

## Book Reviews

Anne Wilson. *Magical Thought in Creative Writing: The Distinctive Role of Fantasy and Imagination in Fiction*. Stroud, Glos.: The Thimble Press, 1983. pp. 156. \$10.95.

This is a charmingly eccentric book. It brings to mind Maureen Duffy's *The Exotic World of Faery* (1972), a work quite different to *Magical Thought in Creative Writing*, but a work which has a similar single minded devotion to a quirky psychologism. Duffy's reason for avoiding a theoretical discussion of Freud and psychological criticism is that hers is a "popularizing effort"; Wilson's reason is that psychological readings have not firmly isolated "the magical level of thought from imaginative thought in order to study the magical creative process." Not only have psychological critics failed here, but also "the reductionist structuralists." In a brief "Preface" (seven pages), Wilson dismisses the efforts of Freud, Jung, and "their successors, from Jones to Bettelheim" (included here are Derek Brewer and Stephen Prickett), and the structuralists Propp, Todorov, and Levi-Strauss. Wilson makes no mention of W. R. Irwin (*The Game of the Impossible*) or Rosemary Jackson (*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*), two recent theorists of fantasy whose work deals with subliminal and unconscious patterns of thought. Another pertinent theorist who might well have proved useful to Wilson's notions of reader response is Normand Holland, but there is no mention of his dynamics here. Given Wilson's *donnée*, I cannot quibble over her exclusion of Colin Manlove (*Modern Fantasy*) in the discussion: his treatment of fantasy has no truck with "magical thinking." For Wilson, an understanding of works of fantasy demands a submission to irrational, chaotic patterns of thought; the "key" to understanding fantasy is "identification." The reader identifies with the protagonist who is, in turn, the creator of the characters and events of the fantasy.

If this sounds strange, it is. Wilson is aware of some difficulty with her theory. She writes: "Those to whom this level of thinking is unstudied terrain may feel inclined to dismiss it or may wonder how any systematic study can be made of the fictions it creates." According to her survey of criticism, no one but Anne Wilson has studied

this terrain. This is unexplored country, and perhaps this suggestion not only serves to head off sceptical responses, but it also accounts for a defensive and tentative advance on the part of Wilson. Her readings of the several fictions she deals with are sprinkled with phrases such as "it is possible," "probably expresses," "may prompt," "may bring to their response," "may be significant," "although one cannot be certain that these do not carry further meaning." Wilson informs us that the "study of magical thought in fiction is a difficult task." The difficulty lies in the insight that magical thought is unavailable to the rational mind; it is fundamentally anti-rational and anti-intellectual — even "solipsistic."

If there is a critical voice behind her pronouncements, it is that of another scholar not mentioned by Wilson: C. S. Lewis. Her notion that fantasy is "subjective material," "primarily pictorial" and not dependent on the precision with which one articulates it ("words are used to communicate a magical fiction to others, but magical thinking does not itself struggle for precision of expression through diction") faintly echoes Lewis's comments that myth and fantasy have power to strike us below the level of our rational minds. (See Lewis's *An Experiment in Criticism*, 1961, and his "Introduction" to *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, 1948). But Lewis's sense of the "numinous" power of myth hardly fits Wilson's sensibility. No, Freud and Jung are the most powerful ghostly presences in *Magical Thought in Creative Writing*.

Attempting to avoid an extra-literary scheme since it would inevitably reduce fantasies to allegoric statement, Wilson confesses that "Magical thought is only difficult for those seeking to study it." The crucial problem is that magical thought is "free from the laws and realities of the external world," that "it is focused exclusively on the affairs of the inner world of the mind," in short, that it is irrational and at work in the unconscious. How, then, do we scrutinize it rationally and consciously without reducing it? Wilson answers:

By concentrating on each story on its own terms, as audiences do, and then distancing myself from the story for objective examination of how it works, I observed a scheme at the heart of it which could be seen to have given rise to its every element. This scheme cannot be seen from the position outside the story which the structuralists have adopted; it can only be seen if one identifies with the hero or heroine of the story and views the events and characters, including the protagonist's presentation of himself, as the protagonist's own creation. The reason for this is that audiences identify with the protagonist and, while they do this to some extent in the case of all stories, in the case of magical fantasy identification must be total, since magical fantasy has no detached author.

This begs several questions. Do audiences concentrate on each story "on its own terms"? Will not each member of an audience concen-

trate on those aspects of a story most immediate to his or her own concerns, knowledge, desires? What does it mean when we speak of a story's "own terms"? Is our later distancing ourselves from the story "for an objective examination of how it works" possible? Does the story have an objective existence or does it exist only within contexts that must be subjective; is there a story in this hermetic room? Does the scheme we observe "at the heart" of the story exist in the story or in our perception of the story? For example, Wilson's argument that magical fantasy has nothing to do with the politics of social reality is difficult to accept in the light of Frederic Jameson's analysis of "magical narratives" in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). Wilson's reading of "The Goose Girl" as a story concerning the internal conflicts of self image experienced by the heroine is attractive, but an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century — or indeed a modern — audience might just as well perceive the conflict as political instead of psychological. The horse and blood relate to kingship and hereditary rule as much as they reflect a sense of self. And the iron stove which Wilson asserts cannot be interpreted reliably since "there is no contextual information" does suggest a prison-house, a fiery furnace, a place of political repression from which the Goose Girl will rise to take her rightful place in the political hierarchy. Clearly, audiences do not experience tales like "The Goose Girl" singly; context becomes inter-textuality and the political aspirations of an emerging working class find their first voice in this iron stove. "Of course, kings and queens in fantasy have no political reality," Wilson says, effectively loosening the tales from history. But what makes the tales so rich, as Jameson says in reference to other literature, is precisely their difference historically from what culture creates today. Relevance lies in difference.

However valiantly Wilson argues that her "scheme" does not approach the story from outside, that she examines "every detail in its context," her discussions of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, and *Hamlet* rely heavily on source material. Details do not exist inside each story; they derive from previous story, and for Wilson each reworking is not accomplished by a "detached author"; rather, the protagonist writes his or her own story. This may be so. Foucault has asked "what is an author?" and for all I know protagonists may be authors. But they cannot escape history. As Jameson points out:

The archaic fantasy material that psychoanalytic criticism feels able to detect . . . can never be imagined as emerging in any pure state, but must always pass through a determinate social and historical situation, in which it is both universalized and reappropriated by "adult ideology." (*The Political Unconscious*, p. 142)

Be this as it may, Wilson's readings are somewhat disingenuous in their insistence that they take up positions only within the texts. Despite her dismissal of Freud and his followers — "my methods are quite different," she writes — her interpretations are often typically Freudian. The primal scene, the family romance, oedipal conflict — these form again and again the substance of Wilson's readings. The Loathly Lady stories (e.g., *The Wife of Bath's Tale*) are instances of the confusion a male feels as he passes into maturity. Wishing to marry his mother and fearing this wish, he makes his marriage partner old and ugly, and in doing this he creates the story. Such a reading — which owes nothing, of course, to Freud — informs Wilson's approach to Rider Haggard's *She* and to *Hamlet*. We learn that "Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia only makes sense if he is thinking of incest" and that Laertes too (being an aspect of Hamlet himself) has amorous eyes for his sister. Surely Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia results from a confusion as to her political allegiance — to Hamlet the Dane or to her father, the Lord Chamberlain — and his love for her is not the same as Laertes's: he tells Gertrude that forty thousand brothers could not love Ophelia as he does. For a writer who claims to examine "the contextual evidence," Wilson can appear careless. She states that Polonius's comparison of himself and Julius Caesar does "not appear to have an ironic purpose," and she later asks why Polonius is "spying on the queen's interview with her son." In the first instance, the irony is surely manifold, and in the second, we hear Claudius approve Polonius's suggestion that he convey himself behind the arras. Polonius's action is neither out of character nor at odds with the political intrigue in the play.

But to criticize is, undoubtedly, "to be trapped in consistent systems of ideas which do not include awareness of irrational thought systems." Magical fantasy results in stories that are, "in a sense, mad." It takes rigorous discipline to free oneself from the intellectual discipline of systematic thought "in order to engage the story magically." Wilson has, as she tells us, undertaken a formidable task. Indeed, in attempting to deconstruct her texts, Wilson has managed only what many deconstructionist enterprises have managed: readings that give the appearance of novelty, but that present substantially familiar allegories — in this case allegories that derive from Freud and Jung. Thus Hans Andersen's "The Shadow" becomes a tale of female power and threats of incest, while the very clear political, philosophical, and literary themes remain overlooked. The allusion to Adelbert von Chamisso's "Peter Schlemihl" is important in establishing these themes and the motif of the double. Andersen's story has an inter-textual as well as a contextual history.

*Magical Thought in Creative Writing* contains some interesting commentary on a variety of texts. It does not, however, convince in

its larger design. Its view of fantasy is hampered by a neglect of form as well as of context: literary, political, and psychological.

RODERICK MCGILLIS

Carole Fabricant. *Swift's Landscape*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. pp. xii, 307. \$25.00.

This welcome study situates Swift in a specifically Irish landscape that is first geographical but then, and inextricably, political and personal. Landscape and prospect, of course, are central to eighteenth-century literature and its criticism, but Carole Fabricant places Swift in this apparently conservative critical context with the aim of demonstrating the fundamental contrast between Swift and his contemporaries, especially Pope. She grounds apparent idiosyncrasies of Swift's temperament in Irish experience. Contemporary travel accounts stressing the filthiness of Ireland supply the concrete basis of the excremental imagery that has alarmed some commentators. Filth and other features of the Irish landscape, like the countryside largely devoted to grazing and but overcultivated in small plots, reflected an oppressive political reality, and Fabricant argues that Swift's fondness for images of imprisonment, for example, reflects the realities of his political landscape. Even Swift's seeming pessimism emerges from this study as an urgent response to genuine disaster that seemed pessimism only to those familiar with the comparatively prosperous English scene rather than the brutally impoverished Irish scene. Fabricant's Swift is far from Maynard Mack's Pope—urban, engaged, and demotic rather than rural, detached, and Horatian. This study excavates Swift's complex environment in vivid detail—it includes helpful maps of Dublin—while tracing Swift's growing recognition, however exasperated, that Ireland was his home. To the familiar images of Swift the Irish Dean or Tory politician, Fabricant adds a valuable corrective—the Drapier-Dean who described himself as “absolute monarch in the *Liberties*, and King of the Mob.” This street-wise Dublin activist may in his turn be used as another sentimental evasion of Swift's complexity, as the Anglican Dean can be, but the danger does not seem immediate. At present he is a healthy corrective.

Simply contrasting Ireland with England, however, would have produced a cruder book. *Swift's Landscape* demonstrates greater thoroughness and literary tact. The thoroughness is necessary because Swift's landscape informs a great many specifically occasional writings—tracts, poems, letters—and cannot readily be recovered

from a few central texts. Indeed, one strength of this book is its detailed attention to many relatively neglected texts (especially poems) — *The Story of the Injured Lady* and the Market-Hill poems, for example — although there are instructive comments on aspects of more familiar works, especially on the Irish presence in *Gulliver's Travels*. The literary tact is necessary to read so many texts in so many contexts — political, personal, and literary. Fabricant explores the ways in which Richard Boyle is at once Pope's admired third Earl of Burlington and Swift's hated fourth Earl of Cork, the notorious absentee landlord, briefly illuminating the different experiences and visions of the two writers. She demonstrates the obvious point that Ireland's brutally antipastoral reality underlies Swift's antipastoral verse, but she also examines with sensitivity Swift's allusions to "To Penshurst" and "Upon Appleton House," defining his complex relation to the country-house tradition that, she argues, he deliberately subverts. She is everywhere alert to Swift's ironic play with pastoral, in Naboth's Vineyard (his orchard) as well as in his writing. Finally, her appeal to the tradition of landscape and prospect provides a fresh approach to the complexities of point of view in Swift. *Swift's Landscape* supports its case with precise attention to many texts and contexts.

That case — "for the centrality and all-encompassing significance of Ireland for Swift's life, writings, and ideological outlook as a whole" (p. 275, n. 28) — is persuasive, and most readers will find the book both informative and stimulating. Some will even look for more. Fabricant's definition of Swift's relation to the "mob" will create an appetite for more knowledge about that mob's composition and the structure of its actions. Her perceptive comments on the politics of filth and cleanliness and on Swift's marginality teasingly evoke anthropological studies of how we structure environments, but these studies do not structure her sometimes diffuse argument. Unfortunately, her argument is directed against a dusty straw opponent — the presumed consensus that there is a group of highly similar Augustans writing typical Augustan poems and that Swift is part of this group. This may imply only a long gap between writing and publication, but it is unfortunate. The synthesizing works she cites (from the late sixties and early seventies) have not gone unqualified, and the notion of an "Augustan" age has been challenged. Fabricant's distinction between the ideals to which Swift owes *conceptual* allegiance and the complex experience embodied in his writing makes the essential point more usefully. We need her emphasis on Swift's Irish individuality not because we all regard him as an "Augustan" but because we view him incompletely as a Scriblerian, or a satirist, or a political writer, or a churchman. Our sense of his

Irish experience is consequently incomplete or imprecise. The strength of *Swift's Landscape* is that it vividly corrects that incompleteness and imprecision.

DAVID OAKLEAF

Coral Lansbury. *The Reasonable Man: Trollope's Legal Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. pp. xii, 228. \$16.50.

Time was I can remember serious academics lifting an eyebrow at the mere mention of Trollope in the novel syllabus. Now former closet Trollopian openly flaunt their preferences for *Phineas Finn*. Studies over the last decade have burgeoned, laying to rest the ghost of that smiling shoemaker of the *Autobiography* cobbling novels and scorning words like inspiration and art. Bradawl and fine leather have become surgeon's knife, the subtle instrument of what Auden once called an art of the commonplace, dissecting money, materialism, social climbing, political chicanery, and double-dealing of all shades among a gallery of worldly clerics, venal public servants and business men, head-hunting wives and tyrannous husbands. Trollope's literary credentials are no longer disputed seriously, and we are at a new phase of more complex matters, refining text, probing aesthetic, analyzing language, and, biographically, proving distinct spheres of his life and work.

Some, if not all, of these tasks are worthily embraced by Coral Lansbury's *The Reasonable Man: Trollope's Legal Fiction*, which begins by taking a closer look at Trollope's life in the General Post Office, a course once shrewdly recommended by the late Lord Snow. This study, together with another recent shorter work (R. H. Super's *Trollope in the Post Office*) rounds out a segment of Trollopiana worth having. We knew the general outline: how he was helped to a post at St. Martin's-le-Grand through his mother's connections, botched the interview but got the job, found his feet in Ireland and gave us the pillar letter box. Professor Lansbury has more to tell, having combed the records in St. Martin's and found more evidence to confirm that Trollope on duty was even more obnoxious, industrious and efficient than we had expected. Trollope in full cry after some delinquent sub-post-mistress in Ballycarry or Ottery St. Mary must have been a sight to behold. At Falmouth, one witness recalled, he stalked into the office booted and spurred frightening the rural messenger whose walk he was about to test almost out of his wits. Such unnecessarily crude and bullying methods, Professor Lansbury remarks, was probably the reaction to the sadism and rejection he suffered as a child. He was, she coolly observes, rather fascinated by the cruelty of human nature. Still, it is

a tad chilling to see young Trollope in the Post Office so meanly terrorizing subordinates and indulging in "dark depression and glowering rages that tested the few friends he owned" (p. 41). It comes as a touch of light relief to find him testing the mails between Cairo and the Red Sea by personally checking the speed of delivery by camel (p. 33).

Professor Lansbury argues that St. Martin's rather than Harrow educated him — at least in plain, serviceable prose. She acknowledges the "castle-building" that kept him sane, while trudging along the muddy lanes from home to Harrow School, but naturally in developing her thesis this more inspirational source of his writing tends to get pushed aside. What is particularly new and useful, though, is the notion that lessons learned in letter-writing, minutes and reports, provided a structure for his fiction. It was Sir Francis Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office from 1798 (Trollope got his start as junior clerk in 1834), who not only demanded language plain and unadorned from the staff, but who adapted from his barrister friend, John Frederick Archbold, a pattern designed to improve pleading and ignorance in law. This was the declaration, comprising a Commencement, Statement of the Cause of Action and a Conclusion. From this shape, Professor Lansbury argues, Trollope found the appropriate vehicle ideally suited to the novels he wanted to write, which invariably turned on transactions involving money and marriage.

The case is strong, I think, on a prose style bordering on the mundane, but solid, informative with the cumulative weight of a case well put. Buckling to his Post Office reports with some aversion, but increasingly drawn to the shape he could achieve (to the benefit of his own tempestuous, ramshackling early manhood) at least on paper, Trollope now anchored his day-dreaming fantasies, his castles in air, on solid foundation; he harnessed his Pegasus to the solid shafts of the three-decker. "I have shorn my fiction of all romance," he was to claim in later days to George Eliot. One might have wished sometimes his horses had not been quite so well reined in. He was rather short on imagination, one feels, to begin with. Still, as Professor Lansbury says, the reason and reasonableness he learned on his stool at St. Martin's-le-Grand set the novelist to work. He had the Civil Servant's desire to study the facts from all angles; this is amply demonstrated in a chapter on the travel books, which occupy a midway position between his official reports and his novels. Likewise the early novels in Ireland dwelling on social miseries have a similar documentary quality.

The legal style sharpens the civil servant's respect for the fact by casting debate into advocacy, first one side then the other, and after the evidence the reader is left to decide. "The reader must judge for

himself" is often literally stated and is always implicit in the narrative. Professor Lansbury rightly draws attention to the forensic manner of dialogue and the procedure of extracting salient evidence from the witness. Few writers make use of such legal language, of "form words" (such as "about," "around," "but," "that") she notes; few rely less on the formulae of "said haughtily" and "replied angrily." In an idle moment I once counted twenty-two variations of "he said" or "she said" in two pages of *Middlemarch*. Trollope down in the well of his court lets the lawyers and the witnesses argue it out.

Metaphor is avoided as in legal language too. Trollope does not want his reader bamboozled with infamous chops and tomato sauce as Serjeant Buzfuz did, and this is one distinguishing difference between his style and Dickens's. I wonder if this is why we never forget Buzfuz, while Mr. Chaffanbrass is mere outline after *Orley Farm* is put down. The emphasis on examination and exposition is convincingly deployed in such novels as *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*, *Orley Farm* and *The Small House at Allington*, and a spirited defence of *Cousin Henry*, a thin novel I have always felt, but it has had its champions in the past and Professor Lansbury makes a case for its dominant theme as the power of woman. The legal language, as well as an actual legal action, makes it a good subject for her, but there is no getting over the novel's second-rate status in the canon.

So far so good, but when it comes to reports and legal forms as the structural principle of the novels Professor Lansbury's argument wobbles slightly and indulges in some special pleading of its own. The transactions over love and money variously, and not altogether clearly, classed as Single (conscience and society) expand into the Multiple Transaction (variously Social Contracts) and even the Extended Multiple Transaction in which the Rights and Duties of Barchester are partnered by Privilege and Power in Politics. As an organizing system this does not make much sense to me. Another slightly worrying shifting of ground is noticeable throughout the book. At times it seems that Trollope plays counsel, witness, judge and "narrative advocate" guiding us to the right judgment, and, as in the case of a very useful account of Mr. Harding's struggles in *The Warden*, sets out "to win his case." At other times we sift not only what we hear "in court" and against the advocacy of narrative comment (a point well made in discussion of *Cousin Henry*). Often, however, Professor Lansbury is obliged to say that the legal framework either does not allow for the full range of contradictory statement a Trollope novel thrives on, and that there is another creative hand at work, the artist himself, fully aware that the law is at times an ass and that its pursuit of a legal victory rather than the truth was its limitation, its own legal fiction. Thus on one occasion dis-

cussing the feelings of Laura Kennedy in *Phineas Finn* she declares that "Trollope goes beyond legal advocacy to determine the character's real intention" (p. 106). Again, "Trollope had learned to reason like a lawyer and his rhetoric was legal, but he always considered that his fiction surpassed the law in veracity and reality" (p. 130). Concerning *The Warden* as Trollope's defence of failure she claims that unlike the typical lawyer he does not try to make the worse appear the better reason, but *gives all reasons equal value* (p. 132). Clearly here the civil servant has the upper hand then. Trollope always wants to be fair, to give the clearest and most unbiased report.

In other words what she is really arguing is that within the legal frame Trollope is playing devil's advocate, and the artist's voice is the truer one. As in *The Macdermots* the legal apparatus is one thing, but Trollope's command of the moral scheme is something more: "the law maintains its own fiction against the truth of the novelist" (p. 123). The ironies and many-sidedness of Trollope's method seem therefore at odds with the constraints of the legal mode. To admit that Trollope offsets the legal model with the other kind of conventional authorial controls is to acknowledge the limitation of the former strategy. Professor Lansbury is quite right to suggest that prosecuting a case falls a good way short of Trollope's handling of human contradictions and the cross-grainedness of life, but sticking to her brief is in the long term a rebarbative process in itself, as it fails to do justice to some fine novels (*Orley Farm* for instance). Still, when the verdict is in a jury must surely applaud this closely reasoned account of the tensions among Trollope, the civil servant, the lawyer, and the artist.

*University of Victoria*

R. C. TERRY

## Books Received

- BLAMIRE, HARRY, *Twentieth Century English Literature*. London: Macmillan (Macmillan History of Literature), 1982. pp. xii, 304.
- BRADY, KRISTIN, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy*. London: Macmillan, 1982. pp. xii, 235. Unpriced.
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- COWLEY, ROBERT L. S., *Hogarth's Marriage A-la-Mode*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983. pp. xii, 179. \$48.50.
- DISRAELI, BENJAMIN and SARAH, *A Year at Hartlebury or The Election*. With Appendixes by Ellen Henderson and John P. Matthews. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. pp. iii, 221. \$24.95.
- FINNEY, BRIAN (ed.), *D. H. Lawrence: St. Mawr and Other Stories*. Cambridge University Press, 1983. pp. xliii, 270. \$49.50.
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- SILVER, BRENDA R., *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. pp. xvi, 384. \$27.50.
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- TAYLOR, RICHARD H., *The Neglected Hardy: Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels*. London: Macmillan, 1982. pp. xii, 202. Unpriced.
- WILLIS, JOHN RANDOLPH, S.J., *Pleasures Forevermore: The Theology of C. S. Lewis*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983. pp. xx, 127. Unpriced.