

## Book Reviews

Elizabeth Bergen Brophy, *Samuel Richardson, The Triumph of Craft*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974. pp. 131. \$7.25.

Henry Fielding, *A Journey from This World to the Next*, introduction by Claude Rawson. London: Dent, 1973 (Everyman's Library). pp. xxxii, 144, hardcover, £1.50, 70 p. pb.

Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild* and *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, introduction by A. R. Humphreys, notes by Douglas Brooks. London: Dent, revised 1973. pp. xxvi, 305, 80 p. pb.

Only special geniuses have the gift of breaking through existing conventions and creating a new literary form, whether it be wholly new or a redirection of existing trends. Seldom are they the great writer of their times, though they often stimulate him as well as whole generations of followers. A Lyly not a Shakespeare created the romantic comedy, a Defoe not a Swift saw that prose fiction had a validity of its own, and a Richardson not a Fielding turned that fiction into the novel as we know it. How conscious such innovators are and how they theorize about their processes are questions about the very origins of art.

Elizabeth Brophy of the College of New Rochelle has set out to answer these questions about Richardson by extracting his theory of art from his letters and prefaces and then using it to evaluate his novels. Although such a principle of criticism would be foreign to the eighteenth-century reliance on absolute standards in all evaluations, and especially to the Puritanical Richardson who strove to make *Clarissa* and *Grandison* into standards of moral perfection, still as an innovator he transcends his age, at least in practice. Although Dr. Brophy finds his theories neither new nor complete, she shows that they were conscious enough, at least after 1741, the date of the earliest letters she cites as evidence, and a year after the appearance of *Pamela*. His bulky correspondence with sympathetic readers reveals a Richardson proud of his craft, determined to preach morality to as many of these readers as possible, and above all convinced that letters reveal character more fully and vividly than conversation can. They probably do, for a shy writer who much preferred writing letters to chatting in his private life, as Brophy suggests. Curiously, she fails to add that they also permit the vivid conflicts of inner drama and surging depths of sensibility which thrilled two generations of readers and writers waiting for the intense innovations of Romanticism. This major impulse in his theory and practice finds almost no place in this book.

In applying these theories to the novels, Brophy blames most of Richardson's weaknesses on his faulty use of his theories, not on the theories themselves. *Pamela* looks like a prig in praising herself and a grasping prude in marrying Mr. B. because she

writes all the letters herself. This narrowness of design hurts the continuation still more, for, although Mr. B. endures the great inner agony and conflict, Pamela writes about it. Yet in the process of her letter writing Pamela makes herself the most important person in Mr. B.'s life, and in the reader's as well. Her example of moral integrity becomes a lesson in her right to be and own herself. If the modern reader is willing to accept this moral interpretation rather than Richardson's conscious, Puritanical moral, Dr. Brophy's defence of his applied theory becomes sound. The same argument applies to *Clarissa*, the novel which must validate or invalidate any criticism of Richardson. Although Dr. Brophy rightly points out that Richardson's epistolary method with its multiple point of view achieves immediacy and variety beyond *Pamela's*, her major stress on Clarissa's assertion of individual rights as a daughter and as Lovelace's victim before and after the rape may seem irrelevant in this book. Individuality is no part of Richardson's theory of his art as discussed. It becomes relevant only if we treat Clarissa's near perfect morality not as Richardson's ideal of a "truly Christian frame of mind" but as an assertion of her individual rights as a woman and a human being. In such a reading, Richardson's ministerial tracts on positive, negative, and routine morality, from the hour by hour programs for daily activity to the method of preparing one's coffin may have to be overlooked, despite Richardson's central concern with them. Undoubtedly Clarissa is vital to the modern reader because she is a woman fighting for the right to exist for her own sake. Her struggle, and even Pamela's, would look heroic if Brophy were to go on and show them off against the general contempt and even hatred for the claims of the individual, particularly the female individual, in the eighteenth century.

Yet within the announced scope the argument is clear and convincing. Dr. Brophy sets out four of Richardson's theories and then applies them in turn to his novels. *Clarissa* as the masterpiece comes triumphantly last. She avoids any anti-climax with *Sir Charles Grandison* by discussing it earlier as another faulty application of theory, though by doing so she loses the full force of her treatment of evolving techniques which end with it. Only the rare sentence is unclear or unwise. A transposition of lines on p. 33 may be blamed on the proofreader, but the author herself smiles behind the too clever italics on p. 104: "Lovelace is clearly different from Mr. B.; while Mr. B. must have *her*, Lovelace must *have her*."

Fielding may not have been the essential innovator that Richardson was, but after he read *Pamela* and turned from the theatre to the novel he had to make the transition from satire to fiction. The gradual shift in his narrative form from the satiric unity of a Swift to the new fictional unity of a Richardson or Sterne appears in the two longest pieces which he collected in the *Miscellanies* of 1743. In introducing *A Journey from This World to the Next* with a view similar to Brophy's but more generalizing, Professor Claude Rawson of the University of Warwick points out aspects of transition which leave the narrative uneven and uneasy. Again the reader can trace the artist's mind at work shaping the scope of his fiction. This mind was less intimate than Richardson's, always maintaining some of the distance of

satire, but like Richardson's it sought to praise the good and castigate the evil. Professor A. R. Humphreys of the University of Leicester has shown how far Fielding succeeds in doing so in both the satiric narrative of *Jonathan Wild* and the later autobiography of the *Voyage to Lisbon*. Although we see the sentimentalizing of the good unbalancing the contrast in Fielding as it seldom does in Richardson, the discrepancy itself reveals the creator's mind at work. Professors Rawson and Humphreys vitalize Fielding the artist for us in this way, just as Dr. Brophy vitalizes Richardson the innovator by showing him struggling with his failures as well as his great success.

Wm. H. Magee

Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image*. London: Faber & Faber, 1974. pp. 316. £3.95.

This is both a socio-political and literary exploration of the African image. In adopting this dual approach, Ezekiel Mphahlele (himself a novelist and professor of English) is evidently affirming what he describes as the "urgent dual responsibility" of the African creative writer, who, caught up in his continent's inescapable racial, political and cultural conflicts, must both interpret his world imaginatively and "act as a political man." The study is divided into two parts: the first explores the African image in terms of politics and the politics of culture; the second, in terms of the literature by both blacks and whites. There is no deliberate attempt to synthesize or assess comparatively the images discussed in these two parts; the author is content just to juxtapose them. His purpose is less to reconcile the different images (there will always be, he states, "stubborn and insoluble tensions between the workings of the imagination and the social forces and imperatives it 'criticizes'"), than to attempt through them to comprehend his complex, vibrant continent. He emphasizes that no single image or truth is commodious enough for the African experience.

The first chapter of Part I, "Blackness on My Mind," examines images of the black man's powerlessness and dependence even after colonialism. The independent countries are still economically and politically manipulated by the white powers, and the colonial state of mind persists because of the deeply entrenched alien religions, languages, and philosophies of education. In Southern Africa, the images are of the culturally and economically brutalized blacks. Mphahlele, a South African, draws on his own personal experience here, and his tone is charged with anger and hatred; but he never rants or raves; his intense feelings are evoked through a disciplined, controlled, taut prose, and are complemented by historical evidence and social insight. In the subsequent chapters, he explores the various images created by black nationalists, by analysts of the African personality, and by advocates of the ideology of negritude. Since the early 60s, Mphahlele has been a fierce critic of the restrictive concepts of negritude as advanced by Senghor and others. His main argu-

ment against Senghor's negritude is that as a social concept it tends to push indiscriminately all Africans into the same fold, and as a literary principle it seeks to regimentalize the writer and to dictate themes and aesthetics. He would accept negritude if it accommodated "any kind of black consciousness . . . be it just a sense of importance of being black; or black independence; or the external trappings of black pride; or the expression of blackness as a state of mind . . ." The final chapter of Part I examines the images of Africa created by the American and Caribbean blacks (a romanticized motherland, an Edenic innocence, a benighted and primitive continent, etc.). This chapter is largely concerned with images found in the works of creative writers, such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Aimé Césaire; perhaps it more appropriately belongs to the literary second part.

An important literary thesis emerges from the author's account of the white writer's images of the black man (a degenerate, a rebel, a noble savage, a child of nature, a compliant figure, etc.). Mphahlele believes that dehumanized caricatures and stiff stereotypes — hence bad literature — are produced by oppression. Oppression denies one race knowledge of the other; it encourages sentimental portraits of the oppressed by liberal members of the ruling race; it forces the oppressor to justify himself and to vindicate his people, thus hatching dry pamphlets and tracts where characters are sacrificed for message. Mphahlele convinces us of the validity of this thesis by concise analyses of a number of novelists including William Plomer, Alan Paton, Olive Schreiner, and Doris Lessing; and its validity justifies his extracting and isolating characters from their novels in exploring the white writers' image of the black man. However, in certain novels by black writers where the black characters are evidently portrayed as human individuals, this approach is not wholly justified. One feels that by extracting these complex characters from their novels for consideration simply as images (the rebel, the victim, the despairing and disillusioned, etc) Mphahlele is *imposing* rather than *discovering* his thesis. To see Achebe's Okonkwo (*Things Fall Apart*), for instance, simply as a man in revolt against white power is to falsify a richly delineated, fully rounded character. One would have liked to see the author explore the human individuality of characters who warrant it, for their individuality surely constitutes yet another African, if universal, image.

Those who know the early version of *The African Image* will realize that the entire first part of this new edition has been rewritten; that the chapter on the American and Caribbean response to Africa is new; and that the second part has been expanded and updated to include younger and more recent writers. When first published in 1962, this book was considered a significant contribution to the study of African literature. It remains an impressive work, both as a perceptive and inclusive consideration of the African experience, and, in sections where Mphahlele tells of his own life, as a personal testament of the inner and outer struggles of the black writer in Southern Africa.

Victor J. Ramraj

Alastair Macdonald, *Shape Enduring Mind*. New York: Vantage Press, 1974. pp. 98. \$3.75.

If great poets are at the frontiers of language, then perhaps within those frontiers competent poets make interesting journeys, and mediocre ones only appear to take a trip. The volume of poems which fails to move us may fail because its language doesn't visit often enough outside the neighbourhood of prose:

The neighbour's cat —  
the ginger tabby — arrives with a silent plop,  
fastidiously to investigate the refuse-bins; or else,  
sidling flat in the herbaceous border, to pretend  
to stalk the blackbird, angry and chattering at it  
from the middle of the grass.

These lines are from a two-page poem called "Back Garden," and while it would be wrong to suggest that the subject matter in *Shape Enduring Mind* is usually so close to home, the verbosity of this poem is not untypical of the entire collection, where words used exceed the thing said.

Considering the breadth of his interests Alastair Macdonald would seem to know the value of poetry, but not the price of language. In Wilde's terms he is clearly not a cynic about subjects fit for poems; but neither is he an ironist, and this might in part explain his lack of compression and intensity. Where there is irony, poems like "Mini-Skirt" and "T.V. News" work. It is the verbosity where there is no irony which retards the poetic journey. A line such as "leadened by day heat's hurt" ("Holiday Night") should, one feels, be ironical if only to assuage what is otherwise sheer wordiness.

Macdonald is a compulsive sketcher rather than a strong imagist. Even in an apparently astringent poem like "Labour," no image unfolds to haunt one: ". . . night falls / too soon and frightening things / cry in the dark." Yes, one asks, but *what* things? Things are often distant or wistful, poeticized but not realized; a scene is set but movement on stage may be perfunctory. Where there is an ineluctable movement of language, there are poems which appeal ("Buses into Town," "Ending"). Yet where the movement relies on windy syntax, or on adverbs / adjectives poeticized into nouns, originality doesn't necessarily follow, and the poetic journey returns to wordiness — "as the car waits at the lights / to accelerate into / the forwards" ("Traffic").

The pièce de résistance of this collection is a twenty-page poem called "The Work." It shares the moralizing tendency of many of the other poems, as it does a sense of lost time ("a glimpsed whole eluding," "Equinox"). In this poem the glimpsed whole is a four-hundred-year-old masterpiece which is never identified, but which we conclude is a painting of the Crucifixion. It hangs in an Italian cathedral, and is a three-star attraction for tourists. The poet is among these travellers, though his voice is only one of several in the poem. We hear from the artist who created the masterpiece, from the masterpiece itself, from a soldier who helped to hide it during the last war, from a beggar, from a teen-

age girl and an old man. By impersonating these, the poet hopes to understand the masterpiece — indeed, art itself — which is both the creation of man's awareness as well as shaper of man's collective mind, enduring through centuries of conflict. Since the present, it seems, is determined both by tomorrow and by yesterday, "The work shapes relativities that haunt us / before and after it is seen." This work is the "whole at storm's eye," obviously the still point of a turning world to which it is the poet's job to "journey for what can be seen / and what it can tell us / and back and back to the self." The structure of the poem is interesting. And the three sections given over to the voices of the Old Master, masterpiece and young girl are effectively moving. Unfortunately, the poet's own persona comes across a little ponderously: the analysis of his visit to the work seems too expansive, again verbose. Unevenness settles in, excitement glimmers then pales.

Kafka, when he was twenty, wrote in a letter that "what we must have are those books which come upon us like ill-fortune, and distress us deeply, like the death of one we love better than ourselves, like suicide. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us." *Shape Enduring Mind* is not one of these books, though in it the voice of the Old Master would seem to agree with young Kafka that it is ungentle metaphor we need to drive home the ineffable:

My art — a dream, a refuge, seeming way  
to make the world my own, a battering rod  
upon my back, imperious call to obey,  
a love to soothe, an anodyne, a god.

Keath Fraser

## Books Received

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- BOUCHARD, DONALD F., *Milton: a structural reading*. London: Edward Arnold; Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974. pp. 180. \$15.95.
- BOYDSTON, JO ANN and POULOS, KATHLEEN, eds., *Checklist of Writings about John Dewey*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; Toronto: Burns & MacEachern, 1974. pp. 396. \$14.50.
- CAWLEY, A. C., ed., *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays*. London: J. M. Dent, 1974: pp. 266. £1.90. hardcover, 95p. pb.
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- MATHIAS, ROLAND, *Writers of Wales: Vernon Watkins*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974. pp. 123. £1.
- MESSINGER, N. P., and WATSON, J. R., eds. *Victorian Poetry: The City of Dreadful Night and other poems*. London: Dent, 1974. pp. 242. £3.50 hardcover, £1.75 pb.
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- OLIVER, H. J., ed., *Christopher Marlow, Dido Queen of Carthage and The Massacre at Paris: The Revels Plays*. London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1974. pp. 187. £1.25.
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- THEKLA, SISTER, *George Herbert: Idea and Image*. Newport Pagnell, England: The Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Assumption, 1974. pp. 307. £2.85.
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