories, or in longer, mosaic-like prose works that lack strong, unifying, rectilinear plots. His favorite form was the frame story and the *skaz*, in which the author cedes his narrative role to a person who tells the story in his or her own colorful style and vocabulary. McLean often refers to the *skaz*-element in Leskov (and describes it with particularly apt image on p. 155), but there is no extensive, in-depth discussion of his *skaz* and frame story technique. From a formal point of view the book could have been more elaborate.

The author endeavors to treat each of Leskov's writings with equal attention, with the result that some of his masterpieces are analyzed less elaborately than they deserve, whereas relatively much room is given to less valuable or even inferior works. *The Cathedral Folk* (even though McLean cautiously remarks that "we may even concede that this novel does not quite rank among Leskov's very best works," (p. 192), has a central place in his oeuvre and is considered one of his masterpieces; yet only a chapter of fifteen pages is devoted to it. The next chapter is almost as long, but deals only with some very minor writings. McLean disposes of the bulky novel *At Daggers Drawn* in less than two pages, in generally disapproving terms. It is true, it has been loathed by contemparary critics, but for purely political reasons; Dostoyevsky and Gorky praised it highly, especially for the heroine Vanskok.

Among the many topics treated in this book with good sense and poise I might single out the theme of Leskov and the German problem; the "righteous men," i. e., the positive characters he attempted for a long period to develop (the author makes the valid point that these types are static and do not grow to win sainthood, p. 458); his approach to the Jewish question (although it may be somewhat of an overstatement, McLean points out that Leskov in the eighties changed "from a literary trafficker in anti-Semitic anecdotes into an outspoken defender of the Jews," p. 425); and his relation to Tolstoy, to which the fourth part of his work is devoted.

Real errors seem to be absent from this book, which is evidently the fruit of many years of scrupulous, intensive labor. One can put a few question marks. When he assesses *The Islanders* as "the nadir of Leskov's entire career as a writer" (p. 161), one wonders whether the same could not be claimed of his anti-nihilistic novels, his anti-Jewish stories. A contradiction seems to exist between McLean's opinion that Leskov "paints a stark and gloomy picture" of the Russian Orthodox Church in *The Cathedral Folk* (p. 198) and his statement that the early seventies were "the period when Leskov regarded the Orthodox church as a potential force of moral progress and enlightenment" (p. 239). Is it completely true that Leskov around 1880 had actually "abandoned Orthodoxy for Protestantism" (p. 347)? Finally, it seems not quite correct to describe the Pole Syrokomla as "a minor poet, now little remembered" (p. 657): his works continue to be reissued and studies on him continue to appear.

The final question arises: does this big book on Leskov prove and convince the reader that he was a great writer—greater than his reputation (especially outside of Russia) has been up to now? In the opinion of this reviewer, many or most of his writings of the late seventies, eighties and nineties, all those "Bishop's Rounds," "Debauchers," "Co-Functionaries," "Ancient Psychopaths" and whatever other strange titles Leskov gave them—stories of which McLean dutifully relates the contents and points to the ideology they disclose, without much discussion of their intrinsic literary value—all fail to reach the level of some of the famous earlier works and will hardly contribute to making Leskov's name a household word among lovers of good literature, to his being ranked alongside Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, as McLean hopes in his Preface. Leskov is the author of a small number of exquisite literary works; McLean reveals new aspects of these gems and draws attention to and rehabilitates a few lesser known stories (like "At the Edge of the World," "The Little Things in a Bishop's Life," "Pechersk Antics"). However, a large number of second rate writings cannot be saved by McLean's interpretation from remaining second rate; and saving them is not what he tries to do—which is one of the appealing qualities of this magnificent book.

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Always Merry and Bright: The Life of Henry Miller, "An Unauthorized Biography" by Jay Martin. Santa Barbara, Ca.: Capra Press, 1978 and London: Sheldon Press, 1979. Pp. xvi + 560; 61 photographs. $15.00.

The title page disclaimer—"An Unauthorized Biography"—of this first full-scale life of Henry Miller might be a bit misleading. Miller, usually indignant at critics and scholars for not taking him at his own inflated valuation, may have required some such gesture of dissociation. However, the subject provided this biographer with interviews and access to a vast quantity of letters and manuscript material. In pursuing these, and other oral and written sources, Jay Martin showed the impressive dedication and energy which were also evident in his biography of Nathanael West. And in spite of having to present much negative evidence about Miller's behavior and writings—inevitable for any informed and even mildly candid discussion—this semi-authorized biograghy is sympathetic to, and sometimes defensive of, Miller. However, the tone is often confused and the intentionality of the thick ironies not always clear. For example, the title, *Always Merry and Bright*, earnestly repeats a favorite self-solacing rhetorical gesture of Miller's, though of course it was partly posturing by an often self-pitying, anxious, resentful, aggrandizing, narcissistic, depressive literary clown.

Martin's writing has been much infected by several of Miller's styles. The contagion brought out some trite burbling, melodramatic chapter organization, colloquial breeziness, and pompous sentimentality. Yet I think the work is better than the worst Millerian mannerisms would suggest. Granted, reaching the utilities in this biography takes some tolerance, whether for the biographer's introductory claim that he "wanted to create a style which could drive... into the chambers of his heart" or for his concluding assertion about Miller that the "stains on his soul turned into star-like gems." The bathetic sentiments and the hardnosed documentation combine in a rather uncertain mixture of intimate pedantry about what Miller ate, read, drank, jotted down, seduced, etc., and would-be novelistic pretenses at what he was thinking and feeling. Martin even imagines a lengthy speech to himself which Miller should have made ("if only he had said"). But the dubiousness of much of this is countered by harsh reportage, in spite of Martin's bland tactfulness about such matters as Miller's sexual peculiarity (as in his years of pimping), his insistent lying (protection for his exhibitionist candor), and his endless exploitation of people (the con-man, of course, was also often conned). While a loving heart is presented as Miller's great quality, with unintentional humor, much evidence is also given of his heartlessness. No doubt he babbled so much about "love" and "wisdom of the heart" because of their absence, an absence which was the source of his rich rhetoric and revelations. The "star-like gems" can readily be re-seen as "stains," as they should be, for they were the one stock for art of this writing rogue.

Martin, of course, quite lacks Miller's talent of burlesque comic rhetoric and his one grace of exploiting it. But the scholar is knowledgeable enough to have acquired from what he considers the more "cynical" (i. e., the critical and disinterested) a sense of some of the Millerian poses. Surely Miller's main project was "the myth of himself" in which "he wanted to be known as a writer much more than to write." He longed for the literary life to redeem the confused and messy and degrading personal existence. Righteously bumptious posturing as Creative Artist, Genius, Romantic Lover, Seer, Sage, etc., eventually found the appropriate large audience of enviously naive aspirants to similar roles. While most of this lacks artistic and intellectual value, it may well be of some interest for cultural pathology, a pathetic-buffoonish monumentalizing of the egotism of art. It might also be useful for study of the schizophrenic American religiosity about "creativity," though Martin has little sense of such social realities.

Miller's fractured sensibility found its justification in logorrheic role-playing. Within that wordy and egotistic wash was a small stream of interesting writings: *Tropic of Cancer* (his only successful book-length work), a handful of sketches of marginal life (such as "Max," "Mademoiselle Claude," "Astrological Fricassée," "The Staff of Life," "Reunion in Brooklyn," "A Devil in Paradise"), and a scattering of curious titles, odd bits, rhetorical flourishes. The larger part of Miller's writing—memoirs, literary essays, polemics, travel pieces, plays, etc.—resulted in a hardly coherent flow of confessional obsession and fragmented arty silliness dominated, as Martin sometimes acknowledges, by the "defensive and egotistical." The incongruities in Miller helped produce some lively burlesque comedy, but the larger unintentional comedy of the vain work and life is mostly pathetic and fatuous.

As a subject, then, the Miller material requires emphatic discrimination. Martin's biography is informative on some of the backgrounds of Miller's writings, such as that he exaggerated his nastiness in *Tropic of Cancer* to temporarily create several of his more successful roles—the insouciant rascally down-and-outer and the outrageous American innocent abroad. But for the most part, the biographer is thin and uninsightful on Miller and his writings, his roles and his society. Martin's lack of discrimination also results in wearisome long reports on publishing trivia, Miller's dreams (from manuscript material), and his money problems. The biographer's unanalytic reporting on Saint Henry's boozy occultism, faith in astrology, and other unintentionally burlesque religiosity, is charitably empty. To treat this material earnestly, as with Miller's other muddled and fractured intellectual pretenses, reads as rather bad pedantic joking.

Martin's biography is somewhat better, though hardly probing, in recognizing that Miller was sexually "maimed" by his repressive lower-middle-class mother and his ineffective father. This led to a quasi-erotic love of "buddies," which dominated much of his life as well as writing, and to the degrading treatment of women as "sacred" yet "sluttish." There is considerable pathos in the obsessionally "naughty" little boy who became the sexually garrulous and promiscuous dirty old man. Yet the lack of most of what is thought of as superego (from the father) gave Miller much of his rascally charm and his exceptional, and verbally responsive, candor about the obscene and other amorality. The commonplace view may be right that Miller (though only in his early writings) liberated not only his own obscenity and petit bourgeois character from destructive repression but in doing so opened some significant literary possibilities and probably contributed to a more general opening up of sensibility.

But the super-egoless liberation also resulted in an egomania that produced hundreds of pages of silly pontificating, the self-parody into pornography in

Sexus, and much other bad writing. While Martin handles some of this rather gingerly, he does document Miller's fragmented sensibility and intellectual muddle and long decline into the literary role he had so yearned after. Much of this could poignantly illustrate Goethe's warning about achieving youthful fantasies of eroticism, glory and imperious self-image. The *Tropic of Cancer* period provided the geography of Miller's personal and literary achievement, the exuberant land of art-defiance and escape from a demeaning family-Brooklyn, alienating America and fractured self. But most of what was left to come was autobiographical repetition and self-parody, with no place to go, little purpose, and not much redeeming style. Even sympathetic Jay Martin grants now and again that most of Miller's later writings, and character of parochial self-centering, didn't amount to much—"Maybe his mind... had worn smooth." The biography, with no larger purpose or understanding than hyped-up chronicling, also wears thin. Subject and object become a rather empty literary vaudeville.

While much is stylistically and intellectually weak in Martin's biography, it is not worse than many of the learned books on Miller. Reviewing those (since my survey of the earlier studies in my *Henry Miller*, 1963), one must be struck by their lack of intelligent discrimination, as with William Gordon's pretentious and foolish study of Miller's "romantic aesthetic" in *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller* (1967), Jane A. Nelson's slightly better and earnestly literal-minded Jungianism in *Form and Image in the Fiction of Henry Miller* (1970), and Bertrand Mathieu's mostly irrelevant mystical and Rimbaud analogizing in *Orpheus in Brooklyn* (1976). However, there has been a scattering of perceptive essays since those earlier ones collected by George Wickes in *Henry Miller and the Critics* (1963), such as Frederick J. Hoffman's "Henry Miller, Defender of the Marginal Life" (*The Thirties*, ed. Warren French, 1967), Eleanor Rackow's "The Tropic in Court" (*Freedom and Culture*, 1970), Alan Friedman's "The Pitching of Love's Mansion in the *Tropics*..." (*Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Edward B. Mitchell, 1971), and Donald Gutierrez, "Tropic of Cancer..." (*Mosaic*, 11 [1977]). Also frequently insightful were Norman Mailer's prefatory pieces about Miller as his failed alter ego in his rather idiosyncratic anthology, *Genius and Lust* (1976).

Perhaps Henry Miller is too problematic a subject for the fat uncritical books that characterize aggrandizing academic production. But Jay Martin's earnest though intellectually inadequate attempt will probably long remain a standard source of information about a sometimes comically charming, poignant and suggestive literary eccentric and representative American grotesque, since *Tropic of Cancer* and a handful of sketches will long be read.

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Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard, and First-Person Film by Bruce F. Kawin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. Pp. xii + 241. $15.50, cloth; $4.95, paper.

Professor Kawin attempts to answer standard questions about film narrative in new ways, and despite some major shortcomings in this book, anyone seriously interested in the study of narrative structure in film should read it. Kawin argues that, although a camera does not possess consciousness and cannot literally be termed an *I*, "it is possible to encode the image in such a way that it gives the impression of being perceived or generated by a consciousness. Although this mind remains offscreen, its existence is implicit and can be integrated into the fiction, with the result that the field is properly termed first person." What Kawin calls "mindscreen cinema" is most usually associated with "systemic reflexivity, or self-consciousness." In its most complex forms it invites the viewer to "share my mind's eye" or "to share my reflexive perspective."

After establishing his concepts in the opening chapter, Kawin then proceeds to analyze various films which employ what he terms the device of "mindscreen." He is at his best when carefully considering Milton Moses Ginsberg's rarely discussed *Coming Apart* and Ingmar Bergman's frequently analyzed *Persona*. He is at his worst when he presents brief, eccentric readings of films, often merely mentioned in passing. For instance, he claims that the image field of Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* may be retinal and that the dissolves into red can be seen as the blood "which circulates through the retina and which, analogously, gives color to the eyelids closed against intense light." Along with such ingenious interpretations, Kawin also lapses into passages of pseudo-poetic prose. "Between the dreaming artist and the dreaming audience, the artifact mediates." In a recent issue of the film journal *Take One*, Kawin claims that he is "basically a poet, but nobody prints my poetry (the best thing I do)." Perhaps, if he had avoided flights of poetic fancy in the opening section of *Mindscreen*, his basic concepts could have been more convincingly presented to the reader.

The major problem with the book, however, derives from its unsatisfactory structure. Kawin neither adequately extends his conception of "mindscreen" nor fully discusses its implications in the first section of his book, and the second half of the text is devoted exclusively to the films of Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard. Indeed, he even includes an introductory chapter on Bergman's career. As a result, the book appears to be an amalgam of two incomplete projects: one dealing with an investigation of "mindscreen" and the other concerned with a comparative analysis of the narrative strategies of Bergman and Godard.

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Script Into Performance: A Structuralist View of Play Production by Richard Hornby. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1977. Pp. xi + 215. $11.95.

This book is far more important than the crude, primer-like artwork on its cover would lead the book browser to believe. It is an irritating book but then so are vaccines and, make no mistake, this book could well be considered an inoculation against several viruses that have attacked modern theatre. Those most in need of this vaccination are the traditional critics who continue to expatiate on the nature of plays as though they were literary phenomena the functions of which are securely imprinted upon pages of paper. A second group in equal need of immunization is a coterie of directors which has burgeoned during the last thirty to forty years, directors who cavalierly insist that drama is something which occurs solely under their ministrations and only upon a stage. These directors, perhaps in rebellion against the blinkered teachings of the "traditional literary critics of drama," have begun to regard the printed script with unforgivable insouciance; many of them have fallen prey to the delusion that they are primary creators because they have set *The Taming of the Shrew* in Western-cowboy staging. Others have disclaimed the usefulness of the printed script completely, dedicating themselves to improvisational pieces created collectively by a company of actors under their directorial titillation. Hornby's book is one of the most able assaults upon these theatrical maladies and one of the strongest defenses I have read for the integrity and value of the playwright within the theatrical procedure.

Of course, there are weak plays in need of directorial mending and, of course, improvised pieces have their authenticity in production—and these are two aspects of dramatic practice that Hornby does not treat fairly or with sufficient sympathy. It is bigoted to deny an improvised theatrical piece critical appraisal because it lacks a script. Horby's bias in this area deserves only a risive response. His avoidance of the problem of dealing with weak scripts is almost Germanic in its rigid insistence upon the authority of the playwright through his play script. Any intelligent theatre person, and I confess that I've met very few, could point out weaknesses of structure in such plays as *Timon of Athens*, *Peer Gynt*, or *The Changeling*—weaknesses, I might add, which are discernible via the processes of investigation recommended by Hornby himself. Why shouldn't a director correct the ending of *Gynt*, or qualify the discovery of the new gold in *Timon*, or repair the failure to fuse the subplot with the main plot of *The Changeling*?

With regard to improvised theatre pieces, Mr. Hornby seems to refuse to admit that the critic has an obligation infinitely more demanding than that of the person who evaluates a performance birthed from the womb of an available script. In the case of the improvised piece the critic must "give back" to the actors their performance as they could not see it or understand it. Such a critic must *read* action, not just words; he must be able to hear meaning as well as see it. This critical injunction was expressed and demonstrated by the first *modern* critic of drama and, perhaps, still the best of them all, Soren Kierkegaard.

Mr. Hornby's major achievement lies in his ability to exemplify his passion for careful and informed interpretation of a script. He makes evident how woefully deficient are the modes of interpretation of "conventional" literary criticism of drama. He makes painfully evident the stupidities of "theatricalist" directors who wish to climb onto the shoulders of a playwright's creativity by "re-doing" his play in silly anachronistic interpretations or ones that answer not to the text but, rather, to the rigid thematic biases of the director. The first part of the book (while being the most biased or polemical section) is also a fine explication of how one goes about approaching a text for critical *and* directorial interpretation (the two kinds of appraisal should not be remarkably different). My only quibbles with this section of the book are that Mr. Hornby appears to share along with Brecht and many others at least a minor aversion to plot as an element of organization for a dramatic work. "Who does what to whom, where, and how, and in what order?" is still an important query of theatrical anaylsis even, or perhaps especially, in absurdist drama. I resist, also, his implication that a playscript is almost sacrosanct. In this instance, I get a strong sensation that Mr. Hornby is recommending that I must swallow a whole script the way I was once told by my mother to hold my nose in order to take a tablespoonful of something which was supposed to be good for me. I am on Hornby's side, however, because (despite his adoration of the printed text) he does most vehemently recommend a thorough analysis of the text prior to writing a critique or directing the play. He explains how to go about such an analysis and then he has the courage to demonstrate his recommendations with three good examples of his own work—the finest being his interpretation of Pinter's *The Homecoming*. Few theorists are this brave; even fewer are this able.

The inestimable worth of Hornby's book is that it reminds us once again that theatre is the most complicated of all human forms of communication and, therefore, that such a complex phenomenon requires a creative interpretative skill not likely to emerge from the intellectual ruminations of quasi-literate minds—singly or collectively. It also strikes a strong blow for those of us who must still struggle against the pontifical bigotry of those literateurs who insist that productions are lesser phenomena and not worthy of analysis because they are divorced from the printed page. Irritating as I found some of his minor biases, I am vehemently on Hornby's side. He makes it perfectly evident why we need not pose the question "Why are there no more Shakespeares?" and he makes it perfectly clear why we may demand that critics and directors at least be able to follow the bent of Shakespeare's gaze *before* they launch into irresponsible interpretations and transmogrifications of his texts.

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Anatomies of Egotism: A Reading of the Last Novels of H. G. Wells by Robert Bloom. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1977. Pp. ix + 196. $10.95.

Robert Bloom is a trustworthy and acute reader and he does Wells a great service in this study of the late novels. But, though he may be able to persuade a stranger who has not read these novels that Wells remained an accomplished novelist almost to the end, I doubt that he will convince anyone well-acquainted with the Wells canon. Bloom's interpretations are flawless, and, after a thorough summary of Wells' views on fiction in the first chapter, he describes Wells' novelistic techniques splendidly. But a masterful—and one must insist intermittent—command of such techniques does not necessarily produce a fine novel. Wells remained a bold and thoughtful novelist even through *Babes In The Darkling Wood,* which Bloom is willing to abandon. But in the novels that Bloom tries to defend—*The Bulpington of Blup* (1932), *Brynhild* (1937), and *Apropos of Dolores* (1938)—he was no longer a real artist of fiction. It is good that Professor Bloom has called attention to Wells' late achievements, for Wells remained an effective writer, but claims for his sustained excellence as a novelist do not stand up.

This is a solid, well-written book, though far too much of the text is devoted to quotation and to recapitulation of plots and arguments from the three main novels considered, leaving very little room for outright interpretation. This is too bad, since Bloom's readings are more satisfying than Wells' narratives.

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Melville's Short Fiction, 1853-1856 by William B. Dillingham. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1977. Pp. 390. $16.50.

William B. Dillingham set out to achieve three main objectives—to explicate the internal patterns of Melville's short pieces, to demonstrate that much of nineteenth-century popular culture was interwoven into these pieces, to argue that Melville's art of irony and indirection resulted from writing for magazines (principally *Harper's* and *Putnam's*) which "demanded palatable art for queasy minds." He succeeded admirably with the first two points, especially in the chapter on circle imagery and echo technique in "Benito Cereno" and in the chapter on sources for "The Happy Failure" and "The Fiddler" respectively. However, his third point is exaggerated and inaccurate. As one case in point, in the same issue in which appeared "Benito Cereno" (*Putnam's* VI, December, 1855) an essay was printed called "About Niggers" (608-612) which initially invoked racist epithets, then mused for a few pages on the recent black revolt in Santo Domingo, and then concluded that the revolt "ought to conceive the skeptic that the nigger is not a joke, and no baboon; he is simply a black-man, and I say: Give him fair play and let us see what he will come to." That this essayist employed the same technique of indirection indicates that Melville's art of defiance had its tradition even in the magazines which he helped to enrich.

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Jack London: The Man, The Writer, The Rebel by Robert Barltrop. New York: Urizen Books, Inc., 1977. Pp. 206. $10.00.

Barltrop's book is a non-scholarly biographical introduction to Jack London. Its 206 pages include a foreword, fourteen chronological chapters, notes, a list of London's works, an index and twenty-eight photographs. The author excludes a bibliography "because I doubt its value for the general reader." He thinks we need a book discussing London "as writer, socialist and whatever else, and man."

We have three long biographies, several autobiographical volumes, and London's letters, so the need for anything short of a full-dress scholarly biography is doubtful. And although the foreword promises "a good deal of material not included in any previous work," this is a considerable exaggeration. In fact, Barltrop provides mainly a convenient redaction of material published elsewhere, though indebtedness could seldom be ascertained by the uninitiated. (The third footnote occurs on page 34, after twenty-three derivative pages.) The "general reader" must meanwhile trust the omniscience of the author, who is relying on such sources as Charmian London, Jack's flighty widow, whose two-volume biography protests her candor and then conceals her husband's bastardy. Barltrop's highly irregular Notes pass over most debts in silence, but cite many letters. The hope that these are unpublished sources, however, proves false, and raises the question of whether any original research occurred at all.

In truth, the whole process of unsystematic redaction deserves challenging. If accurate information is retold in new language, inaccuracies and confusions are likely to arise. If inaccurate or unverified lore is repeated, it becomes increasingly sanctified by custom. And if facts and conjectures are not scrupulously separated, the reader doesn't know what he's got, as in Barltrop's book.

In his last chapter, Barltrop estimates London, having acknowledged the difficulties this man poses: his virulent racism, his jingoism, male chauvinism, egotism; his alcoholism, incipient insanity, probable suicide; his philosophical contradictions and political apostasy; his claim that he wrote for money, and all the potboilers that prove he meant it. Here is unruly material for an apologist. London "cannot be dismissed," because of his large output, enduring popularity, and achievements in advance of his times, yet the author's own reasons for liking London are unclear. Of the writer, Barltrop can remark that *The People of the Abyss* was "the most, and perhaps the only, truly sincere work" of London's career. Of the socialist, he believes that "Jack London socialism," regardless of its inconsistencies, appealed to working-class readers partly because of its crudity, partly because of the self-made man who espoused it. Of the man, Barltrop can "still feel affection as for a problematic friend," yet he depicts a self-intoxicated egomaniac, drunkard, philanderer, slave trader, plagiarist, writer who hated writing, and much else. Because too little effort is given to climbing back out of this deep hole, the book proves disappointing, whether as biography or apology.

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