

## Book Reviews

### “UNCERTAIN STEERAGE”

David G. Pitt, *E. J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882-1927*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984. pp. 415. \$24.95.

One of the intriguing things about David G. Pitt's biography, *E. J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882-1927*, is that Pitt seems to have imbibed so deeply of the paradoxes of Pratt's personality and the tensions in Pratt's poetry, that he has used his own sense of irony to give shape to this very readable volume of what promises to be a two-volume work.

In speaking of Pratt's formative years as the son of a thundering Methodist preacher stationed at various isolated Newfoundland outpost settlements, Pitt remarks that “[i]rony he [Pratt] could hardly escape. It was in the paltriness of his reward for gigantic efforts. It was in the very character of the sea itself, for was not (as Pratt was to put it) ‘the bread of life’ in its right hand, the ‘waters of death’ in its left.”

One such outpost was Fortune, ironically named given that the loss of human life seemed a constant. It fell to John Pratt, Edwin's father, to take the sad news to family members left ashore. And, unfortunately for his children, he often took one of his sons along — “whether for moral support or, more likely, to provide another exemplum of the tough creed he had to teach them. . . .” This is but early notice of the “curious and unexpected ‘convergence of the manifold’ ” that Pratt defined as Fate.

Certainly, it is ironic that a lad with a dismal scholastic record should become the man nearly revered for his academic and poetic achievements. It is ironic that along with his friends, W. H. (Billy) Pike and S. H. (Sam) Soper, Pratt chose Victoria College in Toronto for his advanced ministerial studies rather than the more liberal Wesleyan College in Montreal as a truant compromise to the more traditional Mt. Allison, first choice of the Methodist Church in Newfoundland. “[B]y meddling with a young probationer's plans

[it] may not, perhaps, have denied the Church a great preacher, but it undoubtedly helped to give Canada one of its greatest poets." For it was in Toronto that E. J. Pratt would eventually meet his literary mentor Pelham Edgar.

Unfortunately, Fate (as Pratt would have it) had already declared that Pratt should not find a fulfilling vocation until he was thirty-one years old, and even then he had to balance his part-time work in the English Department with his work as a laboratory instructor in psychology for the Philosophy Department, and his sojourns as replacement preacher. David Pitt leads us through the many "lost years" in both Newfoundland and in Toronto, and yet, ironically, he seems to assure us that the savoury dialectic of Pratt's best and always ambivalent poetry could not have been written had Pratt not had a "dual or split sensibility" between the quantitative lure of the ordered universe of science, and the immeasurable unknowns of philosophy and poetry. "It was one of the great ironies of his life that most of his prime of manhood when creative energies usually run strongest was passed in a state of anchorless drift or, at best, of uncertain steerage."

The most profound irony of Pratt's life as Pitt has depicted it, rests within the incongruity between the insecure and vulnerable person who inwardly dreaded public display, and the public raconteur and jovial host. Like an actor given his choice of roles, Pratt chose those with which he felt most at ease. Even his wife has said that Pratt was "many personalities — different personalities." Part of the public pose was the result of Pratt's idiosyncracies: he was fascinated with the manly sport of boxing ("Ned loved a good fight, as long as he wasn't in it"); he had an absolute obsession for golf; and, he much preferred male company as an audience for his muse and his own entertainment. "Ned" Pratt acquired over the years an aura of legendary stature, enhanced by his own desire to create a self-myth. Pitt often interrupts his own narrative to remind us that Pratt loved to embellish, to (in Pratt's terminology) "codologize." In speaking of his boyhood in Newfoundland, Pitt says Pratt created a "self-portrait . . . largely if not wholly a fictive one." The fictitious element remains part of the picture of Pratt's entire life as he would have it read.

Pitt's biography of Pratt, although well-researched and enthusiastically written, smacks on rare occasions of the intrusion of the author. In considering the nurture-nature reasons for Pratt's temperament, Pitt settles for a "combination of both, as it is true of most of us [my emphasis] who are 'cast in a different mould'." At other times Pitt seems to be perpetrating the Pratt legend — "As if conscious of the historic parting [of Pratt from Newfoundland] and determined to make it a memorable one, the elements before night-

fall erupted in the most violent storm to assault the battered Island in many years — more of Pitt's sensitivity to the ironies of Pratt's life perhaps, but a touch histrionic. Conversely, when describing Pratt's ill-afforded trip to England (his wife and child being left at home with poor means as well), Pitt seems almost disappointed that the poet would spend more time on the golf links than in literary pursuits.

Despite these slight intrusions, the warmth, the idealism, the humanism of the personality which Pitt no doubt wishes us to derive from his depiction of E. J. Pratt is superbly achieved. What we take away from a reading of *E. J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882-1927* is an appreciation for a man of brilliant mind and slender pocketbook, whose madcap schemes to make money often rendered him even more impoverished; a man of intense sensitivity (he was the victim of two breakdowns due to exhaustion) who, given an audience, entertained it memorably from his repertoire of tall tales and anecdotes; a man who was not insensitive to the reverberations of Modernism in Canadian poetry but who served the denigrated Canadian Authors Association mainly out of loyalty to Pelham Edgar; a man touched by joy and tragedy; and finally, a man initially without much literary background, but who influenced more than one generation through his poetry and teaching.

Given the grace and meticulousness of David Pitt's style, and with the best of Pratt's poetry yet to come after 1927, we are not likely to be disappointed in the next installment of the life and times of E. J. Pratt.

WENDY SCHISSEL

E. Talbot Donaldson, *The Swan at the Well*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1985. pp. x, 165. \$15.00.

Many critics have noted Chaucerian influences on Shakespeare of a sort that take no more than a cursory reading knowledge of Chaucer to discern. One may easily see, for example, narrative links between Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or between *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida*. In *The Swan at the Well*, however, the distinguished medievalist E. Talbot Donaldson perceives influences and relationships that hitherto have been overlooked or not developed because critics, with a few exceptions, do not understand that Shakespeare read Chaucer with complete awareness and appreciation.

A revealing example of Donaldson's reading of Shakespeare's reading of Chaucer is his analysis of Peter Quince's play of "Pyra-

mus and Thisbe." While acknowledging other influences on Peter Quince's play Donaldson also makes a strong case for the influence of Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas*. In addition to picking out striking parallels in each, he reminds us that their immediate critics passed similar judgements. Hippolyta's "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard" is merely a more delicate phrasing of the Host's "Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord." In the creation of both Donaldson sees a single artistic intent: "In either case a master of literary form makes fun of old-fashioned and primitive examples of that form while he is himself engaged in writing it, and then assigns his parody to the most naive and most naively self-confident of artists."

Donaldson also examines *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as it relates to *The Knight's Tale* and *The Merchant's Tale* and, following the lead of Dorothy Bethurum, he goes beyond simple resemblances to what he sees as subtle relationships, finding these in the theme of the irresponsibility of romantic love. Not that either Chaucer or Shakespeare disapproved of romantic love or had a moral to present, but both "speculate on and illustrate love's obsessiveness and its randomness." In developing this point of view he draws a number of contrasts and comparisons that illustrate both Chaucer's and Shakespeare's treatment of theme and character.

*The Knight's Tale* is also carefully analyzed for its relation to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Particularly commending previous work on the subject by Philip Edwards, Donaldson perceives the world of *The Knight's Tale* as one of darkness and little felicity and whose temple walls Shakespeare might be said to have plundered. "Yet whereas the horrors in Chaucer seem mostly charged to the gods above, Shakespeare puts them back where they started, in the hearts of people."

For many, Donaldson's book will be of greatest interest for its full and probing discussion of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Shakespeare would have read Chaucer's work in one of several sixteenth-century corrupt editions which contained Robert Henryson's "Testament of Cresseid" immediately following the last book of *Troilus and Criseyde* with no indication of Henryson's authorship. It has been argued that because of the corrupt text the subtlety of Chaucer's poem would have been lost to Shakespeare and he would also have taken Henryson's work to be Chaucer's; and so conditioned by this and by imitators of Henryson's presentation of Cresseid, he could do nothing but present a malodorous Cressida. To which Donaldson answers: "It seems to me that to suppose that Shakespeare thought Chaucer wrote *The Testament* is to attribute to him not only little Latin and less Greek, but minimal English and no sense." And to see Shakespeare's Cressida as indefensible because of Henryson's

portrayal is an act of literary determinism; or to see her as shallow and vulgar when set against a tender-hearted Criseyde is to misinterpret both.

Much of Donaldson's conception of Criseyde is present elsewhere in his criticism and is here used as a check and balance for an interpretation of Cressida. In general he finds that Criseyde has been as much over-sympathized with as Cressida has been maligned. Criseyde does have attractive qualities "but many of our sympathetic responses to her are actually responses to the narrator's manipulation of us," and pressing this point Donaldson does some manipulating of his own. Though both are unfaithful, one tends to — or is directed to — feel sorry for Criseyde and brand Cressida as a harlot. Donaldson finds the direction for this view of Cressida comes from Ulysses: "Though she has never been without defenders, until recently the weightiest critics of the play have been followers of Ulysses, the first high-minded intellectual to settle Cressida's business by calling her a slut." And Ulysses does so without any evidence. Donaldson defends Cressida's conduct in proportion as he finds fault with Troilus's, and speeches of hers other critics find bawdy he convincingly interprets in other ways. On the other hand one may accuse Donaldson of promoting bawdiness when he states of Chaucer's Criseyde: "Despite the strong impression readers are given by the narrator that she is a modest chaste widow, she observes, on the first occasion that Troilus rides by her window after she has learned that he loves her, that he has both 'a bodie and might / To doin' an unspecified 'thing' (ll. 633-34) — an observation at which she blushes." Donaldson should blush for the way he has telescoped the whole passage. One suspects that many who read this book will find that wherever ambiguity exists in Chaucer's portrayal of Criseyde, Donaldson tends to give a negative interpretation. However that may be, his close analysis of *Troilus and Criseyde* side by side with *Troilus and Cressida* is stimulating in the study of both.

Donaldson is also persuaded that Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* influenced Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the Wife of Bath influenced the conception of Falstaff, but acknowledges firm evidence of this eludes him and he settles for similarities. In both *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Romeo and Juliet* is the idea that "love at its most fulfilling does not last in the real world. But Shakespeare's tragedy is the more tragic in that the world destroys the lovers, not their love." The Wife of Bath and Falstaff are seen as authoritative, witty personalities who both labour in their vocation, are both charming yet horrible people, are both adept at converting biblical or proverbial *dicta* to serve their own ends and are both their creators' celebration of life. Donaldson remarks somewhat

wittily. "One might say the Wife of Bath and Falstaff share a Wordsworthian child's vision, uncluttered by conventions, with intimations of immorality."

Donaldson says in his introduction to *The Swan at the Well* that he imagines one day it will be a matter of general belief that the two greatest love poems in English, like the two greatest comic characters, are closely related, and hopes his discussion of them will give some impetus to this belief. It may very well do so. Certainly any future discussion of relationships between Chaucer and Shakespeare must take into account the range and insights of the whole book.

E. GUY

Paul Mariani, *A Usable Past: Essays on Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984. pp. viii, 268. \$24.00.

The University of Massachusetts Press has made a handsome, tasteful object for a collection of Paul Mariani's essays, literary reflections, and longer reviews. *A Usable Past* is the sort of reward a scholar earns after producing a Big Book. Mariani's Big Book was the biographical monument to William Carlos Williams — *A New World Naked* — he published in 1981. It cemented Williams's bust in the American literary pantheon while it made possible Mariani's arrival as a major scholarly reputation. In *A Usable Past* we find him still lit by the afterglow of the earlier production. But here he emerges as a devotee of the noble art of belles lettres rather than as a research scholar. Here the passionate man of feeling steps to the forestage, where in the Big Book he everywhere defers to his subject. The success or failure of such a book really depends, then, on the quality of the sensibility or subjectivity we sense moving beneath the evident intelligence. Some readers might find it a bit surprising that critical writing of this kind, historically the discursive and intellectual style of the Edwardian literary milieu, should have survived into the 1980's, and survived in an academic setting at Amherst only 35 minutes by helicopter from Yale.

This collection includes five more essays on Williams comprising the first section of the book. The most potentially interesting of these is the first, "Reassembling the Dust: Notes on the Art of the Biographer." This essay retraces his steps in the decade-long composition of the Williams biography. In the Introduction he calls this essay "the suppressed prolegomenon to *A New World Naked*" and goes on to define the kind of biography he wanted to write:

By literary biography I mean biography that pays attention to literary style, has a strong narrative line, and presents the subject from the perspective of the moment in which that person lived. I wanted as little of the omniscient author and as little of that easy Monday morning quarter-backing — whether involving the name of Freud or Marx or whomever — as would suffice to order and make sense of the life. (8)

For the simple purpose of getting the work written he decided to lean on the “narrative skills of a Joyce or a Flaubert or a Faulkner” rather than trying to see his subject by the light, or perhaps unlight, cast from some explicit theory. All of this in the interest of letting “the readers judge for themselves.”

In the 1980's such innocence is breathtaking. After all, the desire to escape the shackles of explicit theory leads us blindly into the prison of implicit theory, the one, let's not forget, with the invisible walls. Isn't this the lesson we've all taken away from the last two decades of critical debate? Apparently not. And whether a reader judges for herself has always depended rather more on the reader's own critical intelligence than on the author's suppression of his own underlying assumptions.

The other essays on Williams are reflections on aspects of the poet's work. They are long on biographical detail with little nuggets of practical criticism (see, for example, the excellent close reading of “Raindrops in a Briar” [49-50]), but short on new critical insights as they repeat in trenchant and sometimes melodramatic form the established commonplaces of Williams criticism. The essay on Williams and Wallace Stevens, however, does stand out in emphasizing the personal relationship between these two major figures who represent such opposing tendencies in American poetics.

The commonplaces, of course, do not please everyone and Mariani, as Williams specialist at least, has occasionally been accused of seriously misunderstanding Williams's modernity, no matter how thorough and scrupulous he has been in doing biographical and scholarly legwork. A common complaint against Mariani's work on modernism has been directed at what seems a personal inclination toward late symbolist aesthetics and a consequent mis-reading of Williams, the anti-symbolist, in symbolist terms. If this complaint is true, it is in the current book's second section that we glimpse the source of this colouring to his literary perception. Mariani tells us that his “first love” was Gerard Manley Hopkins, “a figure I needed very much for my spiritual and intellectual survival as a young man” (1).

The middle section of the book is thus devoted to four essays on Hopkins, previously published in the 1970's. These are good solid essays, with the evocation of the historical sinking of the “Deutschland” opening the essay on that poem a particularly effective bit of

imaginative recreation. But the essays, all in all, are mainly personal impression depending, therefore, on the esteem in which we hold Mariani's sensibility. They do not add a significant chapter to Hopkins scholarship and are not adventurous enough in exploring even subjective impressions to add a chapter to the development of contemporary feeling.

The third section of the book is the most important because Mariani engages some contemporary poets who do not yet have a well-defined position on the literary historical landscape. His essay on Robert Penn Warren is fairly typical. It is an introductory survey of some major themes in Warren's poetry. One looks for critical observations about particular texts that typify the work as a whole, statements about the temper of the poet's mind, the type and quality of his formal intelligence, and a clearly formulated provisional statement placing Warren on the literary landscape. Instead the interchangeable cultural clichés which too often these days canopy practical critical finger exercises cloud over the spiky particularity of the poet at hand. Take, for example, the following passage on the theme of Time in Warren: "And how to redeem the time, to understand the fact of being, to learn to live well so that one can at least die well? These are very old questions, shared by all, or at least most, of us. One thing the poet can try to do is to keep the past — which annihilates but also preserves — from slipping away" (163). This is the baggy cliché of the undergraduate essay applicable to possibly every poet on the reading list. Its range of feeling, since the work is being judged on the screen of the critic's own sensibility, has not progressed much beyond the affective scope and seriousness of a TV drama like *St. Elsewhere*. In our day we can at least expect, if nothing really daring is to be attempted, something resembling the range of *Miami Vice*.

Charles Tomlinson, Robert Creeley, John Montague, John Berryman, Thomas Merton, and, a long overdue assessment of the American poet Robert Pack round out the book. None of these is particularly memorable, though the Pack essay recognizes in that poet a neo-Augustan yearning for a new poetry of rural retirement. Such nostalgia for forms of feeling that run deeply through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in our tradition provides a fascinating glimpse into a kind of currently fashionable conservative mentality. It picks its ironic way through what seems the angry and violent chaos of modern life while trying to suppress its glee at the incapacity of liberalism to manage the socio-ethical utopia it promised in the era, just passed, of limitless optimism.

None of these essays is ground-breaking or seminal; they show the critic in possession of the whole standard cloth out of which lectures and talks and surveys are cut. Mariani makes excellent use

of biographical materials in setting scenes, sketching people, events, but beyond that nothing much happens. He is neither critical enough in some objective and lasting sense, nor subjective enough in exploring, more adventurously, strange seas of thought and feeling. He is, at the end of the day, an intelligence who can do detailed biographical research admirably well, a concerned and intense teacher who can no doubt lead a seminar brilliantly and who is enough of a ham to be able to use anecdote and description and detail from the life for his best lecturer's effects, but whose judgements on a poet who jars us, a poet like Byron say, one could never trust.

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JOHN XIROS COOPER

Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984. \$24.95.

Professor Millgate's interesting and informative account of Walter Scott's fictional experiments, which he began in the *Minstrelsy* and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* but brought to fruition in the remarkable sequence of novels written between 1814 and 1819, takes its bearings from the cardinal points of narration, structure, characterization, and (auto)biography. This is, perhaps, a rather too-well-tried approach to Scott and his *oeuvre*, but Millgate enlivens her account of Scott's "sophisticated art of repetition with variation" by considering the implications of narrative voices which ostensibly wish to enforce an unenforceable contractual relationship between narrator(s) and reader. Scott's narrators continually invite the reader to embark upon innovative fictional enterprises while disclaiming novelty, and they construct new frameworks for the presentation of historical action and yet are reluctant to analyze that action.

Scott formulated a "basic prose voice" in the *Minstrelsy* where he adopts an antiquarian's stance to materials not his own. The duality of this textual attitude is carried over into the novels when he deals with historical data which are, again, not fully of his own making. The "anonymity game" and the fiction of authorship of "the Author of *Waverley*," Jedediah Cleishbotham and Peter Pattieson, constructs a fable of composition which elevates narrative design over narrative process. Out of the counterpoint of the commentary of "a nineteenth-century pedant" and the "classic rhetoric of the oral tradition," Scott composed symphonic narratives which filtered historical materials and made both distant and intimate his relationship with his reader. The secret is to know the rules of the game; to be a reader who is also a player is to be a part of a hidden code

of reading. The "fable of composition" closes the text to those who are uninitiated by obfuscating the terms of the narrative, and thence the historical events depicted. Millgate sees *Waverley*, predictably perhaps, using Romance to educate; less predictably, it is also the first stage in the education of a readership who can only perceive history correctly when due cognizance is taken of the narrative design which has shaped its retelling.

Once embarked upon, the narrational devices link novels together in chains of increasing complexity and darkness. *The Antiquary* is "about" the construction of meaning in a text which offers us "three different modes of truth-seeking." The legal and antiquarian are supplemented by, possibly questioned by, a historical *esprit* and sympathy. *Old Mortality's* narration "splinters" authorial responsibility in the various guises of preserver of legends, antiquarian, editor, and critic. But speaking in codes can be dangerous, particularly where history is involved. In its simplest form, it is an unwillingness to disentangle the confusion of events, and such is the condition of Frank Osbaldistone's narrative in *Rob Roy*, where the reader is also fictionalized as Tresham, the silent, and therefore impotent consoler. In *Old Mortality*, an ironic mode shapes a narrative which has to struggle through the incompetence of its narrators and action runs counter to narration. In its darkest phase, it is the susceptibility for making a metaphor of actuality, for in *Waverley* and again in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, national events and private individuals are diminished to symbols and shadows in the "dark dreams" of Flora MacIvor and Lucy Ashton. Given the impossibility of objective narration, it is understandable, though hardly true, that an exasperated Scott should describe himself as belonging to "the Death-head Hussars of Literature who neither take nor give criticism."

The plurality of narrative strategies engages the patterns of history with the structure of Romance, but it is, again, all a matter of interpreting the design of the arrangement. The comparative historical method can also be a contrastive historical method. Annotations frame and expand the fictional dimensions of the text while indicating how the fiction uses illustrations out of historical context, but Scott, at his most antiquarian and "pedantic," avoids the issue by citing a source or giving a reference rather than fixing on the details of the case. For Millgate, *Waverley* demonstrates that the "world of history" can be entered through Romance, whereas the tragedy of *The Bride of Lammermoor* is the reverse. However the dynamic works, the impulse is the same; to penetrate the "surface" of both history and Romance and to learn their "secrets." Romance and historical structures are therefore both aesthetic and moral, and Millgate makes sparing, though effective use of Scott's in-

debtedness to Spenser. In impressive chapters on *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, and *The Bride of Lammermoor*, she demonstrates how Scott combines the emblematic with the realistic in attempting to produce the "proper" reading of Romance, and by extension, of history also. In my view, Scott is most Spenserian in his use of oral tradition, especially that part of oral tradition which, as Millgate says, "is the effect of inevitability proper to formulaic narratives." The forces of inevitability are conjured by Scott in the shape of history, romance, and an elaborate structure of emblems and repetitions. The proper reading of these signs should lead us to a fuller comprehension. The fact of the matter is that it does not; instead of explication Scott offers us "sources," instead of "knowledge" his characters are confirmed in their delusions, or if they do understand, that which they understand has been destroyed by historical inevitability, instead of certainty in the emblematic structure he describes the collapse of worlds (Highland, Covenanting) previously entrenched in emblematic certainty. The "perversity of the plotting" Millgate sees in *Rob Roy* could equally be the "perversity" of an unwillingness to make actuality fit an aesthetic and moral structure of history or Romance.

In her discussion of *Guy Mannering*, Millgate describes the inability to re-establish connections with the past as Bertram's "deracinated condition," the compulsion to turn "memory into metaphor." But much more is at stake here than the inability of Scott's middling heroes to see things as they are/were. In a series of impressive character analyses, Millgate demonstrates the recurrent motifs which shape Scott's characterizations: "The Lost Heir," "The Plot of Reclamation," etc. In her excellent discussion of Henry Morton's "stubborn commitment to a belief in personal freedom," she writes of the "strenuous and painful" experience of reading *Old Mortality* which arises from the denial of that commitment to personal freedom by the structure of a narrative which denies the possibility of such freedom. I would want to take this further; some type or variety of pain and strain is experienced in all the novels which this book is concerned with, and it stems from the novels "metaphoric" relationship with subject matter. The fluxible relationship of history and Romance and the "deracinated condition" of the central characters deny any validation to historical discourse, Romance and characterization in their own right. A more deconstructive critic than Millgate may wish to argue that it is narration itself which is struggling to liberate itself from the conditions of its own authorship. The result is a multiplication of narrative frames and voices, a challenging of historical accuracy by evasion, a refusal to graft an aesthetic and moral structure wholly onto Romance and

“deracinated” characters who can only “see” metaphorically what is happening to them.

Millgate attempts to fix the cause of this fruitful dislocation, and here her argument is less convincing since she locates it in autobiographical hints scattered through the novels and the insights offered by the two great biographers of Scott. One should perhaps ignore, as Millgate does, Scott’s own assertion that he wrote novels because Byron was “beating him at poetry.” Perhaps the cyclical returns to near-identical plots and motifs do have biographical contexts of lost love and fraught relations with an unsympathetic father; this is familiar enough territory. Similarly, the identification of Scott himself with his characters is equally familiar, although not much is advanced by that knowledge. Millgate has some new and strange additions also: Dalgetty from *A Legend of Montrose* is added to the more usual fictional bio-types of Rokeby, Waverley, and Oldbuck. What is more disconcerting in a volume subtitled “The Making of the Novelist” is the absence of a full discussion of the relationship of life to texts; which is the sub-text, the life or the novel? Walter Scott transformed into a character in his own fiction is a kind of monstrosity, but perhaps more importantly, it is a false myth of origins. Enquiry stops at the biographical boundary as if the evocation of a psycho-biography precludes further insight. There are more severe limitations to this approach since there is very little indeed of the making of the novelist, but a lot where Scott is fictionalized as a major protagonist. There are few insights into his milieu or his intellectual formation; nothing on his indebtedness to jurisprudence and the formidable group of intellectuals collectively identified as the Scottish Enlightenment. Instead the dislocation of narratives, history, Romance, and characterization becomes a problem of his psychology which Scott is unwilling to analyze; when we get close to the heart of the matter Scott changes narrational shape. It is surely less of a “problem” of ritualized autobiography or hidden confession and more a part of a wider intellectual probing and testing of the certainties and limits of rational analysis, in history and fiction, by a more questioning Romantic aesthetic. But, let me hasten to add, this is more a difference of emphasis which should not detract from the chief value and success of Millgate’s work, which is to present Scott’s early novels as encounters with a variety of narrative strategies, and in this she does full justice to their complexity and splendour.

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DAVID RICHARDS

John Maynard, *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. v + 262 pp.

In this study, John Maynard's purposes are polemical; his rhetoric, assertorial. A tendency to "psychological scrutiny" has characterized Charlotte Brontë studies, whether or not those studies were overtly biographical. Such psychobiographical analysis is reductionist and perennially off-the-mark. It postulates that "all artists are not so much privileged seers as psychological cripples, struggling in their work to escape their neuroses as a fly from amber"; it assumes as well "the common view . . . that all Victorians were so far victims of their culture's suppressions and reticences that they were necessarily hysterical or neurotic" (33). The author's intent is plain: to counter a view of Brontë as "ill" or "trapped" in order to allow us knowledge and appreciation of her "genius" and, particularly, her treatment of sexual matters.

Maynard initiates his ground-clearing operation by outlining the complexities of Victorian sexual experience. Brontë, he says, "tests and explores profoundly and interestingly the subject of sexuality that some parts of her society were tending to sublime into a prurient underground and to exclude from their conscious awareness" (5); so thorough is her grasp of the sexual life that she prefigures Freud with her insights, most especially in understanding the foundation of adult attachments in childhood family configurations. Brontë creates, in short, "the fullest and most sophisticated discussion of sexual issues of any major writer before Hardy" (viii). Maynard postulates further, albeit hesitantly, that she "anticipates insights of the more systematic psychological and sexual research of our century" (212).

To show how this could be possible, Maynard looks to Brontë's biography, with emphasis on a childhood and adolescence in many ways pre-Victorian, and on an adulthood enriched by reading and European travel. Further, Maynard has collected, sorted, and offered for medical analysis the relevant source material on Brontë's final days and death. The results contradict Rhodes's 1972 opinion (one accepted, at least implicitly, by several Brontë scholars) that Brontë died in the early stages of pregnancy and from complications of a psychosomatic origin. This re-reading of the evidence suggests the improbability of her pregnancy, and that tuberculosis was the likely cause of death. Maynard performs a useful service here, in attacking the view of Brontë as a "sexual neurotic" (the term is Rhodes's) which has coloured study of her work. In the chapter titled "Charlotte on the Couch," he goes on to examine the worst excesses of "posthumous analysis" of her life and works.

Maynard fires with both barrels, but the buckshot scatter leaves the reader wishing for a more consolidated rebuttal to the critics

under the gun. Some significant arguments appear and are dismissed within a footnote; there is a tendency to reduce complex readings to the sorts of formulas Maynard deplors. Moglen and Gilbert and Gubar, for example, are lumped together as feminist critics who embrace "anti-feminist" assumptions and who are "more intent on showing how society has limited and warped women's achievements than on celebrating their successes" (33). That life and literature are socially determined (women's life and literature, over-determined) Maynard will not admit; and as the above quotation will indicate, he has scant understanding of the feminist critical project. Further — and Maynard's book was published in 1984 — there is no recognition here of current developments in psychoanalytic literary theory. (As I shall suggest, recent work in feminist psychoanalytic theory, on the construction of the speaking subject, and on the transference element to the reading and writing processes, would, I think, have furthered Maynard's examination considerably.) While the author issues timely warnings against easy biographical connection, strained historical adjacentism, and the casual use of Freudian fragments, clearly those are the dangers he faces in the absence of fully-articulated alternate modes of procedure.

After these introductory manoeuvres, Maynard commences his own detailed analyses of the sexual thematics and symbolics of the Angria stories and Brontë's novels. These he reads as tales of sexual maturation and negotiation (rather than simple deviation); this, too, is a welcome turn in Brontë studies. Maynard collects convincing evidence for the complexities of Brontë's treatment of sexuality, following the various strands with exemplary close reading. The chapter on *Villette*, for example, looks in full detail at the myths, dreams, images, names, and language of the text. If we read critical approaches to *Villette*, as we do the novel itself, always from the perspective of the ending, then Maynard's open interpretation of the open conclusion is in keeping with his study of the work as a journey toward an acceptance of both life and death, and the development of a sexuality which is "a quality of the entire self and body" (212). But the heading which summarizes this reading — "Complexities of sexual awakening in the realistic world: *Villette*" — shows that the problems so neatly dispatched in the introductory pages have come back to haunt this concluding chapter. What is the "realistic world"? A "real" world, or a world of "fictional" convention? Further suggestion, that "*Villette* gives us as a setting for the narrator's perceptions a cool social world of Victorian realism," helps not at all; nor does the statement that Brontë "finds a way to let us see stereoscopically both a subjective and an objective world" (164).

While Maynard gives a convincing account of sexual themes and symbolics, he has not an over-arching framework sufficient to accommodate fuller consideration of Brontë's literary production. Two separate and conflicting metaphors for the writing process run throughout *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*. Brontë "creates," "articulates," "shapes," "gives," "achieves," "makes," and "experiments"; she does "journeyman work" and "assert[s] mature mastery" (71). On a second analogy (using here Maynard's comments on *Jane Eyre*) she "provides insight into Jane's nature" (100); she "follows Jane's awakening without set formulas or thematic reductions" (117) and "lets Jane tell her tale" (144). Thus to the problem of how to get Charlotte off the couch, Maynard seems to offer a solution: put her behind it. The dream of Brontë as analyst, maintaining a kindly if somewhat aseptic practice (Kleinian, perhaps?) with an analysand Jane Eyre (complete with "nature" and "tale") functions as fantastic counterpart to the deliberately developed and sustained concept of Brontë as creator. But these admixed metaphors serve to show why Maynard is forced to fall back on the notion of "genius," and why he must occasionally assure us of the existence of textual complexities instead of demonstrating their operation.

While the ground-clearing process has isolated Maynard's work here, he does raise a number of issues which will concern Brontë studies, and require the deployment of contemporary critical thought. His suggestion that Brontë's works might be read in the light of developments in the dramatic monologue is one that merits further examination, as does suggestion that more attention be given to the male-author "frame" of Brontë's earlier novels. (This is a question taken up in Sadoff's *Monsters of Affection*.) The idea of the novels as a psychological "working through" is especially important. If this direction is followed, it should lead to a way of understanding the discursive (rather than merely symbolic) modes of representation and consciousness operating in Brontë's fiction. (Skura's *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* will provide theoretical assist to this inquiry, as will application of the notion of the transference.) In rationing himself to elements of Freudian theory without the equally applicable analogies provided by psychoanalytic practice, Maynard has been able to initiate but not complete the study of desire and discourse in Brontë's fiction. *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality* should, however, function as an invigorating tonic for Brontë studies.

## Books Received

- BATSLEER, JANET, and others, *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class*. New Accents. London: Methuen, 1985. pp. 188. Unpriced.
- BERCOVITCH, SACVAN, ed., *Reconstructing American Literary History*. Harvard Engl. St. 13. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1986. pp. x, 351. \$7.95 pb.
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- CHILCOTT, TIM, *'A Real World & Doubting Mind': A Critical Study of the Poetry of John Clare*. Hull: Hull UP, 1985. pp. xxii, 292. \$25.00 pb.
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- STOKES, EDWARD, *Hawthorne's Influence on Dickens and George Eliot*. St. Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1985. pp. x, 238. \$37.50.