

Book Reviews

Karl Kroeber, *Romantic Landscape Vision: Constable and Wordsworth*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975. pp. 142. \$10.00.

Professor Kroeber first explains, with passing reference to Lovejoy and Wellek, the difficulty of defining Romanticism. Using familiar Romantic Vocabulary, he sidesteps definition by suggesting a more "indeterminate" meaning, "an order dialectically constituted, combining symmetries and disymmetries among separately autonomous elements" (p. 4). His intention is to confront an historical sensibility by scrutiny of "specific art works created two centuries ago," and he reminds us that this sensibility must, since it is past, be alien to us. In viewing the work of art as historical fact Kroeber reminds us of Lionel Trilling, but his insistence that both Constable and Wordsworth express "a sensibility alien to ours today" (p. 116) is hasty. One can argue that what was familiar to Wordsworth and Constable — shepherds, solitaries, lonely mountain walks, humble cottages, water mills, barges, canals, horse drawn wagons, and pre-industrial landscape — are remote from our urban culture, but the sensibility that these two artists reflect and which Professor Kroeber perceptively analyses has surfaced again over the last two decades.

Kroeber compares Wordsworth and Freud to elucidate what he sees as the difference — "even antagonism" — in sensibility. Obviously the Freudian notion of childhood differs from the Wordsworthian. For Wordsworth, it is in the child that the man finds his greatness; ultimately the loss of contact with childhood brings decline of imaginative power. Lifelessness is the fundamental characteristic of Freud's universe, continuity of life activates Wordsworth's. As Kroeber notes:

Freud finds a grim destiny for both the individual and the species foreshadowed in the traumas of childhood. Wordsworth finds in the joy-giving power of recollection evidence that his losses as an individual affirm man's role as the most active participant in universal life. (p. 14)

But using Freud in this way is misleading. Recently critics like Harold Bloom, Northrop Frye and M. H. Abrams, cultural commentators like Theodore Rozak and Charles Reich, and the classicist N. O. Brown have looked to Romantic optimism for value. They offer either direct or indirect answers to Freud.

Wordsworth's faith in liberated human potential, stated with magnificent energy in the final lines of *The Prelude*, has spoken eloquently to a decade just past. Even Wordsworth's "naturalism" speaks to us. Kroeber claims that for Wordsworth "civilized life is the fulfillment of natural life, not its antithesis, just as the ultimate result of his submergence in the commonality of Gras-

mere Vale is the realization of the power of his special, unique individuality. His individuality completes the natural self-sufficiency of Grasmere, reintegrating the natural and the human on a higher plane, transforming nature into paradise" (p. 125). This vision of "nature humanized" (p. 31) he also sees in Constable's *The Cornfield*. Nevertheless, he concludes that "the nature in and the nature of Romantic art is obsolete" (p. 131). His claim rests on the fact of changing environment: since the beginning of the nineteenth century the landscape loved by Wordsworth and Constable has disappeared. "Their silence has been filled with noise. More people have crowded into what for them were sparsely populated vistas. There have been more subtle transformations, too. Most of us today do not desire the life represented in *The Haywain*. Few want to be farmers. We do not want to think the way Wordsworth thought, we do not now value his kind of memory" (p. 26). The confusion here arises from Kroeber's silent equating of "sensibility" and "form." Both the style and subjects of Romantic landscape art are gone, but the sensibility manifested in the art of Wordsworth and Constable is surely not irrelevant. We are as concerned today with modes of perception and states of consciousness as were Wordsworth, Constable and the other great Romantics. Their legacy is a subject we can't get rid of: the self.

A false analogy reveals how far Kroeber is from grasping the aspects of Romantic sensibility that parallel our own. His instincts are with the radical element in Romanticism: he notes that Wordsworth speaks "for the inarticulate" (p. 38). Wordsworth's poems of the 1790s, *Guilt and Sorrow*, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, *The Ruined Cottage* and *The Idiot Boy* "are about what in the 1970s is called the 'silent majority,' the classes and characters which are and have been rarely the subject of serious, non-polemical art — the aesthetically as well as sociologically invisible" (p. 38). Wordsworth and Constable are interested in what euphemistically we call "common humanity"; their interest is part, in different ways, of their radicalism. But Wordsworth's "convicts, female vagrants, gypsies . . . idiot boys and mad mothers," Constable's boat builders, farm labourers, and child workers are remote from the middle class conservative we now euphemistically call the "silent majority."

Such quibbles, however, do not affect the book's analyses of specific works. Kroeber's aim in *Romantic Landscape Vision* is the same as in his earlier work *The Artifice of Reality* (1964). In the latter book he reminds us:

The more we can put aside a priori systematizations and work through particular poems toward the pattern which relates them to one another, quite different poems, the more fully will we be able to enjoy both the diversity and the unity of early nineteenth century poetry.

His interest, he maintains, is in specific works, in *Romantic Landscape Vision* a few poems and paintings by Wordsworth and Constable. The first three chapters pair the following poems and paintings: the "spots of time" passage and *The Haywain*, *Tintern*

Abbey and *The Cornfield*, *Peele Castle* and *Hadleigh Castle*. Interest in darkening vision is clear, and in his reading of the latter two works Kroeber makes an interesting and original attempt to see these works not as palinodes, but as "fulfillments of the art which preceded them" (p. 44). *Peele Castle* and *Hadleigh Castle* develop rather than reverse their creators' earlier thought. The gutted castles testify to Wordsworth's sense of community gained through sorrow and loss, and to Constable's concern with depth, destruction and loss. Both works show profound analyses of mind and nature, continuity and loss by replacing "a pleasure principle by reality principle" (p. 52). Youthful idealism, one assumes, gives way to "philosophic" resignation. Wordsworth's phrase "philosophic mind" echoes Anna Barbould and should remind us of the futility of trying to rescue Wordsworth from his decline. Although Kroeber's comments are not completely convincing, his approach is stimulating.

Chapters four and five trace the poetic and artistic traditions of Constable and Wordsworth: Chapter four is "Constable and Graphic Landscape," and Chapter five is "Wordsworth and Poetic Landscape." The history of landscape painting and poetry from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century is a subject demanding more than two brief chapters, but Kroeber rightly deemphasizes the relationship between Constable and Ruisdael. The final chapter compares Constable's *The Leaping Horse* with *Home at Grasmere*. Kroeber tries to establish not merely analogies "between the art of Constable and Wordsworth but also to identify differences," and he succeeds admirably while ignoring theoretical questions concerning the relationship between poetry and painting.

Kroeber impresses with his exegesis of specific works, especially of Constable's work. His commentary on Wordsworth's "spots of time" passage and on *The Haywain* are insightful. To the former work Kroeber brings a new critical sensitivity to the imprecision of Wordsworth's language, to the importance of paradox in Wordsworth's poetry. Paradox defines the Romantic artist who becomes conscious to overcome self-consciousness, who explores his own mind to bring him closer to others, who gives to receive. Through paradox Wordsworth illustrates "mysterious processes which render language ineffective to convey what he wants to convey" (p. 11). The strength of paradox, the strength of imprecision in language is that these not only celebrate the power of mind, but also indicate that the mind does fail. The two incidents or "spots of time" illustrate, Kroeber suggests, "the paradoxical development-deterioration of the mind's mysterious power" (p. 12). Wordsworth's theme is loss amid the persisting rhythms of life. The poet's language is incapable of picturing man's diversity of strength, his ability to cope with loss, but it is this very difficulty that leads the reader to insight. Paradox cannot explain; it can sustain.

Kroeber isolates other familiar Romantic themes: permanence amid impermanence, the concrete universal, time and timelessness, unity in multitude and individualism and relationship. The following passage illustrates his ability to illuminate a familiar work. He stresses the "commonplaceness" of the scene in *The Haywain*, but notes "one oddity."

The wagon is where one would not expect it, in the middle of the stream. Constable's picture is of a *passage*, as is suggested by its original title: *Landscape: Noon*. What is represented is a moment of transition. But the picture gives an impression of quiet, tranquility, even stasis: the moment of passage evokes a sense of continuity. (p. 16)

Details in a Constable painting are lovingly depicted, but each is "connected to larger rhythms." It is a sense of loss amid continuity that Kroeber detects in both Wordsworth and Constable.

Such perceptions are stimulating and enliven much of the book. But Kroeber's focus shifts, especially in the first two chapters, to the reader or viewer: "Constable's moment of passage from morning to afternoon *creates in us consciousness of the persisting rhythms of life*" (p. 16. My italics). We have here the nineteenth century insistence that art awakens feelings in its audience. In his discussion of *The Haywain* Kroeber fears he is "eccentrically impressionistic" when he suggests the painting creates "impressions of the smell of the water and the warm air and of the unobtrusive sounds which must be part of such a scene" (p. 22). His appeal to the "impressionism of many of Constable's own remarks" on landscape and sensation will not do as logical argument. His explanation of *The Cornfield's* appeal is ingenious, but how true to the painting? He writes: "*The Cornfield* satisfies because it affirms the importance of place as evidence of the intrinsic cohesiveness necessary to living" (p. 41). Both *The Cornfield* and *Tintern Abbey* "are textured in order to encourage *development of response*" (Kroeber's italics), but he does not consider "variety" of response. It is true that every strong work of art demands development of response; the longer we ponder the more clearly we comprehend. But to leap from this to the conclusion that "we must contemplate [*The Cornfield*] for some time, because it is the temporal continuity and connectedness of life which the picture, of necessity, must reveal gradually" is hasty.

Kroeber raises several other interesting subjects: Constable's "compositional texture," Wordsworth's passivity (Leavis's "wise passivity" strikes me as sharper insight), civilized nature as opposed to exploited nature and the encouragement to liberation in both poet and painter. His style is usually clear, but he can irritate with paradox and pleonasm. And only Milton could successfully manage this sentence:

[Constable] preferred to painted finished versions of pictures for which he had made large, thoroughly painted sketches, which most modern critics regard as superior to the finished canvasses. (p. 17)

Roderick McGillis

Rosalie L. Colie and F. T. Flahiff, eds., *Some Facets of "King Lear": Essays in Prismatic Criticism*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974, pp. xi, 241. \$15.00

"Like all great art," F. D. Hoeniger says in this volume, "*King Lear* has a mysterious core beyond explanation which we yet strive

to approach and to apprehend more closely." "The prismatic" approach here is from twelve different perspectives; twelve essays (two of them by Rosalie Colie herself) which view the play from different angles. The essays were written independently, with the writers prompted only to consider suggestions made in Maynard Mack's "*King Lear*" in *Our Time* and to regard the play (the prism) as an object of admiration as well as an instrument of analysis. The great attractive cynosure — the play itself — sheds its radiance on many of these pages, most of all whenever a particular critic has given his hand to the text and allowed it to lead him to insight. There are so many insights that the book should be required reading for anyone who studies and loves *King Lear*.

Of course, with everyone sighting down his own particular line of refraction, it would be surprising if the "prismatic" method did not throw up a few cases of self-bedazzlement ("Light seeking light doth [now and then] light of light beguile"). Sheldon P. Zitner approaches the play through its language, which he believes needs some decoding. He is right to say that many of the savage circumstances and incidents of the play, such as Lear's revenges and the world's reactions to them, "are literally unspeakable." But even after spotting that *King Lear* is matter more than words can wield, Zitner somehow seems to miss the point that when Lear at the end cries "Howl, howl, howl!" he is heaving his heart into his mouth. And Thomas F. Van Laan seems almost perversely detached from the pain of that same catastrophic moment when he writes:

Lear's first sound upon entering with Cordelia dead in his arms is "Howl, howl, howl!" and what follows merely reiterates in various forms this initial response. The fact of Lear's pain is always present in our consciousness, but not because he carefully articulates it. Unlike Macbeth and Othello at the end of their tragic careers, Lear is unable to articulate a fully elaborated self-conception with its own appropriate language, its own recognizable voice.

To anyone who cannot tell that this awful cry is the whirlwind of Act Three speaking out of Lear, we may as well say only "Look with thine ears."

Van Laan's essay is about Lear's search, through play-acting, for a bearable role in the world. He accepts the motif of the turning wheel as a satisfactory metaphor of the play's shape, and so also do several other contributors (in fact, in the quest for a satisfactory shape for the events of the play the sub-plot is sometimes rather overemphasized in this book, most especially in Bridget G. Lyons' essay). John Reibetanz sees fortune's wheel as an important emblem among many "Theatrical Emblems" in the play. Reibetanz, I think, believes too readily in a difference between public-theatre and private-theatre dramaturgy. The last scene's grouping around the dying Lear, he suggests, reflects with great irony the opening court scene. So it does, but to say that this kind of symbolic regrouping is a private-theatre technique seems quite wrong to me — *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, is

full of emblematic groupings. And one wonders for how many readers of *King Lear* "Cordelia exists as a dramatized emblem"?

Maurice Charney, writing on nakedness and clothes, shows that Robert Heilman and Dean Frye did not entirely cover the subject. He demonstrates the resonance throughout the play of "the naked truth," "the naked babe," and "naked nature." F. D. Hoeniger has a fascinating thesis that the story of Lear is primitive and that Shakespeare added to his play elements that are not in the historical or dramatic sources. Hoeniger asks us to accept a little preamble: that in his early teens he saw *Lear* acted and it appealed to the "primitive" in *him*; it is possible that Shakespeare also first heard the story as a boy "told over a winter's fire by his mother or a grandam, by a friend or schoolmaster," and its primitiveness struck home deeper than ever Holinshed could have planted the tale in after years. The analogues from folk versions which Hoeniger then cautiously presents are really striking: I wonder if he knows that before Nahum Tate had ever read *King Lear* he wrote a play with a surprisingly-similar plot?

Where the Hoeniger essay tends to underline the belief that Shakespeare's stage is all the world, W. F. Blissett's discussion of recognition in *King Lear* moves us gently from the sweeping tragic view of Aristotle to that beautiful "tiny quiet bright focus" on the moment when Lear, waking from his madness, recognizes his child and himself. Martha Andresen writes on sententiae and commonplaces in the play.

It is to Rosalie Colie that we listen with especial attentiveness, for the two essays in this volume are among the last things we will have from her: she died just as the book was accepted for publication (it seems typical of her kindness that with Nancy Lindheim's "*King Lear* as Pastoral Tragedy" in consideration for the collection Rosalie Colie did not put in her own essay "Nature's above Art in that Respect: the Limits of the Pastoral Pattern." That essay is still unpublished). The first of her papers, "The Energies of Endurance: Biblical Echo in *King Lear*," is very rich: a tour-de-force of sensitive listening to two texts at once; a cool argument that response to the scriptural music in the play need imply no doctrinal commitment; a moving testimony to the play's communication of "the art of known and feeling sorrow" and that art's ennoblement of the human spirit. In her second essay she brilliantly argues that in *Lear* Shakespeare commented upon the century of "crisis of the aristocracy" in which he was living. But the best part of this essay seems to me to come in the last half-dozen pages when Rosalie Colie turns her full attention upon the human relationships in the play and shows us that while Shakespeare may be demonstrating the problems of the old aristocratic code "his heart lay with the old mores of abundance, kindness, and carelessness." English studies are sadly poorer for the loss of an interpreter who could listen and speak like this.

F. T. Flahiff saw the book through the press, for which he deserves great credit. He also contributes an essay, which independently backs up Hoeniger's, on the King Edgar of popular legends. As part of his discussion, Flahiff cites and interprets

the last lines of the play, lines which are spoken by Edgar or Albany and which several other of the contributors to this book also comment upon. No one — not even those who see the wheel of fortune as a figure of the play — notices that the beginning of the play is in its end, that when the final speaker says

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say

we may be back, after all that pain, where we started: Cordelia in Act One spoke what she felt, not what she ought to have said; so did Kent; so did Lear. It says a great deal for *King Lear*, and not anything the less for this book, that after so minute and plural an examination the play retains so much of its great mystery.

James Black

Books Received

- BEARDSLEY, MONROE C., DANIEL, ROBERT W. and LEGGETT, GLENN, eds., *Theme and Form: An Introduction to Literature, Fourth Edition*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975. pp. 711. \$11.95.
- BUCKAWAY, CATHERINE M., *The Silver Cuckoo*. Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1975. pp. 66. \$3.95.
- COLLIN, W. E., *The White Savannahs*. Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975. pp. 329. \$5.95.
- CURRAN, STUART, *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis*. San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1975. pp. 255. \$14.50.
- DOBBINS, AUSTIN C., *Milton and the Book of Revelation: The Heavenly Cycle*. (*Studies in the Humanities No. 7*). University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press. 1975. pp. 170. cloth \$6.75. \$2.95 pb.
- FUIMI, ANNAMARIA BORSANO, *La Critica Shakespeariana di Ludwig Tieck*. Milano: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1970. pp. 188. Lire 2600.
- GOING, WILLIAM T., *Essays on Alabama Literature* (*Studies in the Humanities No. 4*). University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1975. pp. 176. cloth \$6.75.
- HARPER, J. W., ed., *Browning: Men and Women and other Poems*. London: J. M. Dent, 1975. pp. 244. £3.00 £1.40 pb.
- HIBBERD, GEORGE, ed., *The Elizabethan Theatre V*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975. pp. 158. \$10.00
- HUME, KATHRYN, *The Owl and The Nightingale*. Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975. pp. 139. \$10.95.

- JUMP, JOHN D., ed., *Byron: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and other Romantic Poems*. London: J. M. Dent, 1975. pp. 233. £3.25. £1.65 pb.
- JUMP, JOHN D., ed., *Byron: A Symposium*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975. pp. 188. \$22.75.
- LAWRENCE, R. G., ed., *Jacobean and Caroline Tragedies*. London: J. M. Dent, 1975. pp. 265. £3.95
- MILLS, MALDWYN, ed., *Chaucer: Troilus and Crysedes*. London: J. M. Dent, 1975. pp. 337 £2.50 £1.25 pb.
- MOGLEN, HELENE, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne*. Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1975. pp. 172. \$7.50
- NEARY, PETER & FLAHERTY, PATRICK, ed., *By Great Waters: A Newfoundland and Labrador Anthology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974. pp. 262. \$3.95
- PARTLOW, ROBERT B. JR., ed., *Dickens Studies Annual, Volume 4*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975. pp. 189. \$15.00. Don Mills, Ontario: Burns & MacEachern. \$17.20
- WEBB, EUGENE, *The Dark Dove: The Sacred and Secular in Modern Literature*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1975. pp. 280. \$8.95.
- WHITRIDGE, MARGARET COULBY, ed., *Lampman's Kate: Late Love Poems of Archibald Lampman 1887-1897*. Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1975. pp. 52. \$3.95.