Book Reviews

Samuel L. Macey, *Clocks and the Cosmos: Time in Western Life and Thought*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books (The Shoe String Press), 1980. pp. 262. $19.50.

Clocks and the Cosmos is both informative and stimulating. Its subject is the impact of horology, the study of clocks and watches, on the writings of philosophers, theologians, and poets and novelists, especially from 1660 to 1760 but also in the nineteenth century — approximately, from "Hudibras" Butler to "Erewhon" Butler. Indeed, "Horology in Western Literature and Thought" would be a more accurate subtitle than the one the book has. Instead of imitating Poulet, Macey supplies, with scholarship and enthusiasm, "as wide a historical survey as possible" (p. 11) of a subject he feels has been neglected. Acknowledging and accepting the outlines of the shift from mechanical to organic models traced by Meyer Abrams and the reactions to mechanism explored, for example, by Herbert L. Sussman's *Victorians and the Machine* and, in America, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, Macey fills in convincing detail from his own subject. His book has the virtues of a good survey — broad coverage and a wealth of illuminating examples. Of course we all feel familiar with the image of the clock, although many students must furtively regard the clockwork universe and its Clockmaker God as an inexplicable aberration of the eighteenth-century mind. *Clocks and the Cosmos* is informative because it demonstrates that the image of the clock was far more exciting, pervasive, and versatile than superficial familiary would suggest. It is stimulating because the background it supplies encourages the reader's own investigation of the image in the literature and even cinema familiar to him.

The first of the book's four sections treats the historical background of clockwork technology, while the next two look at the impact of that technology, first on philosophers and theologians from Bacon and Descartes to Paley and then on writers of literature

in the same period. That period is roughly contemporary with the horological revolution (1660-1760) during which British craftsmen greatly increased the accuracy, expanded the production, and reduced the price of timepieces. In 1776, Adam Smith could cite watchmaking as an example of the advantages of division of labour: after a century during which the cost of living doubled, a watch that would have cost twenty pounds could be had for twenty shillings (p. 34). Line drawings of verge-and-foliot mechanisms help the reader appreciate the technical achievements and improved methods of production that gave clockmaking the high-technology glamour that we now find in the computer industry. Macey's discussion of Boyle's use of the metaphor and of the prevalence of the image of the watch in Defoe and Hogarth suggests its social importance. The second section's discussion of the clock in philosophy and theology from Bacon and Descartes to Paley thus draws on the excitement of the technical achievement that provoked its use. Familiar examples — like Johnson's assertion that, in knowledge of the heart, Richardson was to Fielding as a clockmaker was to a man who could merely tell the time — gain freshness from context, for Macey casts a wider net among philosophers and theologians than most literary historians and critics. He traces the use of the clock as an image of order, the development of and reactions to automata and to the Cartesian notion that animals were machines, and finally the versatility of the image. Since either weights or springs could drive a clock, for example, the clock suggested the tentativeness of any hypothetical mechanism explaining an observed phenomenon: empirical success supplied an image of empirical skepticism. The section concludes with the decline of the clockwork model as writers sought a model better able to do justice to growth and reproduction.

In the third section, on the influence of literature, Macey's discussion becomes more purely literary. Macey collects many examples and is full of stimulating observations on matters of detail. We learn, to take a minor example, that Turkey was one of the main places of export of ingenious clocks and so see how it is appropriate that Walter Shandy, who regulates his life by the family clock, is a retired Turkey merchant (p. 149). His discussion of *The Clockmakers Outcry against the Author of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760), which he suggests may be Sterne's, is welcome. (Some of his readers will want to know that this "rare pamphlet" [p. 243, n. 14] has been available in modern reprint since 1975 as part of Volume 3 of Garland Publishing's Sterneiana series.) Macey's wide-ranging and stimulating discussion of literary reactions during and shortly after the Horological Revolution con-

cludes the three sections that form the strongest part of his book. The final section, on ambivalence towards the clock metaphor in Romantic and Victorian literature, seems sketchier, although my reservation is not entirely fair. It seems sketchier because the context Macey supplies is so full that the reader develops its implications along with him and also because the dominant images and assumptions of the nineteenth century, which condition the reaction to the older image, are beyond the scope of his book and so are properly left to implication and brief reference. He is interesting on the ways in which Melville, Poe, and Butler fit into the evolution of the metaphor of the clock, and he adds fresh observations, for example, on the watches that characterize individuals in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Since the book is so thoroughly researched, I miss in this section reference to E. P. Thompson's "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" (*Past and Present*, 35 [1967]), which clarifies the relationship between easily accessible timepieces and the changed social attitudes toward time their industrial use encourages: brief reference to such social history could supply links between the context of Victorian industry and travel and the literary image of the clockwork devil that Macey discusses so well.

Finally, this is a handsome book. The endpapers reproduce Doré's lithograph, *Bourgeois Men Setting their Watches by the Noon Gun*, nicely illustrating the final section. Photographs of chronometers from 1700 to 1816 portray the technological exuberance the book discusses. Photographs of Hogarth's *Miss Mary Edwards* and *The Lady's Last Stake* support the discussion of Hogarth, although these are too small and dark for much detail to be clear. A few errors escaped proofreading: there are some misspellings — "indentical" (p. 57), "mightly" for "mighty" (p. 211, in a quotation from Shelley), "*Bulletion*" (p. 245, n. 47), "Yong" for "Young" (p. 246, n. 9); there are commas rather than periods at the end of two sentences that conclude with quotations (pp. 100, 126); there are inappropriate capitals for the second word of a sentence (p. 112) and a whole title (p. 132); there are some omissions — a closing parenthesis (p. 109), a volume number (p. 235, n. 64), quotation marks at the start of a quotation (p. 240, n. 16). None of these, however, distorts meaning or causes serious inconvenience. *Clocks and the Cosmos* is a stimulating, knowledgeable book that should appeal to a wide range of readers, from students and scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature to readers of science fiction curious about either clocks and automata or the impact of technology on thought.

DAVID OAKLEAF

J. S. Bratton, *The Impact of Victorian Children's Literature*. Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1981. pp. 230. $23.50.

The Impact of Victorian Children's Literature has a puzzling title. J. S. Bratton qualifies his analysis of this literature's impact by reminding us that we don't know how many children actually read these books or what their effect was. Nor does he discuss all Victorian children's literature, although at times the reader may feel that he does. A more accurate title would reflect his purpose, stated in his introduction as an evaluation of nineteenth-century children's fiction that was written to convey moral instruction. He traces the development of this fiction from primarily evangelical objectives to social concerns, dealing with representative or influential writers as a way of trying to clarify his subject. Yet even on these terms the book is self-defeating, for Bratton tries to do too much. Organizing his book into six chapters (theory and background, the development of juvenile publishing until 1850, evangelical fiction, boys' books, girls' books, the decay of the tradition) he could easily have expanded the book into six books. Admirable in its intentions, the book's impact on its own readers is likely to be exhaustion.

The best chapter is the introductory one where Bratton sensitively explores the problems of his topic. He points out how difficult it is to generalize about this literature or its readership. Even within a social class, experiences of literature differ depending on very particular circumstances. How then can we generalize about Victorian children when not all children went to school or the same kind of schools? Those who did attend would still have had different experiences of literature depending on numerous factors, for example, the nature of the teacher or the child's family background. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 was critical in the history of this moral literature, for it led to "compulsory, free and essentially secular state education." The child's experience was no longer as unpredictable. The Sunday Schools that had developed to teach reading as well as religion gradually lost their pupils when one of their functions was taken over by the state system. The effect was to break up "the close links between literacy and morality, basic education and social control which had led to the development of children's literature in the early part of the century." The reward books that Sunday School teachers presented to their pupils are just one example of the impact of social conditions upon literature. In this way the Sunday Schools created a need for a certain kind of book, just as later Mudie's library helped control the nature of adult Victorian fiction.

So far, so good. It is important to be reminded of the social and historical background to this literature, of the need to avoid the facile generalizing that still occurs regarding Victorian children and

their literature. The book falters when Bratton proceeds to discuss possible critical approaches. Again he is aware of problems, but his solution is unsatisfactory. He rightly states that "the liberal humanist tradition of literary criticism offers no effective approach to the material with which this study is concerned." By liberal humanist tradition, he seems to mean a Great Tradition, an approach that ignores the nature of the reader, the desires of the writer, and the role of the publisher. Acknowledging that most of the books do not appeal to the modern reader, that only scholars, and few at that, curl up with a good Victorian religious tract, he notes that the conditions of reading and buying these books differed from the usual practice of adult reading and buying. The child readers lacked the freedom of adults who could choose and thereby influence their writers. Children rarely had choices; the books were given to them for their own good. A writer did not try to please his child readers; he was more concerned to please a publisher who was most often a religious man, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, concerned to teach the readers what was good for them. Did children ever question these lessons? We may not know what real Victorian children thought, but we do have an imaginary child's response. When Alice falls down the rabbit hole, she turns to her education for assistance only to realize that nothing she has read has prepared her for this. Lewis Carroll may not have been impressed with the lessons of Victorian children's literature, but Alice remains confident that her lessons are right; it is the wonderful world that is wrong.

If as Bratton claims we cannot know whether the books were read, if adult memoirs that mention the impact of specific books cannot be taken as absolute proof of a general response, then Bratton as a critic is placed in an awkward position, divided from the original audience by age, education, and era, yet trying to view these books outside the smug perspective of the twentieth century. In the end it is not clear whose perspective he adopts. He constantly shifts from describing an imagined original reader's response to his own. One paragraph on Marryat begins, "Marryat has an axe to grind in this matter"; the next opens, "From the boy reader's point of view." Which boy reader? In each instance, the writer's stated intention implies an imagined reader, and what we are left with is a densely written analysis of far too many works with an appriopriate reader for each.

This density raises the question of Bratton's own intended audience. Much of the book is devoted to abbreviated plot summary and analysis. Many books are discussed in one or two paragraphs. Even books that Bratton regards as highly significant, for example, Hesba Stretton's novel, *Jessica's First Prayer*, are analyzed in less

than two pages. Those of Bratton's readers who do not know these books beforehand are not likely to gain in appreciation after one paragraph; those who have read the books will not benefit from such meagre analysis. We may never know the effect of Religious Tract fiction upon Victorian children, but *The Impact of Victorian Children's Literature* mainly impresses us as conveying too much too fast. Although Bratton tries to express the individuality of the different writers, his form works against him. A reader who wants to understand and enjoy Victorian moral fiction for the young would be better off reading a handful of the original works available in most libraries in Robert Lee Woolf's series *Victorian Fiction: Novels of Faith and Doubt.*

Apart from the slight discussions of individual authors, such a reader would still find much that is useful in Bratton. In his chapter on the development of juvenile publishing, Bratton notes that in the late eighteenth century, books for children and reading for the poor were closely linked. Both the Religious Tract Society (RTS) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) responded to this twin need. The two societies became known for different kinds of books. The Evangelical RTS imitated James Janeway and concentrated on deathbed scenes and conversions. They made titles available in different editions to appeal to different markets. This was the first step in the decay of their original purpose: "saving souls gradually ceases to be so overriding an aim of all RTS books that it makes all social distinctions evaporate: not only the bindings, but also the contents of the volumes began to be changed by the social groups for which they are intended, and the social lessons they therefore carry." The SPCK, unlike the RTS, had a ready market, providing books for the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, founded in 1811. Bratton prefers the RTS conversion story, finding too many contradictions in the SPCK tales whose real lessons seem more often social than religious in nature. When commercial publishers entered the market, their eclectic book lists allowed a more rapid development of children's fiction, but at the same time such lists further moved Victorian children's fiction away from its religiously pure origins.

Such developments seem to dismay Bratton. By his concluding chapter, he is almost lamenting the gradual watering-down of stern religion from these books. He has previously spoken of fictional models to suit instructional purposes. Now he talks about the "emptying of meaning" in the final development of the literary conventions established by evangelical writers. The power of the converted infant, able to turn sinners to God, degenerates into the power of little Lord Fauntleroy. Love of mother replaces love of

God. The effect is a "process of structural hardening coupled with moral softening." *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction* might better have been titled *The Decline and Fall of the Victorian Religious Children's Story*, or perhaps more aptly, *Paradise Lost.*

ADRIENNE KERTZER

Leonie Kramer, ed., *The Oxford History of Australian Literature.* Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981. pp. 509. £27.50 ($49.50).

The body of *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* is made up of three sections, on fiction, drama, and poetry, each by a different contributor, but all from the University of Sydney. The fact that the contributors are all from the one university was not a good idea; while that was convenient for the editor, it precluded inviting more qualified people, like the drama critic Margaret Williams, to contribute. Adrian Mitchell does an indifferent job with his section on fiction, Terry Sturm does a respectable job with his section on drama, and Vivian Smith does a highly creditable job on poetry. The book, then, gets better as it goes, but if we read sequentially, we need to go through nearly 300 of the 400 pages before we reach Smith's section. Most people, however, will use the History as a reference text, to be read in accordance with their special interest.

Mitchell's section, the first, suffers from the lack of a strong, organizing viewpoint. His treatment tends to be desultory, much of it reading like a series of Book Reports. He does attempt to give his account direction by tracing a development from the romance to the realistic novel, but he never explicates his notion of romance or realism, so that he is often vague and sometimes outright muddled, as at the end of his discussion of Henry Handel Richardson: "Her themes are romantic, set in a world both convincingly recreated and seriously entertained. Richardson is . . . the doyen (*sic*) of realism in Australian fiction." Mitchell is prone to write in abstractions: he maintains, for instance, that Christina Stead's novels "present the range and texture of experience but will not impose a shape upon it."

Sturm is even more prone than Mitchell to abstract writing, as if that were a mark of intelligence and cultivation. In addition, he often packs too much into his sentences, shifting gear as he proceeds. In the following sentence, he shifts gear several times, and makes detours rather than take a direct route: "Sydney Tomholt, most of whose plays appeared in a single volume . . . in 1936, had a much

more vigorous sense of dramatic action and visual effect than Palmer, whose tendency to rely too exclusively on discussion and debate in *Hail Tomorrow* is also apparent in other examples of social realism like George Landen Dann's *Fountains Beyond . . .*, an otherwise workmanlike, unpretentious play aimed at exposing the plight of Aboriginals dwelling on the fringes of white townships. . . ." Sturm also tends to be repetitious, especially in his disproportionately long account of Australian drama before Esson. He is unable to vitalize that part of his history; it is likely to remain of academic interest, having little to do with the sudden outburst of dramatic activity in the late 1960's. By devoting so much attention to Australian drama before the 1960's, he is trying to suggest a greater continuity than really exists. He skirts the subject of the indebtedness of recent Australian drama to foreign drama, but that debt is enormous and has to be confronted. Sturm's thesis of continuity is strained, and seems born of a narrow nationalism.

A narrow nationalism also weakens Mitchell's history of fiction. He quite isolates Australian fiction from its foreign influences (except, curiously, Randolph Stow's debt to Conrad). But, to take some examples, Christina Stead's novels need to be brought into relationship with Balzac's, Martin Boyd's with Henry James's, Patrick White's with Lawrence's and Mann's and Dostoievsky's, Joseph Furphy's with Laurence Sterne's. The Australian novel is not autogenous, and cannot be evaluated against itself alone. Set alongside Sterne, Furphy appears a minor but interesting disciple, not the colossus that the more nationalistic Australian critics try to make him. Henry Lawson, too, set alongside other short story writers in English, appears trivial and rather constipated, interesting more for his unusual settings and subject matter than for his inherent achievement (his stories are less impressive, for instance, than those of Sarah Orne Jewett, a highly respected but not major figure in American fiction). There is still too much confusion among Australian critics between the importance of certain writers in the development of a tradition and their actual achievement; that is one of the main signs of the youngness of Australian criticism.

Literature in English by the Aboriginal peoples of Australia is quite neglected in the History. While the techniques of their writings are those of English literature, their themes reflect a different consciousness. Smith is the only contributor to mention any Aboriginal names at all (he mentions two), and even he records the name Jindyworobak as from "the Aboriginal language," thereby giving evidence of the widespread ignorance of White Australians of things Aboriginal: there are at least 11 families of Aboriginal languages, as against only three in Europe (Indo-European, Finno-Ugrian, and Basque).

Apart from Smith's interesting generalizations upon Australian poetry, there are few observations in the History about tendencies and "traditions" in Australian literature, and nothing at all about its special temperament. The literature is unusually depressing, and one can understand why when one goes back to its roots. As Leonie Kramer points out in her Preface, Australia was settled in very different circumstances from America: its history began in rejection and hopelessness, not in choice and hope, and neither the passage of years nor the migration of free settlers from various countries has much modified the resentment and defensiveness that lie close to the surface in Australian life. There are significant gaps in Australian literature which quickly strike those living outside the culture but which are not remarked upon by any of the contributors, perhaps because these gaps are not so noticeable to those living within the culture: the literature quite lacks tenderness and is frequently abrasive. The great Australian novels are bleak; and while there are plenty of novels dealing with the struggle for a principle of survival, there are almost no tender novels in the whole literature. There is no great love story in Australian literature and, until the last decade, virtually no love poetry (Mary Gilmore and Judith Wright wrote of love and motherhood because, as women in Australia, they were *expected* to). The body of comic literature is very small, and in what there is, the negative qualities of derision, the desire to humiliate, vulgarity and brashness loom large. These negative aspects have not prevented Australia from achieving an important literature, but they may constrict the development of that literature; in any case, some account needs to be taken of them in a history of that literature.

The Oxford History of Australian Literature does not advance previous histories of the literature as much as one would wish. In particular, it does not notably advance the 1976 revision of Geoffrey Dutton's *The Literature of Australia* (even its Bibliography is highly dependent on the Bibliography in Dutton). Its chief merit lies in Vivian Smith's history of Australian poetry up to about 1970, which seems to me the best available. Smith is the most cosmopolitan of the contributors, the most aware of what was taking place in English or American or French poetry before it took place in Australian, and his section is that much more satisfying than the others. The other contributors might well have heeded Kramer's admonition in her Preface: "Any definition of Australian cultural identity and its reflection in literature which does not take account of the enrichment of Australian experience from a variety of sources . . . is bound to be inadequate."

JOHN B. BESTON

Jean Hall, *The Transforming Image: A Study of Shelley's Major Poetry*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980. pp. 176. $12.95.

Jean Hall's book is clear and consistent though by no means simple, and a brief discussion of the argument can hardly avoid losing much of its subtlety. The author begins by noticing the critical views of Shelley as skeptic on the one hand and as Platonist on the other, agreeing with Harold Bloom's description of him as a "tough-minded Humean poet" afflicted with "an idealistic and pseudo-Platonic heart." Attempting to show that his underlying ideas are empiricist, she quotes the view expressed in his early essay, *On Life*: "nothing exists but as it is perceived." According to Professor Hall, meaning for Shelley is contextual rather than objective. He is attracted to Plato more as poet than as thinker and he creates images that exist in the process of consciousness rather than in a transcendent world. Shelley's poetry is therefore centrally a poetry of experience, in which the Humean world of habitual flow is illuminated by "intuitive experience" expressed through imagery. It is also a poetry of *individual* experience, concerned not with Truth but with a particular poet's apprehension of truth in a particular moment: poems may end by questioning themselves or by disintegrating under the stress of intuitive rapture.

In this way, *The Transforming Image* draws a contrast between Shelley's kind of poetry and the more traditional poetry of Dante or Milton, to cite examples used at different times. The traditional mode presents a world of appearances that hide the divine reality revealed by the poet. Shelley's poetry, on the other hand, has no faith in divine reality: all we have is the world of appearances, the very world of all of us in which the imagination may teach us to see heaven or hell. Shelley's poetry is therefore, says Professor Hall, concerned not with the stripping away of appearances but with their transformation. Shelley's discussion in the *Defence* of the great poem built up by poets since the beginning of the world suggests the role of the imagination in cultural tradition, constantly providing new contexts for the familiar, transforming dead signs into living metaphors, seeing new truths in familiar appearances. Thus through the transformation of countless intuitive moments, culture is kept alive for those who participate in it. Similarly, an individual poem sustains itself only as long as the poet transforms its central image into a version of himself. Shelley's poetry "calls for the incessant creation of new poetry," moving towards an ideal that is not a transcendent reality but a new expression of the relation between the self and the world. Identifying the world of poetry with the world of self, the transforming image becomes in any individual poem the embodiment of the poet's desire, the world transformed

by poetic power into a world of poetry that denies the distinction between appearance and reality.

But Shelley's poetry faces a dilemma. In *Alastor*, the Poet — and probably the Narrator as well — fails to recognize that the beloved ideal is not an objective reality but the image of idealized self. His idealistic quest ends in death because it insists on regarding visionary experience as transcendental and therefore as unattainable in life. The alternative for the idealistic lover, Professor Hall suggests, is to realize visionary experience *in poetry*, through "ecstatic union with one's own imagery." The poet must unite himself with his poetry, finding his beloved in the world of the transformed self that is also the world of poetry. However, when this union is achieved through the transformation of the central image of the beloved in *Epipsychidion*, the result is annihilation — not only of the lovers but of the poem. Professor Hall therefore shows how Shelley's poetry is built on the edge of the grave, warding off with song its own decay and presenting itself and the poetic process as temporary and even tentative affirmers of life and love in a world that includes death and tyranny.

Occasionally I wished for more direct consideration of the very objective images in some of Shelley's poems: while the Poet in *Alastor* certainly does try to embrace his vision and drag her into the real world, Professor Hall does not remark that she reaches out to embrace him first. I would have been interested in her remarks on this (to me) puzzling and intriguing moment in the poem, especially since the author places a certain emphasis on the *Poet*'s initiative. But the discussion of *The Triumph of Life*, in which Professor Hall argues that the poem is a fragment and shows how the transformations of Life are a parody of the transforming images that recreate the world, is the most helpful discussion I know of this difficult poem. Rousseau becomes another version of the *Alastor* Poet, unable to interpret his vision of the shape all light in a world outside time and therefore unable to escape death in the world of Life: "Like the oracular statements of Demogorgon, which must be interpreted by Asia in order to mean anything, the shape all light's cryptic command ["Arise and quench thy thirst"] is given content by the essential being of the person who obeys it."

This is a very compressed book. In well under two hundred pages it considers *Alastor*, "Mont Blanc," "Ode to the West Wind," *Prometheus Unbound*, *Epipsychidion*, *Adonais*, and *The Triumph of Life*, as well as making briefer comments on a few other poems, notably *The Cenci*, which Professor Hall compares to and contrasts with *Prometheus Unbound*. But in spite of this compression, *The Transforming Image* is clearly and elegantly written. The Introduction and brief first chapter deal with the critical and philo-

sophical background of the argument, but throughout the rest of the book critical debate is carried on mainly in the full and helpful notes. I was sorry that Professor Hall did not extend her approach to other poems, especially *The Witch of Atlas*, a poem of transformation with a hermaphroditic "Image" of unrealized potential at its centre. But the argument of the book suggests to the reader new approaches to poems Professor Hall does not discuss. It is a considerable achievement, I think, to say so much in so brief a book and to say it so well. The book is filled with memorable sentences and vivid writing: it is at once precise and suggestive, important and unpretentious. For anyone who still expects from Shelley fuzzy idealism and wings beating vainly in the void, this is exactly the right corrective. For anyone who would like to understand the major poetry better, it offers clear, sensitive and well argued readings.

ANNE MCWHIR

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