

Songs obscures the very point of this volume—Innocence contains as much goodness as evil and, in Blake's system, is one of the contraries necessary for progression. Maybe the devil lurks behind the ironically presented philosophy of Tom Dacre in "The Chimney Sweeper," but one wonders what Pattison would do with the non-ironic poems in *Songs of Innocence*, "Laughing Song" for instance.

My purpose here is not to interpret Wordsworth and Blake but to insist that thematic studies like this devote as much attention to the literature as to the development of theme. There is a difference between an argument whose boundaries are established prior to the composition of a book and one whose boundaries are discovered and clarified during its actual writing. The first tends to impose itself on literature whereas the second is more likely to emerge from a sensitive and conscientious response to it. Pattison's argument too often seems imposed. Too often he regards poetry as the servant of his theme rather than as the master capable of defining its boundaries and implications.

Despite the above reservations *The Child Figure in English Literature* is a useful study. As noted, the premise is interesting and Pattison is undoubtedly correct in stressing the central influence of Christian doctrine on the uses of the child in literature. His examination of the social and philosophical forces responsible for shaping the different views of childhood is illuminating and reaffirms the important connection between literature and its intellectual milieu. And finally, his discussion of Victorian prose (Chapters IV-VI) is consistently more detailed and stimulating than his earlier comments on poetry. (His comments in Chapter V on the importance of childhood perspective in autobiography are especially astute and could be expanded into a much needed study of this subject.) Pattison is definitely at his best when addressing prose, arguing here with a contagious enthusiasm which prompts one to reexperience the literature. One cannot ask more of criticism.

Like the other aspects of this book, the style is uneven. Pattison's use of language is at times loose and affected, evident in phrases like "thunderous silence that envelops the idea of childhood" in Classical antiquity (the point of this paradox is not clear), "theme of ambiguity" (is ambiguity normally a theme?) and "theme

of innocence" (will not the more common innocence do here?) At other times loosely selected diction combines with awkward syntax to produce indecipherable sentences like the following: "The sentiment of innocence [is innocence a sentiment?] that childhood evokes in Shakespeare is a felt response to the brutal condition of fallen man, and this sentiment is as strong as the fallen state against which it reacts is shown to be corrupt." Fortunately, such stylistic lapses are rare. Pattison's prose is generally clean and, unlike many critical books, refreshingly readable. I would like to see his obvious talents employed on a more focused and detailed, if less ambitious, study of this subject.

Roger Ploude

MARK SPILKA, ED.
*Towards a Poetics of Fiction:
Essays from Novel: A Forum on
Fiction, 1967-1976*
Bloomington: Indiana University
Press, 1977. Pp. 359.

This collection is almost as good as having a complete run of the journal *Novel* on one's shelves, and, in some ways it is even better, since editor Mark Spilka has arranged his selections from the early issues in thematic order. There are six main sections to his book. The first, entitled "Towards a Poetics of Fiction," which gives its name to the collection as a whole, is clearly the most important, since it consists of six essays written expressly for *Novel* and a seventh which has a direct bearing on the subject. These essays are by now required reading for any serious student of fiction theory: they are "An Approach through Structure" by Malcolm Bradbury, "An Approach through Language" by David Lodge, "An Approach through History" by Frank Kermode, "An Approach through Narrative" by Barbara Hardy, "An Approach through Genre" by Robert Scholes, "An Approach through Time" by Eleanor N. Hutchens, and bringing up the rear, "The Problem with a Poetics of the Novel" by Walter L. Reed, who takes

on all such theories by arguing that a poetics of fiction is neither possible nor desirable. It is very much to the credit of Mark Spilka and his fellow-editors on *Novel* that they opened their columns to Reed while profoundly disagreeing with his premise. The seven essays, taken together as they are printed here, certainly make for a fascinating and indeed historic debate, which Spilka sums up by saying that "a working poetics [of the novel], more loosely pluralistic than fixed, constantly tested, revised, and modified by experience, and so kept tentative and flexible, can promote the best kind of novel criticism, that which takes into account the novel's manifold nature and history as it makes its inevitably selective and partial illuminations." It would be hard to disagree with that.

The rest of the collection, if not as integrated as the first part, contains several equally good insights. At the risk of being invidious, I would single out Ian Watt's witty and moving "Reflections on *The Rise of the Novel*," which begins: "Having, long ago, grimly refrained from posting sundry devastating retorts to a few of [my] original reviewers . . . I finally decided that a few rather miscellaneous reflections about the composition, the reception, and the shortcomings of the book . . . might have enough general interest to justify exposing myself to the charge of self-important anecdote." They certainly do. Perhaps most interesting is the revelation that the book originally opened with a "thirty-five page heavily-footnoted methodological introduction" which "successive revisions eventually boiled down to one word": the famous "If" in "If we assume . . ." of the first paragraph. Watt's wry comment on this slaughter of the innocents is memorable, and should be painted in red letters on every critic's wall: ". . . introductions begin by being infinitely expandable and end by proving equally expendable."

Also well worth having is Graham Good's stylishly written reappraisal of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* which, he argues, "still places the novel in what for us is an unusual light," that of "the art-form of sadness." There are several other fine essays, but it would be tedious to catalog them all. Regular readers of *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* will recall them easily to mind, and will be grateful to Mark Spilka for bringing together between two covers the best of the first ten years of a remarkable journal's work. If *Novel* does not quite seem

to have achieved its ambition—to foster "the kind of theoretical and critical support for fiction which poetry had received from the critical revolution in that field from the 1920's onward"—it has not been for want of trying. It is not simply that Spilka is no Leavis, the *Novel* too urbane to emulate *Scrutiny*: it is that the world of the 1970's is so different from that of the interwar years, and the complexity of the task where the novel is concerned so much greater, that no journal could have achieved such a revitalization single-handedly. But that is not to say it was not worth attempting, and one must be grateful to Spilka and his colleagues for what they have been able to achieve, the essence of which is preserved within the pages of this book, which span the first ten years of the journal's activity.

John Fletcher

ARMIN ARNOLD and
JOSEF SCHMIDT, EDS.
Reclams Kriminalromanführer
Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun.,
1978. Pp. 455.

Reclam's established series of "Guides" to a variety of art forms from Opera to Chamber Music, Stage Drama, and Radio Play, most of which have gone through several editions, has taken a new turn with this "Guide to Detective Fiction." It will be equally long-lived. Published in German, as all books in the series, this lightly-written work of curious lore reflects that delightful self-irony so often found in the detective genre itself. "Whoever wants to read a history of crime fiction in five minutes," as the editors beckon, is advised to consult the brief chronological table of works from 1679 (a Chinese collection of tales) to 1953 (Ian Fleming's "invention" of James Bond). Whoever is "not yet a crime-story fan" is cajolingly offered selected delicacies from a list of the "one-hundred best," most of which are "so gripping they can wean you off smoking." Here then is mass-produced literature for a hurried and harried world. The choice of