Book Reviews

Marjorie Perloff. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. pp. xvi, 346. $20.00.

Marjorie Perloff's latest book represents a departure from her usual practice of closely investigating the work of a single writer — the last was Frank O'Hara. In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* she attempts an extended exploration, examining the work of six poets and the composer-performance artist John Cage. The separate essays are connected by an opening chapter of "theory" that proposes the existence, within Modernism, of a "poetry of undecidability" based on a "poetics of indeterminacy," a provocative phrase that gives the book its title. Such a title immediately suggests the literary critical use of Kurt Gödel's famous mathematical proof of indeterminacy and the essential incompleteness of any formal system: in any formal system it is always possible to construct an indefinite number of indemonstrable propositions, theorems formally permissible in the system but not demonstrable on the grounds of the system's original axioms. As a result a formal system can never be closed; it is always open-ended, and thus the consistency of the whole can never be finally demonstrated. Occasionally in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* Perloff sounds as if she will be making use, metaphorically, of Gödel's interesting and influential proof, but one waits in vain for reference to Gödel anywhere in the book. Indeed after a hundred or so pages the reader forgets ever having had Gödel in the back of his or her mind. Such an expectation can in fact partially obscure the now familiar structuralist and post-structuralist metacritical concepts from which she is actually drawing theoretical sustenance.

Of course, Perloff has never been known as a philosophical critic or theorist and this book represents her first extended outing in that direction. Her strengths, and they are considerable, have always lain in her vigorous practice of close reading, to which one must add her skill in the critical use of biography, and her courage in tackling

writers of our own generation before the traditions of reading which encoffin the long-dead have had a chance to be carpentered.

Her thesis is simple enough. There is a line of modernist writing which does not derive entirely from the usual French precursors — Baudelaire and Mallarmé — but descends instead from the third important French precursor to modernism, Arthur Rimbaud. The line that develops from the first two she calls High Modernism. She lists Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, Crane, Auden, Lowell, and Berryman as its chief protagonists. This line we also recognize as constituting the Symbolist tradition in Anglo-French poetry. The line that develops from Rimbaud, however, is rather different and it includes Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Samuel Beckett, John Ashbery, David Antin, and John Cage, just to name only those to whom she devotes space in her book. This designation, however, must also include writers like Jack Spicer, Robert Creeley, the Cambridge don Jeremy Prynne, and the British post-modernist Roy Fisher.

Ambiguity of reference and complexity of design distinguish the polysemic approach to meaning in the poetry of High Modernism. This is achieved in a number of characteristic ways, and none is more characteristic than the Symbolist manipulation of syntax: "syntax tends to be extremely elliptical; words are wrenched out of their 'normal' contexts and call attention to themselves. In reading Mallarmé, for example, we find the syntax so difficult that we are constantly forced to *stop* reading," in order, one assumes, to rescan what has already been read. Rimbaud's syntax, by contrast, is surprisingly simple, and is characterized by "straightforward subject-verb units . . . , with relatively little modification and almost no subordination." Close attendance on Symbolist syntax does lead to the unlocking of the mystery eventually; we do manage to bridle the syntactic gyrations of the text and thus limit the play of meaning. We may not always understand what Mallarmé is saying, but eventually we do come to know what he is talking about. In Rimbaud's case, however, the exact opposite seems to be true. His syntax operates, most of the time, within clear grammatical norms. The enigmas of his verse don't arise from a densely rendered syntactic surface, but from the difficulties of reference which the "straightforward" syntax presents:

> "C'est son des villes!" the poet exclaims rapturously, but immediately the reader is thrown into confusion. For what does "ce" refer to? And where are we? The description that follows is neither that of a recognizable cityscape like Eliot's riverfront London nor an ideal city of the imagination like Yeats's Byzantium. Rather, Rimbaud evokes "cities" that are, from the start, impossible to locate in "real" space.

In Rimbaud's case we know what is being said, but not what is

being talked about. This Perloff sees as a crisis of reference, and she calls this procedure the "poetics of indeterminacy."

Syntax is only one aspect of this difference between High Modernism and the Rimbaldian variety. There are others. She distinguishes, for example, two attitudes towards the question of formal unity. High Modernism values, and achieves, a clear, if complex, unity of design, drawing on patterns of repetition and recurrence, working out difficult, but unmistakably cohesive notional and affective sequences that override surface discontinuities, sloping finally towards the consolations and satisfactions of a vibrant closural repose. Such satisfactions sat uncomfortably with Rimbaud and the Rimbaldians.

Their work constantly undermines the kind of unity and referential finish High Modernism cultivates. This deflection of the text's flight toward formal unity is purchased, Perloff suggests, through the consciousness of poetic discourse as "an open field of narrative possibilities." And, further, by obscuring the referentiality of the signs — external reference, self-reference, intertextual reference — the writer multiplies the number of possible meanings; meaning is thus in a state of flux, of free play. Of course, such a critical observation is possible only in a time when we've come to understand the arbitrary nature of the relationship between the sign and what it signifies. We are in a domain of freestanding signs, of signs, in Roland Barthes's suggestive phrase, "sans fonds." Thus, in the Rimbaldian poem we may be sent down a road marked Paris, but find ourselves circling Beirut; our response to the discomfort this occasions should not be a needless reaching after maps, but rapture.

Not Kurt Gödel, but Roland Barthes and, on the horizon, Jacques Derrida preside over the "theory" of the book. However, for a practical critic who has only recently become a theory-bibber, Perloff finds Derrida a little too rhetorical and, in a lengthy footnote, tries to distance her own notion of "indeterminacy" from his, by arguing that her use of the term refers to certain features of "particular art works in a particular period of history rather than as a central characteristic of all texts at all times." What is not at issue, she writes, is the ontologically loaded question of whether or not the sign can bring forth the *presence* of the signified or whether it is merely the *trace* of a signified that is forever absent. With this disclaimer she abandons the possible argument that the Rimbaldians have penetrated to the foundations of the literary by discovering a universal property of all language; she must proceed, instead, by asserting that semantic indeterminacy is a new kind of rhetorical manoeuvre in literature, the primary effect of which seems to be to seriously discombobulate a reader's expectation that language is essentially stipulative and referential.

But why would anyone want to do such a thing to a reader? Perloff's answer is that the poetry of semantic indeterminacy has the effect of "making us look at the world we actually inhabit, the sights and sounds we really see" and it forces us "to become aware of our natural discourse, to become sensitive to the way we actually talk and hence think." In other words, semantic indeterminacy makes the familiar and habitual strange, allows us to perceive it anew. We should remember though that Russian formalism, which underlies this observation, arrived at the notion of defamiliarization by a wholly different path. The early Soviet critics, whom Perloff invokes in support of her position, argued something quite different: literature should be seen as a practice which, *through a variety of formal devices*, not through semantic indeterminacy, enacts a transformation of received categories of thought, feeling, and expression. Subverting the particular patterns of thought or perception imposed on reality by ordinary language, by the affective norms of the common intuitive life, or by the codes of other literary works, literature is thus seen to estrange such forms and, in so doing, to weaken their grip on the ways in which we perceive the world. But this occurs in order that the literary text's motivated operation on the real can occur unimpeded by assumptions and expectations derived from habit and custom. Thus the work of art *disorganizes* the familiar in the name of a more efficacious semantic *determinacy*, not in its opposite.

If a Rimbaldian, or any other, text is plunged into the crisis of reference Perloff suggests, it would be hard pressed to have the defamiliarizing effect she ascribes to it. A poem that hoists itself, amazingly as a rhetorical "accomplishment," on its own rapturous gibberish neither foregrounds "the world we actually inhabit, the sights and sounds we really see," nor the habits of thought and feeling that blinker perception of those things; all that it displays is its own incoherence.

Frankly, I don't think anyone can accept that Rimbaud's poetry or the poetry of any other of the writers Perloff examines can be accounted for in the way she proposes. Since she will not venture the ontological problem "reference" presents, she attempts to situate herself in the designation of a literary sub-mode. Instead what needs to be investigated is the discursive practices of the Rimbaldians in the discursive contexts they inhabit. It means in fact recognizing that Arthur Rimbaud, her paradigm, was not working in a socioverbal vacuum in the France of the Second Empire and the Third Republic. It means recognizing that Rimbaud's "Villes" is minted not from "language as such," nor from a classic poetic diction, but from the popular adventure literature of his day, widely disseminated in cheap editions for the mass market and decorated

with hallucinatory photogravure illustrations, from an ironic perception of the inflated, bombastic style of the political rhetoric of the Parisian press in the 1860's and 1870's, from the language of popular songs, street cries, music hall routines, the operas of Meyerbeer with their exotic settings, preposterous plots, and vast scenic triumphalism, wedded to Scribean "librettese" — what the Verdi scholar Julian Budden has called a confection of archaisms, elegant circumlocutions, and transferred epithets, all endeavouring to keep everyday reality at a distance, and, above all, from an irony that found its fullest expression in the Imperial pretensions of the Second Empire, pretensions set against the provincial, petty bourgeois, smallholding mentality of the Empire's economic and political base. If Rimbaud's poetry "refers" to anything, it is to the affective climate of a culture as imbibed through the multiplicity of its discursive practices. It means recognizing that the crisis of reference with which she begins is not the literary-historical issue which Rimbaud and the Rimbaldians raise, and her distinction between High Modernism and the Other Tradition on the basis of referentiality is finally trivial and unproductive, unless attacked philosophically. The real distinction between the two Modernisms lies in differing attitudes towards the problem of poetic diction.

Both types of Modernism begin as reactions against the "poeticizing" of experience through the formation, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of a linguistic register recognized as appropriate to poetry. Both Baudelaire and Mallarmé, as Eliot after them and in a direct line from them, sought to make a literary, and purified, "dialect" which neither dissolved utterly in the many languages of everyday life, nor exhibited that degree of artificiality and distance from the everyday we hear so palpably in the poetic diction of the lesser Augustans. T. S. Eliot's efforts in this direction are well known, being both theoretical and practical. Eliot's interest in the definition of the "classic," for example, is really an exploration of the possibilities of coining a poetic language in which a "classic" literature might yet be composed in our time, a language that has the colloquial suppleness of the everyday, projecting a voice that is not narrowly the voice of a single social class, and yet a language formal enough that it achieves a lightly carried high seriousness. Some have argued that Eliot won through to just such a diction in *Four Quartets*.

The "poetry of indeterminacy," as Perloff doesn't fully realize, is a poetry that no longer sets for itself the historical task of making a "classic" poetic diction. It is a poetry which has turned decisively from the "poetic" and "literary" toward the discursive practices of the everyday for its verbal materials. Perloff reaches this point in her comments on David Antin's "talk" poems, which, she says,

"force us to become aware of our natural discourse, to become sensitive to the way we actually talk and hence think." Apart from the illogical "hence" and the need to be more specific about what "our natural discourse" might consist of, this observation is a very interesting and fruitful one, and rather than ending her book with it, for it occurs on the very last page, she would have made a more lasting contribution to our understanding of contending Modernisms had she begun with it.

Mount Royal College JOHN XIROS COOPER

Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson. *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch.* Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982. pp. xiv, 246. $7.95.

Certainly Robert Kroetsch is one of Canada's most dazzling and important writers. Part of his importance may be, however, that he can be regarded as, precisely, a "contemporary Canadian writer," and these conversations show why. For Kroetsch and his two interviewers, Canada's contemporaneity distinguishes it from, say, America: "American literature found itself in the nineteenth century and Canadian literature in the twentieth" (p. 152). While American literature has a background of High Modernism, the Canadian writer is truly Postmodernist: "we came into contemporary writing easily. . . . Our national discontinuities made us ripe for Postmodernism" (p. 112). However, although his passion for Canada is unmistakable and admirable, Kroetsch's interests as a Postmodernist often make it difficult for him to claim a specifically "Canadian" status. As Robin Mathews has noted, Kroetsch has had a definite "American experience," and his interviewers are inclined to associate him with "Pynchon, Nabokov, Barth" (p. 203); so, notwithstanding the asserted difference between the literature of America and Canadian writing, Kroetsch exhibits qualities that confuse the boundaries. The structure of the "conversations" works in the same way. There are four segments: influence, game, myth, and narration. However, themes dealt with in one segment may reappear in another: the boundaries are, again, confused. This "labyrinth of voice" highlights two (at least) of the conversations' predominant themes with regard to writing difference (I am Canadian) and inter-connectedness (I may also be something else, say, American). Part of the interest of this book is that the participants attempt to hold these two themes (with their many implications) simultaneously.

The discussions of "influence" show that Bloom's thesis about "the anxiety of influence" has itself generated much anxiety. Although

he cites a number of "sources" or "layers" (Cervantes, Ovid, Nabokov), Kroetsch's Postmodernist sensibility requires him both to affirm and react against the notion of influence. His "anxiety" is expressed in terms of the "confusion" noted above: "There is a contradiction between my longing for influence and my insistence upon discontinuity" (p. 25), and again, "All my talk about discontinuity (is) in the face of my acknowledging a tradition . . ." (p. 42). Two of Kroetsch's sources are Jung and Frazer, and his comments on them help to elucidate his notions of myth and "renaming" or "retelling": for these writers (as opposed to Freud), myth is freed "from the burden of meaning" and is treated as "pure story" (p. 89). The return to original story underlines Kroetsch's interest in renaming or "renewal" and in the decreation of meaning, and in *What the Crow Said* (1978) for example, this "act of naming" becomes part of the Canadian experience: the prairie is retold through a "dream of origins." Kroetsch is interested not so much in myth, however (which implies pattern and Modernism), but in "mytheme" and anecdote or "momentary insight" (p. 112): again, his Postmodernism requires him to be pluralist, concerned with multiplicity and "fragments." This pluralism, along with his interest in oral and folk traditions, leads Kroetsch to champion "historical, cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 118) and this testifies to his many "layers" of influence. Yet the obsession with "newness" adds to the "confusion": the "retelling" both absorbs and liberates itself from convention. The concluding remarks on the movement from Modernism to Postmodernism illustrate this ambiguity, with Kroetsch both "violating" (p. 198) the earlier traditions and yet acknowledging the influence of Stein and Saussure (also Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf). The almost Helgelian balance of difference and interconnectedness is evident as well in the dual treatment of Canada as a whole and as a series of fragments or prairies, or stories: Postmodernist logic inevitably presents a view of "Canada as text."

Kroetsch's use of "conventions," only to "violate" them, is one facet of a "problem" that is only occasionally hinted at in the conversations but which affects a number of writers willing to call themselves Postmodernist. Simply, the ready expounding of Postmodernist academic theory detracts from Kroetsch's expressed joy in story and story-telling (or "retelling"): the conversations, and their rich explanatory techniques, take away some of the pleasure of the texts. Robert Wilson remarks at one point, "I cannot read, say, *The Studhorse Man*, without thinking constantly about the conventions that exist . . ." (p. 70); and later, Kroetsch himself draws attention to the prominence of the background of the text (rather than the text itself) in relation to declining readership, "I

think one of the problems in our time is that we're losing an audience that knows the conventions" (p. 165). Although western universities may regulate the ability of readers to know narrative "conventions," it is certainly true that fewer and fewer people are equipped to play the Postmodernist "game." Kroetsch's own university background may lead him to over-rate or distort reader skills: he talks of "good readers" (p. 162) of his works and suggests that the act of reading now is "incredibly demanding. . . . The reader has to be aware of so many . . . facets" (p. 175). This necessary awareness of "facets" or "conventions" may discourage the reader from entering the labyrinth at all, but Kroetsch may have anticipated this problem with the remark, "If I had to criticize myself, I would say I almost go too far with my sense of story as dominating everything" (p. 190). This "sense of story" provides the context for the story itself: perhaps the story is in danger of becoming a "layer" well-buried beneath the requirements of Kroetsch's Postmodernist theories.

These conversations show Robert Kroetsch and his interviewers in a fairly precise post-Barthesian framework: they deal with structuralism and the interconnectedness of the text, with myth and metonymy and the problem of meaning, with story and culture, and with the functions of author and (more so) of reader. The tone is, like Barthes, authoritative ("Every text is . . . ," etc.), perhaps because it is especially concerned to manipulate readers (again like Barthes): this is, of course, an excellent book for students of Kroetsch. The questions and responses are interspersed with excerpts from appropriate texts either to add authority to or to elaborate upon (but never to contradict) the participants' statements. The richness of the supplied contexts and the extent of the interviewers' participation occasionally has the effect of making Kroetsch seem second (or tertiary); but the threesome create a harmony of discussion that is self-confirmatory ("That's right. That's right"). The conversations do show the extent of Kroetsch's contemporaneity, though they may (intentionally) blur his identity as a Canadian at times, and they do reveal a highly articulate and "anxious" writer; but, as Kroetsch would joyfully acknowledge, the story itself is primary.

University of Stirling KENNETH GELDER

Horst H. Kruse. *Mark Twain and "Life on the Mississippi."* Foreword by Everett Emerson. Amherst: University of Masachusetts Press, 1981. pp. xviii, 183. $17.50.

Scholarly journals have already assigned and published numerous reviews of Kruse's book, and these take the forms of two basic responses. Edgar M. Branch (*Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, September 1982) illustrates one view, faulting Kruse's discussion of the Mark Twain-Isaiah Sellers relationship but applauding the entire genetic study as "a notable success" that "will have a salutary effect on the criticism of Mark Twain's river narrative"; Kruse's work "refutes some current misconceptions" and is "an excellent and much-needed book." However, Edgar J. Burde (*American Literary Realism*, Spring 1983), while conceding that Kruse has been "a good detective as well as an exhaustive scholar" (and *commending* Kruse's explication of the Isaiah Sellers question), disagrees, doubting Kruse's main theses that "Clemens exercised sound literary judgment in the course of composition," that Clemens had a high opinion of the resulting book, and that the book constitutes part of Clemens's "greatness" as a writer.

Branch's praise reflects the long-held wish by many Twain scholar-critics for a full-scale study of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), the Twain travel narrative most unjustly scorned in literary criticism. In spite of the magnificent opening chapters of Twain's work, most of them originally issued in instalments in 1875 in *Atlantic Monthly*, the book still stands only halfway in critical reputation between the boisterous, subversive *Innocents Abroad* (1869) and the dutiful, occasionally polemical *Following the Equator* (1897). Travel narratives are of course overshadowed (for modern commentators) by Twain's fiction, but there are so many engrossing episodes and characters in the repository of history, lore, scenery, interview, and yarn titled *Life on the Mississippi* that it did seem unsatisfying for the book to lack, in an age of specialized literary studies, a detailed treatment of its own. If it has never been seen as a literary masterpiece, at least it has proved invaluable to students of American culture interested in the impact on nineteenth-century Americans of an immense brown force that meanders through the heartland, shaping lives and livelihoods.

Horst Kruse ambitiously hopes to change the prevailing critical attitude represented by Leo Marx, who dismisses Twain's guidebook-excerpts, tall tales, and social commentary (on Walter Scott's influence, duels, the Civil War, and other topics) as padding for an "uneven, hasty and loosely put-together volume . . . not literature but a disorderly patchwork." Kruse, in contrast, insists on the artistic coherency of *Life on the Mississippi*. Yet in the eyes of Burde and

others he has fallen short of his objective, and whether the fault lies partly in the difficulty of converting the German-language edition (available since 1970) into this English version, or entirely derives from the premises of the study, Kruse's book does somehow fail to match (unlike Walter Blair's successful *Mark Twain & Huck Finn* [1960]) the complexity and amplitude of the literary work it examines.

This does not mean that Kruse's study is inconsequential or unworthy of its attempt; more than anything else, this judgment essentially corroborates how much the field of Twain studies really needed this book that Everett Emerson rescued from its inaccessibility to the English-speaking countries. But Blair's long-respected work affords the best means for understanding the limitations as well as the achievements of *Mark Twain and "Life on the Mississippi."* Blair sought to treat virtually every aspect of *Huckleberry Finn*: its inception, composition, literary and biographical sources, sales, reception — even its status in foreign editions. Kruse, on the other hand, chooses to leave aside the memorable "cub-pilot" section that leads off Twain's book, concentrating instead on the charges that Twain worked without any master plan in subsequent chapters. Moreover, Kruse's information about literary and historical sources for Twain's material, welcome as it is, falls far short of being a definitive study. He does manage to tidy up a dozen questions about Twain's reading, correctly date a letter of 1882 that has misled scholars, and supply a useful chronology for Twain's composition of *Life*. Most crucially, however, Kruse simply does not vanquish the main critical objections to Twain's book. Kruse wants to defeat the detractors principally by establishing intention on Twain's part — he meant all along for his book to possess its anecdotal flavour, loose structure, and drifting pace, and *therefore* the book is better than is commonly supposed. But surely this logic can form only one element in the critical evaluation by which *Life on the Mississippi* will be elevated to a status of increased respect and deeper understanding, if that ever happens.

Kruse has fallen short of performing for *Life* what Blair accomplished for *Huckleberry Finn*, and neither has he given us critical insights to illuminate the work such as, say, Henry Nash Smith soon provided for the novel that Blair had dissected. The detractors thus remain unsatisfied, and *Life* stays unstudied in many respects. All the same, everyone should recognize that Kruse has brought new attention to Twain's narrative of his return voyage on the major American river, and that Kruse has made a case for continuity in Twain's thinking in regard to the book, especially his yearning to produce "a standard work" on river piloting and the Mississippi region. Eventually Twain groused that "the powers of heaven and

Earth and hell are leagued against it, and it may never be finished at all," that he "never had such a fight over a book in my life before," and that, having completed the manuscript at last, "I will not interest myself in *any*thing connected with this wretched God-damned book," but Kruse convincingly shows that Twain actually loved his labours on this subject, and was proud of the product.

The very fact that a book-length study finally exists will enhance the literary stature of Twain's travel narrative. Someone else can undertake a larger project that will finally do justice to this amorphous biography of a river and to Mark Twain's accompanying autobiography. And that eventual study must come to terms with the defensible yet inescapable fact of the varying tone and atmosphere in Twain's book, which glides and turns and backs water like one of those floating palaces negotiating the bends and chutes and crossings of his beloved river.

University of Texas at Austin ALAN GRIBBEN

Pamela McCallum. *Literature and Method: Towards a Critique of I. A. Richards, T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis.* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983. pp. 270. $42.00.

Pamela McCallum has written a challenging book on a difficult but worthy subject. Ranging widely in the history of philosophy, the development of modern psychology and the criticism of culture, as well as in literary theory and criticism, she has attempted to redefine the traditions at work in the criticism of Richards, Eliot, and Leavis, and to assess their methodology anew. Readers of this work will certainly have to think again about the "unresolved contradiction" between idealism and empiricism in the criticism of all three, and will surely be better able to detect the consequences of this "impasse" for literary theory and practical criticism in this century. There are definite rewards awaiting those who stay the course, though it seems fair to say that not everyone may be willing to endure the unremitting infelicity of Dr. McCallum's prose style, or to forgive her uncertain grasp of philosophical issues and of the provenance of the ideas she discusses.

In an eight-page introduction Dr. McCallum identifies the Marxist company she has kept before registering her displeasure with "that eclectic mixture of empiricism, pseudo-idealism and political liberalism which is known as Anglo-American philosophy." Vigorous polemic is required, she implies, because "the poverty of liberal thought does not necessarily imply the absolute end of its ideological ascendancy and prestige. Quite the reverse." What is needed is a

critique grounded, not in "reductive psychologism" or the sterility of "strict logic," but in "the historical particularity of the object." She continues:

> It would not be sufficient to indicate merely that Richards, Eliot and Leavis refer to English liberal philosophy when constructing their modes of analysis; we must grasp also *the particular way* in which each inwhich each inscribes himself in it during a certain period. My interpretive practice is therefore at once critical and historical; that is, it addresses itself to the intellectual construction as well as to the historical 'moment.' This approach (as distinct from those which remain imprisoned in an either/or mentality) is loyal to both dimensions. . . . In any case, it is the general thesis of the following work that modern literary and textual criticism is to be understood as a *totalisation*, as against those who restrict exploration to either the historical or the theoretical side.

This seems quite healthy and agreeably spirited, if not entirely clear on a first reading. We may wonder exactly how criticism can avoid being historical, how literary history can fail to be critical; or whether "an either/or mentality" is not itself an example of "reductive psychologism" (the hypostasizing of a bogus mental entity wherein to "imprison" the opposition). But such quibbling may be held in check by the assumption (acknowledged or otherwise) that what is at issue is a matter of emphasis, not of essence; that what follows will simply add to our understanding within the (allegedly) "sterile parameters of orthodoxy." However, if we proceed on such a comfortable basis, having found no reason in the past for accepting Marxist claims to superior dynamism, comprehensiveness, or access to the mysteries of "historical genesis," but having profitted nonetheless from the efforts of Marxist scholars, then we lay ourselves open to the charge of oppressive tolerance. Dr. McCallum insists upon and deserves a different kind of hearing, altogether more exacting and inquisitorial.

In order to estimate more clearly the cogency of Dr. McCallum's method, let us consider three terms relating to the idea of wholeness which figure importantly in the Introduction and guide her commentary throughout the remainder of the work: totalization, eclecticism, and syncretism. *Totalization* is defined in the text as "synthetic reconstruction" and in the notes as "the diachronic relational process in which the elements of a totality are deconstituted and reconstituted (or detotalized and retotalized)." There is an appropriate emphasis on process to remind us of the persistent and often stealthy tendency to create falsely static totalities. *Totalization* seems likely to earn its keep, even though it is justified in a way that seems embarrassingly "loyal" to the "either/or mentality": "It is obvious (*pace* atomism) that literary data or cultural items are

never isolated appearances, but are bound together by internal relations within the unique organized whole." It might be truer to say both that "the existence of one aspect necessarily alters the character of another," and that such alteration alteration finds in a manner always and necessarily in part mysterious and irrecoverable. To invoke, therefore, "the entirety of the thought patterns and methodology in which themes have developed," is at best disingenuous.

The idea of totalization does not sit well with eclecticism, according to Dr. McCallum. Indeed, she consistently uses the latter term pejoratively, taking it as a symptom of pseudo-synthesis in the mid-nineteenth century, which was resurrected and "rethematized" by Richards, Eliot, and Leavis. In face of positive assessments of eclecticism, she simply re-asserts that "eclecticism abstractly assimilates aspects of other conceptual systems without understanding how and at what historical moment they are valid" (p. 231). Yet eclecticism was not seen so simplistically in the nineteenth century. It gave its name to one of the century's most important philosophical movements, as well as to a significant movement in the visual arts, and is crucial both to the quest for a new order to buttress or replace Christian cosmology, and to the many contemporary investigations of the nature and history of the decadent. In Britain it gave its name to the influential *Eclectic Review* as well as to the short-lived *Eclectic Gazette*. It was seen as a potent threat by the Germano-Coleridgeans, while religious sceptics recognized in its ancient and modern forms a means whereby to establish and furnish their own enclaves. Eclecticism was a crucial issue in all areas of art criticism, and, given Arnold's life-long refusal to settle for what he called "enlightened eclecticism," it is clearly inadequate to employ it as a token of unconsidered, ahistorical disapproval.

There are similar difficulties with Dr. McCallum's use of "syncretism," a term she assumes to indicate only illegitimate attempts to elicit harmony from conflict. We hear, for instance, of "confusion and syncretism" in the wake of a sweeping claim:

> The predicament in mid nineteenth-century English tradition can be seen as a tension between two notions of human nature: the early liberal (Benthamist) belief . . . and the later postulate that human essence demanded the development and actualization of uniquely human attributes or faculties. In syncretically adding the second without abandoning the first English liberal philosophy incorporated two concepts of human nature with opposing implications.

To characterize syncretism as mere addition is a grave distortion of the subtleties of Victorian thought, and, in particular, an unwarranted slight to theology whose influence pervades the writings of the faithful and the sceptical alike. The romantic syncretism of Coleridge and Chateaubriand, of Thomas Arnold and Newman, the

activities of the Syncretic Society, the subtly harmonizing hermeneutics inaugurated by Schleiermacher, the sophisticated historical scholarship of Burckhardt, F. C. Baur, and their British disciples — these attest to the fact that syncretism was no longer to be dismissed as an ill-fated development of seventeenth-century Protestant theology.

If the account of "The Tradition of Idealism and Empiricism in Methodology" is weak and unpersuasive, the same cannot be said of the treatment of Richards, Eliot, and Leavis. Dr. McCallum comes into her own here, reading texts sensitively and teasing out contradictory implications in a highly suggestive way. Others have remarked on the inconsistencies in the work of all three, but McCallum adds insights and illustrations to the store of materials which will help future readers of Richards, Eliot, and Leavis. She is particularly good on Richards's use of "stock responses" (part of a more general subtlety in her appreciation of Freud) ; and on the evasions inherent in Richards's formalism. She substantiates the important claim that "No phase of Eliot's thought has been more misinterpreted, maligned or misunderstood than his political writings of the late twenties and early thirties." And she demonstrates clearly how "Leavis's practical criticism is most properly understood as a reductive hermeneutic wherein human consciousness moves towards its own completion through the mere possession of a cultural object." However, the comment that Leavis's reliance on "enactment . . . reflects not so much the intransigence of genuine critical thinking as a kind of blind vitalist intuition without theoretical understanding," is another reminder that McCallum's own critical harvest is made possible by strategic reductions and the intuiting of relations between parts and wholes.

The language holds the key to the theoretical lapses and practical virtues of *Literature and Method.* Throughout the work Dr. McCallum adds prefixes, suffixes, and extra syllables to words in an effort to cobble connections between her theory and practice, and to confer conceptual rigour and originality on her own discourse. The result, alas, is extremely cumbersome and increasingly irritating. She is guilty of literal nonsense: "On the contrary, [Mill] represented [poetry and science] as separate phenomena, each of which must function together in the actualization of human faculties in a process whereby each forms the other's completing counterpart to achieve a syncretic unity." Her mastery of English idiom is so fitful as to permit *inter alia*: "introjects a subterfuge," "fetishization," "at the crux of," "the entanglement . . . is the matrix," "impinging . . . into," "where the formalized occlusion of the interplay between *ought* and *is* becomes complete." Now Dr. McCallum might well say that my objections themselves rely on "the jargon of lucidity"

— the kind of linguistic (and political) conservatism so conspicuous in the efforts of Arnold and his successors to purify and replenish critical discourse. There seems no way out of this impasse, because one critic's *mimetic fallacy* may be another critic's sawing through the bars of "the prison-house of language." Readers will have to decide for themselves whether *Literature and Method* is a major contribution to critical theory or whether its revisionary achievement is largely confined to the explication of particular and important documents in the history of criticism in this century.

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