

Book Reviews

Virginia Surtees, ed. *Reflections of a Friendship, John Ruskin's Letters to Pauline Trevelyan 1848-1866*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979. pp. xvi, 287. \$27.50.

The lamentable piecemeal publication of Ruskin's letters continues with Virginia Surtees' edition of his letters to Pauline Trevelyan. Since J. L. Bradley's *Ruskin's Letters from Venice 1851-1852* of 1955 there have been a least a dozen editions of groups of his letters, and still we have no definite word about a Collected Edition, always a formidable and now an almost prohibitively expensive undertaking. Yet with every new selection from his vast correspondence the need for a complete edition becomes more apparent. Ruskin looks like becoming the one major Victorian whose letters and diaries must be read incompletely and inconveniently.

Strictly speaking the present edition consists of more than the title promises. Of the 224 letters only 157 are from Ruskin to Lady Trevelyan; the remainder consist of Lady Trevelyan to Ruskin (6), Ruskin to Sir Walter Trevelyan (15), Effie Ruskin to Lady Trevelyan (18), Ruskin's father to Lady Trevelyan with a few to Sir Walter (17), and a miscellaneous group which includes letters to or from W. B. Scott, Henry Acland, and Ruskin's mother (11). The bulk of the letters derive from the Trevelyan family papers which have recently been deposited in the library of the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne. For the other letters Mrs. Surtees has drawn upon collections on both sides of the Atlantic.

An impressively large number of the letters make compelling reading, and even those which are inconsequential are rendered valuable by the annotation. For an enriched understanding of Ruskin these letters are indispensable. Ruskin felt at ease with Pauline Trevelyan, and would joke with her, playfully upbraid her, but most of all depend upon her sympathy in his increasing emotional turmoil and despair. It was to her that he confessed on 8 May 1854, following Effie's departure amid a flurry of gossip: "For *me* you need not be in pain. All the worst to me — has been long past. I have had no wife for several years — only a shadow — and a duty . . . The world must talk as it will. I cannot give it the edifying spectacle of a husband and wife challenging each others truth." A few weeks later, writing from Switzerland where "the sight of the Alps has put me to rights again," he gave what is undoubtedly his most direct and least self-justifying account of Effie and their marriage: "She is such a mass of contradiction that I pass continually from pity to indignation — & back again . . . I am not demonstrative in my affections — but I loved her dearly." Equally forthright is his analysis of his father: "If he loved me less — and believed in me more — we should get on — but his whole life is bound up in me — and yet he thinks me a fool — that is to say — he is mightily pleased if I write anything that has big words and no sense in it — and would give half his fortune to make me a member of parliament if he thought I would talk — provided only the talk hurt nobody & was in all the papers. This form of affection galls me like hot iron — and I am in a state of subdued fury whenever I am at home which dries all the marrow out of every bone in me." On occasion in these letters we get closer to the core of Ruskin's personal tragedy than in anything else that he wrote.

Although Pauline Trevelyan was a close reader of Ruskin's books, there is not much in the letters that bears directly on them, though there is plenty of talk about innumerable projects "rolling over and over in my head," including a plan, never carried out, for etched views of the Swiss towns that were being rebuilt to accommodate tourists, which he would bequeath to "foolish posterity, that it may mourn and gnash its teeth in its Hotels." A later letter, written a year or so before Lady Trevelyan's death in 1866, gives a rare account of his perception of himself as a lecturer on political economy at Manchester: "in general I find my talk flies over peoples heads — like bad firing." By far the most interesting comments on the work come in Effie's letters describing his agitated sketching of cathedrals already in the hands of restorers, and in John James Ruskin's letters about the magazine publication of *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris*, with their revelation that Thackeray, weeks before the appearance of the first *Unto This Last* essay in the *Cornhill*, "shrunk from appearing to sanction the Sentiments — so to relieve him from the Opprobrium of seeming to approve of anything kind liberal or just towards the Working Classes I let my Sons initials go to the end of the article."

Lady Trevelyan remains a shadowy figure in the letters, as was perhaps inevitable given Ruskin's extreme egocentricity. We have, however, Raleigh Trevelyan's *A Pre-Raphaelite Circle* of 1978, which gives a lively account of this attractive woman, whose lifelong friends ranged from scientists such as Whewell, Sedgwick, and Henslow, to the Pre-Raphaelites whom she patronized. Mrs. Surtees notes that even so austere a judge of women as Carlyle conceded that she was "a kind of wit, not unamiable, and with plenty of sense." We glimpse something of this in her few surviving letters to Ruskin, whom she archly compared to her dog, "a quaint surly old fellow . . . who takes his own views of things, and likes & dislikes people vigorously."

As a piece of editing the volume has a great many strengths and a few faults. With precision and authority Mrs. Surtees relates each letter to the relevant events in the lives of the major personae. One of the triumphs of the edition is that in doing this she never merely repeats the familiar facts of Ruskin's biography, but by calling upon Sir Walter Trevelyan's diaries and upon unpublished manuscript material by or relating to Ruskin in collections in England, the United States, and Canada, she constantly gives us either new facts or old facts from a fresh perspective. She does not hesitate to prolong a footnote when she wishes to argue a point (for instance, her discussion of why Pauline Trevelyan and Lady Waterford never became friends), nor is she afraid to report her own visit to a room once occupied by Ruskin and speculate on the views he probably had from the windows. Mrs. Surtees had produced a volume that may be read (as it was evidently edited) with pleasure, footnotes as well as letters. In editing letters the Victorians likewise aimed at readability, and their example might be followed more often. At the same time, one longs for more scholarly information. We are not told, for example, whether the text is a literal or a partly modernized one. Nor are we given such useful information as the date of Pauline Trevelyan's important paper on the Pre-Raphaelites in the *Scotsman*, or the dates of many of the manuscript letters quoted in the annotation, or precise enough information about the books of natural history and sermons referred to by Ruskin. The addition of this largely bibliographical detail would not make the volume less readable. Finally, since a reviewer always looks vigilantly for an error, especially when faced with so well informed an editor, I must point out that James Anthony Froude appears throughout as A. J. Froude.

Roger Peattie

R. P. Bilan. *The Literary Criticism of F. R. Leavis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. pp. vii, 338. \$27.50

In *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* Francis Mulhern observed that none of the studies of F. R. Leavis "could credibly claim to be a systematic reconstitution and assessment of Leavis's aesthetics, literary criticism and cultural analysis." Mulhern rashly stated that this state of affairs was likely to continue, but R. P. Bilan's study is just such an overview of Leavis's work. Bilan believes that Leavis is a great critic, but oddly enough this book demonstrates the limitations of Leavis's very real achievements more effectively than any of the polemics of detractors.

The approach is indeed systematic. Bilan begins with a section on "Society, Culture and Criticism" in order to put Leavis's work in the full social perspective it demands. The section analyzes the concepts of the organic community of the past and the technologico-Benthamite civilization of the present, and devotes chapters to Leavis's ideas about cultural continuity, the educated public and the function of criticism. Bilan makes it clear that Leavis is a critic in Arnold's tradition and that it won't do to see him as a moral critic as opposed to a literary one. Leavis rejected such an opposition, reminding us that literature deals with life and therefore with values. Bilan concedes that Leavis is not a profound social thinker compared to Weber and Durkheim, that his view of the past is often simple and even sentimental, and most importantly, that his hopes for the future involve a concept of the educated public that is problematic.

The heart of Bilan's study lies in its two middle sections, "Leavis's Criticism of Poetry and the Novel" and "Leavis on Lawrence." The first of these rightly stresses that Leavis is more original and important as a critic of fiction than of poetry, but a little more discussion of his very real achievements in *New Bearings in English Poetry* and *Revaluation* would have been welcome. Bilan's approach is as empirical as Leavis's own: specific literary judgments are cited to illuminate the key concepts and terms. Bilan recognizes that the core of Leavis's method lies in the use of interrelated terms like "impersonality," "maturity," "concreteness," "realization," "life," and the "normative." (Unhappy usages like "ahnung" and "nisis" are ignored.) These terms have a literary and moral flavor simultaneously: Leavis sometimes "wobbles" (to use a term applied to Leavis by C. H. Sisson) from a poised literary and moral judgement into the didactic. Bilan documents such failures and ambiguities very ably. The question arises: if Leavis himself can falter and apparently not realize it, does he have a method that others can use reliably? Bilan stresses the importance of criticism as a collaborative enterprise, an idea that Leavis propounded. Mulhern's book raises some questions about Leavis's influence and his followers that Bilan might have considered. Leavis has perhaps been most influential in demanding that we think seriously about the concept of tradition, but Bilan shows that a seminal book like *The Great Tradition* is sometimes unclear or inconsistent in using exactly this concept. Bilan relentlessly demonstrates that Leavis's evaluations are sometimes poorly-grounded or merely rhetorical, and that he doesn't care much about the unity of a novel as long as it contains valuable parts. These are serious shortcomings in a critic whom many regard as exemplary. Bilan's candor is certainly engaging.

The candor is most intense in the section on Leavis and Lawrence. I should praise the chronological approach: we can follow the evolution of Leavis's attitudes and judgments. It would be easy to think of Leavis as a proponent of

Lawrence's greatness from the start, but it would be wrong. An evaluative critic is most vulnerable when we see the shifts in his opinions. Bilan shows the extent to which the evaluations shifted as Leavis began to see Lawrence as a writer we need for health, a writer with a profound critique of the modern world and a positive religious vision. The role Leavis found for Lawrence's work sometimes led to distortions: Lawrence could be described as a superb comic writer, his irony supposedly never had a trace of animus, his irrationality could be played down. And, as Bilan does not point out, the word "genius" could be used too often. The distortions are most damaging in the discussions of such tales as "The Fox" and "The Captain's Doll." Bilan is particularly good in the pages devoted to Leavis's treatment of the tales.

The last section of this book lumps together the revaluation of T. S. Eliot with a discussion of "The Religious Spirit" under the convenient title, "The Later Leavis." More than convenience is involved: it was the growth of Leavis's religious spirit that led him to attack Eliot's work as life-denying while praising Lawrence as a life-affirmer. Bilan is surprisingly uncritical of Leavis's rather vague religious sense. Indeed, it is presented as a positive accomplishment. Leavis could praise the religious quality of *The Pilgrim's Progress* while separating it from the theology, a distinction between religion and theology that would have scandalized Bunyan. Lawrence and Blake offered sounder precedents for talking about the spiritual without doctrinal content, but they are elusive religious thinkers. Bilan compares Leavis with Buber, Bonhoeffer and Tillich, but his religious spirit seems insubstantial alongside theirs. C. H. Sisson said years ago that he detected a "wobble" in Leavis's spiritual concerns, and that Leavis is a man who ought to be sure. He was as sure as he could honestly be, but it is hard to see an achievement in his occasional comments on religion.

In the criticism he strove to be sure and had more to offer, raising major issues and making important judgments. His ability to sound very certain has not misled R. P. Bilan into merely assimilating the criticism. This book does such a fine job of testing Leavis's judgments that it may make the reader ponder one judgment in particular, the exasperated verdict on Eliot: "What is offered, it seems to me, is decidedly not satisfying. No major artist, I am apt to say, is a 'case.' Yet one couldn't happily call Eliot minor. So he is in his special limiting way unique." Leavis himself could not be called a minor critic, yet Bilan has scrupulously pointed out an abundance of major flaws, causing me to suspect that Leavis too was in a special limiting way unique. "Cases," of course, may be more common if not less troubling in criticism than in poetry.

Bert Almon

S. C. Neuman. *Gertrude Stein: Autobiography and the Problem of Narration*. Victoria: University of Victoria Monograph Series, 1979. pp. 88. \$3.75.

Much has been written by now on the fictive aspects of autobiography, that is, on the near inevitability that an autobiographer will misrepresent himself or herself, partly because the very act of writing challenges the wholeness of that self, but also because autobiographers are not primarily interested in telling their life stories. Autobiography is not a variation of biography. The fictive emphasis has reached the point where critics must now insist that autobiography, unlike fiction, does have something to do with our expectations about real facts (Neuman mentions this distinction, in her introductory chapter). Gertrude Stein is often a test case in discussions of autobiography because her works in this form do not even present themselves as straightforward narratives of her own life; one is purportedly the autobiography of her companion, Alice B. Toklas, another is provocatively entitled *Everybody's Autobiography*, and various other unconventional forms are embedded in her other writings. Stein is sometimes discussed as an exemplary American autobiographer and lately as a lesbian autobiographer (a mode in which Stein misrepresents rather less than others).

Ms. Neuman also uses Stein as a test case for more abstract theories, but her approach is austere theoretical — to demonstrate through an analysis of several major works that Stein knew that autobiography as a genre is not "about" the truthful narrative of one's own life, but "about" the writer's desire to create an artifact of her own self, which Stein did. Stein met the problem (that autobiographers are incapable of truth and readers unsure whether to expect it) head on, devising forms that draw attention to the autobiographer's split personality. Hence, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein admits the "ontological ambiguity" of the form and exaggerates the "translated tone" of any narrative seeking to recreate the viewpoint of an other, even if that other is essentially a part of the writing self. Neuman is also interested in Stein's treatment of time, particularly her creation of a "continuous present" to replace conventionally timebound narrative. Stein refers (like Laurence Sterne) to several other kinds of time than that in which her writing takes place: she uses present participles, she divests her words of mythic and connotative resonance (in contrast to Proust and Joyce), and she employs a deceptively casual, anecdotal, mode of organization to show that everything is happening right now, in the writer's mind as she writes.

Neuman relates Stein's antagonism to the past to a vague Freudianism derived from the critic Louis Renza — vague because Neuman says nothing about Stein's real life, she treats her lesbianism as non-existent (undoubtedly a factor in the ambiguity as to whether Toklas and Stein are two or one), and so we don't really know what psychological dynamic distinguishes Stein from other autobiographers who lie about the past or try to ignore it. As Neuman describes them, Stein's conflicts revolve only around matters of literary theory. The presented self, the theorist on matters of identity, is taken as the whole thing. This book also concerns Stein's later autobiographies only, from 1933 on, the date of *Alice B. Toklas*. One can hardly blame anyone for refusing to analyze *The Making of Americans*, but that nearly unreadable work is autobiographical, as are various other writings that present themselves as fictions. Neuman's distinction seems to be not chronological so much as one between writings that are called autobiographies or that suggest that Stein had a view of autobiography as such, and other writings where Stein's views seem unconscious or inchoate.

Neuman's Stein develops into a theorist of the distinction between the "human mind" and "human nature" and a quasi-scientist who turns her powers of observation on the observing self, recognizing like Thomas Kuhn that even scientific theories are ultimately products of an observer's subjectivity. How then would Stein have justified the "everybody" in *Everybody's Autobiography*? Was her truth everybody's truth, was she making a joke, or was Stein hoping for the best? Stein succeeds at last in identifying the activities of the human mind with the autobiographical form which exists to reproduce them. Neuman explores the process well, but to return to the distinction I made before, I am frustrated by the lack of grounding in reality in her analysis, even if it had taken the form of speculation or an analysis of Stein's sense of her self. The presentation of real facts would not necessarily have been the answer here, but perhaps some analysis of the places where Stein reveals that she is suppressing or teasing. Given the literary form being considered, it is somewhat disorienting to find that Stein's most grandiose self-image is being treated as the whole.

Judith Sloman

Patricia A. Parker. *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode*. Princeton University Press, 1979. pp. x, 289. \$17.50.

Patricia A. Parker sets four objectives for this study: to extend the work of Ker, Vinaver, Auerbach and Frye; to interpret the works of four major poets; to explore the affinities between romance and lyric poetry; and finally, to provide a context for modern theories of narrative and linguistic "error." Although each of these objectives merits a detailed critical study, Dr. Parker manages to bring to all four topics a measure of illumination and insight.

Her accomplishment of the second and third objectives is successful. Her reading of works by Ariosto, Spenser, Milton and Keats lends them a new and vital perspective, by its emphasis on repeated words and images that too often go unnoticed. For each of the four poets, Dr. Parker selects a key word — "error" for the *Orlando furioso*, "dilate" for *The Faërie Queene*, "pendant" for *Paradise Lost*, and "threshold" for poems by Keats — and demonstrates that repetition of this key word is a deliberate emphasis on the aspect of romance in the works. A re-reading of the poems reveals the extent to which the key words determine the poems' themes, and in the earlier works, their narrative forms as well.

In the fulfilment of the third objective the notion of romance is extended beyond narrative and purely literary considerations to those of language and meaning in the poems of Keats. "Whatever else may ally Keats with the romance imagination," his diction and allusiveness "frequently subvert the marshalling of meaning towards a single end" (p. 168). Dr. Parker provides some provocative links between romance and lyric, some of them very insightful. She sees Keat's frequent refusal to resolve ambiguity as a distinctly poetic characteristic, and one that has been emphasized by modern poets. She is led to make the following generalization:

In contrast to the directionality of prose, poetry thrives on ambiguity, on resonance and repetition, on a thickening of the medium rather than the "shortest way." The linear tendency of words . . . is precisely what it seeks to evade. (p. 236)

She arrives at this conclusion by way of her close reading of Keat's poems and by her tracing of his specific development as a poet. But the generalization can be called into question.

The insights achieved in working out the second and third objectives are derived from the assumptions of the first objective and influence the formulation of the conclusion. Dr. Parker's claim to extend the work of Ker, Vinaver, Auerbach and Frye presents a problem of methodology, since these writers represent a combination of historical, generic and thematic approaches. Dr. Parker defines romance as "a form which both projects its end and defers its arrival" (p. 201). She recommends the usefulness of this definition because it "has the advantage of comprehending historical difference even as it reveals structural affinities" (p. 4). The definition is plastic enough to transcend historical periods and lend itself to a purely thematic approach, but Dr. Parker adopts a historical approach nevertheless. This historical approach would seem to be the main — perhaps the only — justification for the selection of Ariosto, Spenser, Milton, Keats and Stevens: the chain of influence is easy to trace, historically, from one to the other. Once this historical approach is seen as the real organizational principle of the study, its real subject is revealed as the tracing of romance elements in post-medieval English poetry. But the introduction of Valéry and Mallarmé into the last chapter would appear to indicate a modal or thematic approach. The methodology is thus mixed and confusing.

Moreover, the definition of romance (the first objective) is subtly altered as the study proceeds. In the *Orlando furioso*, romance is a narrative form, a genre, and the "error" determines the narrative structure. Ariosto is "a poet for whom romance is already both established and open to an anatomy of its deviance, an anatomy which makes the *Orlando furioso* a sequel not just to Boiardo but to the whole tradition it recapitulates and transforms" (p. 14). Yet the study begins, not with established romance but with Ariosto's "deviance," and the reader is left hungering for some notion of "the whole tradition" of romance as a genre. Chrétien is mentioned only in passing; the *Roman de la rose* and Wolfram are cited once each, Boccaccio not at all; and even Chaucer gets short shrift, considering the study's emphasis on English poetry.

With Milton, the definition of romance as narrative sequence is transmuted to romance as narrative space, the arena of action rather than the action itself. Unlike the key words which characterize the works of Ariosto and Spenser, "pendant" is a metaphor of Milton's cosmology rather than of his poetic structure. Attention is given to images rather than episodes and the quest is seen to be transferred to the reader, who is to make of the poem a sort of "pilgrim's progress" (p. 128). For Keats, romance is again redefined; now it is seen as a "pilgrim's progress" (p. 206) into the self, a lyric interpretation of an essentially narrative form. The modern poets extend the "regress" to that of meaning itself, so that romance is once more redefined, this time in linguistic terms. We arrive finally at Dr. Parker's identification of romance and poetry, quoted above. She maintains that poetry is by nature romantic, and romance poetic, because both romance and poetry dwell on presence rather than purpose, the "shortest way." The definition of romance has by this point been so altered, so extended beyond historical and even generic limits, as to become a useless term.

At the same time, the traditional romance motifs — recognition and restoration, reanimation, divagation, spell and counterspell — which Dr. Parker mentions are essentially narrative elements, and can be traced more directly in

post-medieval prose works. If romance is a tradition "both established and open to an anatomy of its deviance" for Ariosto the poet, it is at least equally so for Cervantes the novelist and his successors in the art of fiction. The "thickening of the medium" can take place as effectively at the level of narrative structure, of episodes, as at the level of linguistic structure, of phrases and sentences. Thus Dr. Parker's conception of romance is not only vague where historical and generic precision is required, but also limited where historical and generic considerations demand a wider view.

These deficiencies of organization and conception notwithstanding, *Inescapable Romance* is an interesting and valuable contribution to the general study of romance, and especially to the closer study of Spenser, Milton and Keats.

Barbara Belyea

Books Received

- CORMIER, RAMONA, and JANIS L. PALLISTER, *Waiting for Death: The Philosophical Significance of Beckett's En Attendant Godot*. University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979. pp. iv, 155. Unpriced.
- HASSALL, ANTHONY J., *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones*. Sydney Studies in Literature Series. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1979. pp. xvi, 116. \$7.50.
- JORDENS, ANN-MARI, *The Stenhouse Circle: Literary Life in mid-Nineteenth Century Sydney*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1979. pp. xii, 186. \$22.50.
- MARTZ, LOUIS L., *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980. pp. x, 356. \$22.50.
- PHILLIPS, DONNA, ed., *Voices of Discord: Canadian Short Stories from the 1930's*. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1979. pp. 224. \$3.95.
- ROGERS, PAT, *Robinson Crusoe*. Unwin Critical Library Series. Winchester, Mass.: Allen & Unwin, 1979. pp. xviii, 182. \$22.50.
- SALWAK, DALE, *John Braine and John Wain: A Reference Guide*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980. pp. xiv, 195. \$28.00.
- SCHUMAN, SAMUEL, *Vladimir Nabokov: A Reference Guide*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979. pp. vii, 214. \$24.00.

- STANGE, KEN. *Nocturnal Rhythms*. Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1979. pp. 97. \$5.95.
- SUMMERS, CLAUDE J. and TED-LARRY PEBWORTH. *Ben Jonson*. Twayne's English Authors Series. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979. pp. 223. \$10.95.
- WIEBE, RUDY, and ARITHA VAN HERK, eds., *More Stories From Western Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980. pp. viii, 296. \$6.95.
- WINKLER, ELIZABETH HALE. *The Clown in Modern Anglo-Irish Drama*. Frankfurt / Bern: Peter Lang Ltd., / Herbert Lang & Co. Ltd., 1977. pp. 297. Unpriced.