

RICHARD E. HUGHES  
*The Lively Image:*  
*4 Myths in Literature*  
Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop  
Publishers, 1975. Pp. 227.

Northrop Frye somewhere refers to archetypal criticism as "fantastical learning," and after reading Hughes's book one can appreciate the force of the characterization. If, trusting to etymology, criticism can be described as an activity that involves the making of distinctions, then *The Lively Image* is an exercise in anticriticism, since it applies to the problems of literature the syncretic habits of mind that the author identifies as "mythological thinking," through which, "we recreate the oldest mental behavior of our species, we make contact with our earliest and most natural thought processes."

A good example of what Hughes means by this, and of the limitations of his approach, is his discussion of the Narcissus myth, interpreted, apparently on no firmer authority than Freud's word for it, as symbolic of the impulse for a simple, collective, nonthreatening, edenic condition of life. This impulse, not surprisingly, Hughes finds expressed in Richard Brautigan's *Watermelon Sugar*, which thus we are to see as essentially a reformulation of the Narcissus myth. The two stories, if we understand them in their primitive nature, are really the same.

The problem, of course, is that the more an idea is made to account for the less it is likely to mean. Generalizing is a process of intellectual dilution; if you extend it far enough you can make anything seem cognate to anything, but as a statement loses its precision it loses its value. Hughes is probably right in claiming that his method parallels "our earliest and most natural thought processes," but that, by itself, doesn't constitute much of a recommendation, as anyone who has spent much time correcting student papers should know. There is perhaps no pattern of argument so fraught with danger as that from analogy.

And, after all, how useful is identifying Agatha Christie's *A Murder is Announced* with the story of Midas's barber? How much light is generated in either direction? It is, perhaps, marginally interesting that the Dionysius myth, construed as a para-

digm for the Jungian collective unconscious, does share certain traditional symbols with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but when Hughes attempts to use these similarities as the basis for an interpretation, as he does when concluding from Kurtz's reference to his fiancé as his "intended" that the lady is "will and consciousness . . . she is cerebration and the mind," he has clearly pushed his analogy farther than it will comfortably go. There is no easier trap to fall into than the assumption that because A is like B in certain points that it must be identical to B and therefore must correspond at every point.

A small quibble. After each of the book's main sections are appended short stories which Hughes describes as "interludes," "a chance for the mind to play with each of the myths in a new costume, to see how the myths take on new shapes." None of these four stories is referred to in the argument proper, and together they constitute about half the book's total length. They are all four of them very good stories, but with the price of books what it is these days there seems precious little justification for yet another reprinting of "The Secret Sharer." One hopes that this sort of thing will not become common practice.

Nicholas Guild

MAARA HAAS  
*The Street Where I Live*  
Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson  
1975. Pp. 215. \$8.95.

Maara Haas is well known in Canada as a radio personality with an enviable reputation as a reader of her own work. The stories in *The Street Where I Live* are set in a slum neighborhood of prewar Winnipeg and deal with that city's ethnic population, consisting mainly of first and second generation Italians, Polish and Ukrainian immigrants. Read in carefully modulated tones, complete with appropriate accents, the stories come alive as warm, gently satiric evocations of communal urban

life. Yet these same stories, which engage us when they are dramatized individually on radio, are considerably less captivating published as a collection and without benefit of an interpreting voice.

Part of the problem here is the publisher's (or writer's) temerity in calling this collection of anecdotes a novel. The reader of a novel has a right to expect a reasonable range of information about each of the central characters, as well as the prospect of growth—of change of some kind—in at least some of them. But the characters in *The Street Where I Live* are static; we know little more about them in the final vignette in which we see them than in the initial one. Like Dickens's Mrs. Micawber (*David Copperfield*), they say much the same thing in much the same way about much the same kind of situation each time they appear. This is a pity, for the potential is enormous for the development of such characters as Mrs. Kolosky and Mrs. Weinstein, the two gossiping harridans who dominate the other women on the street.

Still, although the characters are undoubtedly flat in E. M. Forster's terms, they are nonetheless individualized, and the manner in which Ms. Haas accomplishes this individuality sets the tone of the book. For each of the characters is a type-cast representative of a specific ethnic group—in the manner of the stage Irishman—and is set apart from the others as much by his peculiar way of mutilating the English language as by anything else. Believing all the usually pejorative myths about one another's national characteristics, religion and moral codes, the characters here never really come to terms with their neighbors. But they do have to live with each other, and the resulting conversations, confrontations, and general confusion is the stuff of light comedy.

Memorable moments occur when Ukrainian Mrs. Golombioski translates the program of a local cultural evening to Regina Britannia, when Mr. Franciosa berates his hockey-mad boy Angelo, and when the Widow Siboolka visits a gypsy fortune-teller. And on occasion, anecdotes transcend the localized setting. The antics of Orest the Undertaker, who "saves" clothes from corpses to rent at wedding parties, and then worries in case someone will recognize them, could amuse readers from various cultural backgrounds. And the activities of the druggist's two daughters who, when left to mind their father's shop one afternoon, ravish its candy counter

and cosmetic shelves, have the potential to arouse memories of similar youthful escapades in many readers' minds.

Those who will enjoy the book most, however, are those readers who have experienced the kind of scenes it recreates. For most others, *The Street Where I Live* will be of limited interest, providing a light-hearted, mildly satiric look at just how ridiculous we humans can sometimes be.

Stan Atherton

### WERNER WEBER

#### *Forderungen: Bemerkungen und Aufsätze zur Literatur*

(Demands: Comments on and Studies of Literature)

Zürich: Artemis, n.d. Pp. 312. Fr. 19.

Werner Weber, since 1951 Feuilleton-Editor of the reputable Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, has published a great number of articles and reviews many of which have been reprinted in the form of collections and diaries (*Figuren und Fahrten*, 1956; *Zeit ohne Zeit*, 1959; *Wissenschaft und Gestaltung*, 1959; *Die Reise nach Sancheville*, 1960; *Tagebuch eines Lesers*, 1965). His achievement in the field of literary criticism has been acknowledged by several academies and institutions in Switzerland and Germany

*Forderungen* . . . begins with a short article on Émile Zola and Flaubert. Zola's words on the death of Flaubert (which remind Weber of Victor Hugo's "La mort de Balzac") are examined and analyzed. Zola's description of his trip—along with Daudet, Charpentier, Edmond de Goncourt, and Maupassant—to Croisset to visit Flaubert on March 28, 1880 and then his return on May 8, 1880 to the same place in order to attend the funeral of "Monsieur Gustave" is intelligently discussed and evaluated.

The next four pages deal with Baudelaire and what Claude Pichois in his *Baudelaire devant ses contemporains* calls the "Legende du Baudelaire. La vrai et la factice, le réel et le mythique." After