

Book Reviews

Rolland Hein, *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982. pp. xix, 163. \$8.75.

Rolland Hein's book is the third modern book-length study in English of MacDonald, following on works by Robert Lee Wolff and Richard H. Reis. Recent years have also seen briefer, though equally important, discussions of MacDonald's writing by such commentators as Colin Manlove, Stephen Prickett, M. Jadwiga Swiatecka, and a growing body of less prominent scholars and critics who together are making MacDonald one of the growth areas of Victorian studies. It should be said right away that Professor Hein's book immediately earns for itself a prominent place in this substantial *corpus* by virtue of its good sense and its distinctive angle of approach. It is a book with its own self-imposed limitations, however, and by no means does it attempt a rounded discussion of MacDonald's writing. For that, alas, we must still resort to Wolff and Reis, neither of whom provides a fully satisfactory account. Thus one's initial welcome to Hein's book is qualified by a measure of swift disappointment: the comprehensive monograph MacDonald deserves has yet to appear.

It is scarcely fair, however, to blame a book for what it does not attempt before one has considered what it actually provides. The subtitle goes a considerable way to defining Hein's concern; he wishes to explicate MacDonald's prose fiction with reference to his Christian beliefs:

What is presently needed in MacDonald studies is a demonstration of how his beliefs create a "harmony within" — how thoroughly the symbolic terrain of his imaginative prose is shaped by his theological convictions, and hence by his understanding of the Bible. This is what I am undertaking. (p. xvi)

This kind of approach has been adopted before, of course, but never, I think, with precisely Hein's combination of thoroughness

and balance. Both Wolff and Reis deal with the relationship between MacDonald's writing and his religious ideas, but each displays a quirkiness which tells us as much about himself as about MacDonald. Hein is much more satisfactory: handling both the MacDonald texts and the theological issues with an easy confidence, he avoids Wolff's excessive preoccupation with Victorian doctrinal warfare as well as Reis's seemingly arbitrary selection of Time as the key conception in MacDonald's religious speculations. Hein gains through not having to distil MacDonald's religious ideas into a few summarizing pages, as Reis has to do: instead, he is able to consider them facet by facet. His plan is to allow each major work or group of works to illustrate an aspect of MacDonald's religious thought: a point dealt with in one chapter is then understood to be relevant to other parts of MacDonald's output. Thus Chapter Two, on the *Princess* books, underlines the idea of "becoming" (that is, moral growth or deterioration) and the notion of God's love as a purging fire. Chapter Three, on *At the Back of the North Wind*, is Hein's opportunity to discuss the sacramental vision in MacDonald's writing while the ensuing chapter, on *Phantastes*, stresses the death of self. And so on. Just as this plan, neat as it is, does not imply, however, that the theological concepts are limited to one book for their expression, neither does it imply that each book contains only one theological point. In the *Phantastes* chapter, for example, Hein gives a satisfying sense of its thematic complexity, though his approach also imposes some sense of order on that complexity.

Described thus, Hein's book would appear to have an excessively narrow appeal, but in fact he has tried to avoid writing merely for that select breed, the MacDonald specialists. His opening gambit of using C. S. Lewis as a stepping-stone back to the now obscure MacDonald — Hein reminds us how MacDonald is Lewis's Virgil-like mentor in *The Great Divorce* — gives us double warning that Hein is writing for as wide an audience as he can catch. This opening is arresting in a journalistic way, and Hein continues to keep a non-specialized, even lay audience in mind. His style has a kind of pedagogical simplicity, and some of his accounts of such "background" matters as Scottish Calvinism and German Romanticism are fairly perfunctory. The opening reference to Lewis suggests further that the book is being written partly with an impulse to communicate at that level of popular Christianity which Lewis tapped so effectively. One notes, furthermore, that the book is published by a subsidiary of Eerdmans called Christian University Press. *The Harmony Within*, in effect, appears to have the twin aim of both contributing to the literary discussion of MacDonald and also offering MacDonald's Christianity to the reader.

Once again, it is mainly a matter of recognizing what the book does and does not set out to do. The passage quoted above continues thus, laying Hein's cards on the table:

MacDonald was a devout and careful student of the Christian Scriptures, and his imagination, consciously and unconsciously, was shaped by them. With this truth as a guide I hope to illuminate much (not all) of the obscurity of the fantasies. I am not directly concerned with measuring literary quality as such, although I will offer various judgments along the way. Others — notably Lewis and Reis — have evaluated MacDonald's literary qualities, and there is little point in my repeating their opinions.

It is hard to believe that Professor Hein has no opinions of his own — almost as hard as to believe that Lewis and Reis have said all that needs to be said about MacDonald's literary qualities. Hein has still performed an important literary service in the way in which he has explicated the fantasies, yet his lack of concern with literary evaluation results, often, in the impression that his second impulse (as I see it) to offer his reader MacDonald's Christianity as a good in itself holds sway. It is as if MacDonald's texts were ultimately less interesting to Hein than the "spiritual vision" they contain. *The Harmony Within* is thus essentially within the Lewis tradition of MacDonald criticism: the words the writer chooses don't matter; the crucial thing is the narrative pattern and its meaning. Once again, MacDonald is in danger of being taken more seriously as a thinker than as a writer, and I for one regret this. With all respect to believers, I have to say that to see MacDonald's interest as confined to his Christian message is to restrict his appeal unnecessarily.

While in this carping frame of mind, I also note the following points. Hein's instinct to make his book vividly readable for the larger audience can lead him to less than fair details, as when MacDonald is described as having "embarrassedly confessed" to his wife that he had written *The Portent* simply for the appeal of the tale: this, I think, is to twist and extend, for greater liveliness, Greville's account in *George MacDonald and His Wife*. The same tenderness towards his readership, I think, has led Professor Hein to relegate his account of MacDonald's view of the Imagination (a crucial notion with any Romantic writer) towards the end of the book, and there to deal with it all too briefly. I would dispute, too, certain of Hein's basic notions about MacDonald, such as "he was primarily a poet and novelist, not a controversialist" (p. 26). This emphasis may result from a healthy reaction against Wolff's book, but phrased thus it seems to underplay much of the pugnacity which imbues MacDonald's utterances.

Perhaps more important, Hein seems not entirely consistent on the important question of whether faith and creativity are at odds in MacDonald's novels. A generalization late in the book might lead one to suppose that Hein does not believe they necessarily are — or does not want to believe they are: "Any deficiencies in his art may point to deficiencies in the quality of his imaginative talent, but do not indicate that his faith has diminished the talent" (p. 149). This is clearly meant to apply, however, principally to the fantasy writing, and in both his account of *At the Back of the North Wind* and his chapter on the novels, Hein seems to imply that his agreement with the literary judgements of Lewis and Reis includes their belief that the novel was simply a wrong medium for what MacDonald had to say. Yet the chapter on the novels ends with a stress on the "sacramental" sense which Hein rightly finds in them and perceptively insists on the closeness of the novels to the fantasies. Indeed, the bulk of the novel chapter is taken up with an exploration of certain key symbolic archetypes they contain. In short, Hein goes a long way down a road which might have led to a more thorough and favourable reassessment of MacDonald's novels, yet he refuses to push on to any such uncanonical conclusion.

This perversity is matched by, and possibly in part explained by, the perversity (as it seems to me) of his choice of novels on which to concentrate his discussion: while touching on many of them, he devotes most space to *Guild Court* and *Paul Faber, Surgeon*. I'd have thought it obvious that the first half-dozen Scottish novels (from *David Elginbrod* up to *Sir Gibbie*) were far more interesting than either of these and equally capable of illustrating the symbolism of the novels. Perhaps Professor Hein was uneasy about getting to grips with their deep Scottishness, though the only "outsider's" mistake I spotted was the pardonable one of offering as an illustration of the Aberdeen school attended by MacDonald a photograph of a building of a much later date. Yet the curious choice of novels to discuss does underline what increasingly seems to me the next major requirement in MacDonald studies, namely a thorough examination of him as a Scottish writer, and a much broader exploration than we yet have of his literary debts and sources (including possible American influences).

I feel I can say this all the more categorically because, despite my criticisms, Professor Hein has done so much in this book to provide us with an account of the Christianity in MacDonald's writings: *The Harmony Within* supplies a felt need. It is a distinctive and valuable contribution to the literature of its subject; with it, Hein joins the very small band of indispensable writers on MacDonald.

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DAVID S. ROBB

Laurie Hergenhan, *Unnatural Lives: Studies in Australian Fiction about the Convicts, from James Tucker to Patrick White*. St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1983. pp. ix, 210. \$19.95.

This is one of those books with a long gestation period. Judging from the bibliography, Hergenhan first published on the convict theme in 1965. Since that time, much of the material in the present volume has been published as articles, although sometimes in a quite different form. Thus for twenty years Hergenhan has been establishing himself as a, or perhaps the, authority on the convict in literature.

Although this has been his primary critical task, it certainly has not been his only academic one. He was founder and is still editor of *Australian Literary Studies*, the pre-eminent journal in the field. He was founding director of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Queensland, an operation of which the financial limitations belie the esteem with which it is regarded throughout the world. And he is the General Editor of the UQP Portable Australian Authors Series, on which almost any course in Australian literature must depend.

I give all this biography not to justify the length of time it took for *Unnatural Lives* to appear, although it does that. Nor is it simply a hymn of praise to Hergenhan's contribution to Australian literature, although he deserves that. But rather it is an explanation of the book at hand, of its strengths and weaknesses.

As I read *Unnatural Lives*, I felt the book reflected what I knew of Hergenhan's academic history. It is the work of a careful, considered, builder. There is some awareness of innovations, although perhaps not as much as one might like. Instead, the emphasis is on making sense of what is important, of working through to the point at which there remains something clear and established which will last.

I suspect this is at least part of the reason for Hergenhan's selection process. Although clearly well-aware of the breadth of Australian fiction, he has shied away in his study from other than the major works. In the introduction he makes an evaluative justification by stating that these are simply the most revealing on the subject. I would question such an assumption in the light of much recent study of popular culture, which has shown that often the most ephemeral literature reveals the most about the history of ideas. But then, I have a general difficulty with evaluation, an approach which Hergenhan obviously believes in. For throughout *Unnatural Lives* there are evaluations of the artistic success of the works under consideration. And there are similar assessments of the primary critical commentaries. Hergenhan shows little inclina-

tion to what Barthes called the polysemic, what might be called "let a thousand meanings bloom."

There is a feeling in the book that a process of delicate sifting, used in evaluation and interpretation, will lead to a valuable truth. In this task, Hergenhan explores such works as James Tucker's *Ralph Rashleigh*, Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*, and Patrick White's *Fringe of Leaves*. The approach is essentially thematic (and also, one might say, thematically essentialist) with an added interest in not biographical interpretations but biographical explanations, of whys and wherefores.

One of the more interesting examples of the latter is in the consideration of Brian Penton's *Landtakers* and *Inheritors*. There Hergenhan provides a fascinating exploration of Nietzschean theories but his journey tends to highlight what is missing elsewhere in the book. Both in biography and philosophy Hergenhan shows a willingness to go out on a limb with Penton and in the process makes statements which are not as firmly grounded as those in the rest of his study. And yet partly for that reason, the commentary on Penton is some of the most insightful in the book.

The moments of philosophical overlay in the book are very lightly worn. Besides Nietzsche and Penton, the introduction shows a strong dependence on Lukacs and an awareness of Foucault. But although Hergenhan's comments often show at least an implicit class consciousness, in the rest of the book the kinds of ideological confrontation suggested by Foucault and Lukacs do not appear. Hergenhan seems concerned to persuade his readers rather than provoke them and thus tends to avoid the grand and dangerous assumption. This is true although there are a number of moments in his work which imply that assumptions are there to be made, as in what I think is the best section of the book. This very brief chapter is defined by its opening sentence: "Some of the ways the convict legend was kept alive during the years 1927-1970 can be suggested by an outline of the influence of Price Warung on the Palmers and, through them, on others, such as Russel Ward and Ian Turner."

I must, however, admit my subjectivity. I recently read a review of *Unnatural Lives* which claimed that this chapter is the weakest, primarily because it doesn't conform to the rest of the book. But to my mind this is one of its obvious strengths. It reaches beyond the author-to-author pattern and stretches for the larger vision, thus showing what the book could have been. An ironic twist is provided in this section by the commentary on Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*. Ward's book is one of the seminal documents on Australian culture but Hergenhan methodically and convincingly shows some of its errors in judgement. And, by example, shows its infelicities of

style. At times, Ward's phrases seem jerky, wrapped together. On the other hand, Hergenhan's are precise, lucid, even, if one can use such a word about so straightforward a critical work, beautiful.

But Ward's book remains major while I think Hergenhan's will stay at the level of useful. Anyone who wishes to discuss these authors must go to Hergenhan but for the student of convictism in Australian life there will be interest but perhaps little inspiration. I used the word "dangerous" before. *Unnatural Lives* is the epitome of reasonableness and thus almost always convincing. But had it been less reasonable and more willing to flirt with danger, it would have been perhaps less convincing but on the overall scale would simply have been more.

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TERRY GOLDIE

Philip Dodd, ed., *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing*. London: Frank Cass, 1982. pp. viii, 164. \$17.50.

This collection of essays, originally published as a special issue of the journal *Prose Studies* (vol. 5, no. 1), is, in the editor's words, "devoted to British travel writing," ignoring the facts that neither Jerónimo Lobo, Joachim Le Grand nor V. S. Naipaul are British by birth or nationality and that, for the first two writers mentioned, the language of their publications wasn't English.

The collection "attempts to give a sense of the wealth of such writing, to map some of its forms and conventions and, implicitly, to claim a place for travel writing in any revised definition of literature" (Editor's Preface). Thus, this volume includes essays on imaginative travel writing in the Renaissance, on the eighteenth century (two essays), on Victorian social reportage, and three essays on twentieth-century travel writers, whereas the last essay is devoted to V. S. Naipaul's *Middle Passage*. A review essay of research into travel writing concludes this book. The editor's intentions are, indeed, supported to some extent by the contributions themselves. Especially the four essays on twentieth-century travel writing, including the piece on V. S. Naipaul, trench new ground and introduce new material and new perspectives. This certainly applies to Martin Stannard's essay on Evelyn Waugh's travel books and to John Thieme's account of V. S. Naipaul. Both these essays, different in kind as well as intention, come to very important conclusions about their subject. Stannard tries to show that Waugh's travel books in their sequence as well as his heavily edited later versions in *When the Going Was Good* are as much accounts of actual travel as they are instructive material to trace Waugh's intellectual history in the 1930's. In the best essay in this collection, "Authorial Voice

in V. S. Naipaul's *The Middle Passage*," John Thieme centres on the persona of the traveller Naipaul, his shifts of approach, his definitions of his position in comparison to earlier travellers to the West Indies: Naipaul is then introduced as "Victorian traveller, enfeebled explorer, novelistic observer, cultural analyst, and, lastly, as purveyor of second-hand information" (p. 149). Thieme discusses Naipaul's choice of various personae in the context of artistic unity and links it, after an excellent discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Naipaul's book, to the heterogeneous studies Naipaul was writing about. Thieme also argues that this important link, the sociological basis of the material an author is writing about, cannot explain away the final failure of Naipaul's book "to produce a genuine answer to the problem of tone" (p. 149). Certain personae chosen by Naipaul are recognizable voices from Naipaul's novels, so that Naipaul the travel writer and Naipaul the novelist are part of a common artistic concern.

One other essay in the volume, Peter Miles's "A Semi-Mental Journey: Structure and Illusion in Smollett's *Travels*," is written in the same vein. Miles has found new answers to the complicated structure of Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* and his critical discussion of earlier attempts to explain away inconsistencies in Smollett's collection of fictitious letters is excellent. Smollett, far from being an inconsistent, badly-organized author, is shown to have employed an elaborate imaginative organization closely akin to his own and his contemporaries' novels. Here, once again, the personae employed by the author are of vital importance, and following this clue, the essay gives new answers about a particular writer.

Most of the other essays, on the other hand, fail to support the editor's intentions. Joel Gold's essay on "The Voyages of Jerónimo Lobo, Joachim Le Grand, and Samuel Johnson" is excellent in its considered treatment of the fate of Lobo's original *Itinerário* in Le Grand's translation into French and Johnson's later translation and edition into English of Le Grand's version. Illustrating the various processes of editing and translating, Gold's attempts at a serious critical explanation fall rather short of his aims. Gold would have had to include a much more detailed and historically accurate sociological analysis of the three societies concerned than he is able to give.

This lack of sustained sociological debate is also conspicuous in the three essays that deal directly with periods of social unrest or with problems of structural poverty. F. S. Schwarzbach, in his " 'Terra Incognita': An Image of the City in English Literature, 1820-1855," has discovered an illuminating term comprising the whole of bourgeois social reportage of that period, but this dis-

covery apart, he adds nothing new to other books on the same material or to Peter Keating's "Into Unknown England," dealing with a later period. There is no serious attempt to link the content and mode of writing of the so-called social explorers to the ideological strategies and class fears of the period, whereby social reportage would be decipherable as far-fetched attempts at social pacification.

Margery Sabin's "The Spectacle of Reality in *Sea and Sardinia*" is far too long a description of Lawrence's book, written in a pseudo-Lawrentian style and content to quote extensively without really taking Lawrence critically. Philip Dodd, in his own essay on "The Views of Travellers: Travel Writing in the 1930's," makes a few useful remarks, especially about Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, but he fails to relate writing in the 1930's to the political situation in Britain and elsewhere. Only a closely argued discussion of the role of left-wing intellectuals and their conservative counterparts in a period of upheaval and turmoil, a close analysis of their theoretical framework, can result in valuable new interpretations.

Jenny Mezciems's piece on Renaissance travel writers, though, is a valuable contribution to the history of ideas that discusses the subtle transformation travel writing undertook as part of the debate about truth and fiction in the development of prose writing. But Joanne Shattock's final review-article gives a few valuable hints without really finding a non-chronological way of reviewing the research. It thus reflects the collection of essays as a whole. In its lack of a common theoretical basis, in its explicit aim to depict rather than analyze, the volume cannot seriously expect a place in the critical spectrum defined by such scholars as F. A. Kirkpatrick, Philip B. Gove, Emile Pons, Marius-Francois Guyard, Walter Rehm, or Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow.

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Books Received

- BOULTON, JAMES T., and ANDREW ROBERTSON (eds.), *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, III: October 1916-June 1921*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Edition of the Letters and Works of D. H. Lawrence), 1984. pp. xxviii, 762. Unpriced.
- BROWN, JULIA PREWITT, *A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*. New York: Macmillan, 1985. pp. xx, 137. \$15.95.
- CAWS, MARY ANN, *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. pp. xiii, 312. \$27.50.
- COHEN, RALPH (ed.), *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985. pp. x, 244. Unpriced.
- ERICKSON, PETER, and COPPELIA KAHN (eds.), *Shakespeare's "Rough Magic": Renaissance Essays in Honor of C. L. Barber*. Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985. pp. 322. \$37.50.
- HODGES, DEVON L., *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985. pp. 153. \$17.50.
- POLLAK, ELLEN, *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Women in Culture and Society Series), 1985. pp. 239. \$18.95.
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- SHOAF, R. A., *Milton, Poet of Duality: A Study of Semiosis in the Poetry and Prose*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. pp. xiv, 225. \$17.00.
- SKIFFINGTON, LLOYD A., *The History of English Soliloquy: Aeschylus to Shakespeare*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985. pp. xi, 139. \$19.50.

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TORGOVNICK, MARIANNA, *The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985. pp. 267. \$26.50.

WALDOFF, LEON, *Keats and the Silent Work of Imagination*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985. pp. xv, 215. \$17.50.