

tily observed that, if cattle could think, they would imagine their gods as super-cows. One implication of Darwinian science was to turn this witty criticism into bitter truth" (p. 59). And when the study considers the operation of a related Darwinian notion in a literary work, a witty compression sometimes results. In the "mock-gospel" of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, for example, the doctor is said to "have been transformed from a post-Darwinian Jehovah into a post-Darwinian Christ"—he is a "sham" in either incarnation (p. 97). This is the kind of insight Wells himself prized.

If there is a problem with Professor McConnell's work, it is that it aspires to be what it is not. "My concern is with the art of Wells's science fiction," he writes (p. 6). "Literary value," not ideas, will be emphasized, since Wells was "not an original thinker. His gift was for *imagining*" (p. 11; his italics). In fact, however, there are not many passages of literary analysis in the study. And what there is of aesthetic evaluation is not always as instructive as the thematic and historical analyses. These are a few of the literary facts or judgments proffered: T. H. Huxley's essays on evolution "are among the masterpieces of English prose" (p. 15); Henry James's novels "are among the greatest achievements of his age" (p. 21); Harold Bloom is "perhaps our most perceptive critic of Romantic and modern poetry" (p. 82); a passage from *The Jungle Book* is "one of Kipling's finest, and one of the century's most important" (p. 100); *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is "one of the most successful and most lasting nineteenth-century tales of horror" (p. 85); *Brave New World* is "one of the most celebrated twentieth-century visions of a nightmare future" (p. 158); Olaf Stapledon is "one of the unquestioned geniuses of science fiction" (p. 211); Swift is "one of Wells's earliest found and most treasured writers" (p. 159), while P. B. Shelley is "one of Wells's favorite and most frequently cited authors" (p. 11). Unfortunately, vagaries of this kind are duplicated in the assessment of Wells's work. For example, a paragraph from *The Time Machine*, "a masterpiece" (p. 75), "a major and brilliant work of literary art" (p. 82), is "one of the most powerfully imagined passages in modern English fiction" (p. 82), "one of the great chilling passages in the history of the English language" (p. 86). The shepherd in *When the Sleeper Wakes* is "one of Wells's most important characters" (p.

153), while *The First Men in the Moon* includes "one of Wells's finest scenes" (p. 156). A passage from *The Food of the Gods*, "a major fiction" (p. 171), paints "one of the book's most poignant scenes" (p. 165), and *The Shape of Things to Come* is "one of Wells's subtlest, most self-conscious performances" (p. 209). Finally, *Star Begotten* offers "one of the funniest passages in Wells" (p. 215), a virtue it shares with *The First Men in the Moon*, which contains "one of Wells's funniest scenes" (p. 156). The last of Wells's scientific romances, *Star Begotten* is "in its way one of his best" (p. 213). The judgments suffer from a want of discrimination. Perhaps Professor McConnell has set himself an unnecessary or impossible task. He remarks of the passage he so admires in *The Time Machine*: "There is little that need be said about a passage like this" (p. 86). Apparently, it defies analysis—or requires none.

*The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells* would have benefited from closer editing in other ways as well. Johnson's *Dictionary*, for example, is set "at the end of the eighteenth century" (p. 196), and the promise of a return to Teilhard de Chardin, on page 26, is not kept. Professor McConnell's talent for intellectual history suggests that the promise would have been worth keeping.

Camille La Bossière

JOSEPH J. WALDMEIR, ED.  
*Critical Essays on John Barth*  
 Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980. Pp. xi  
 + 247

In his thoughtful and highly informative introduction to this collection of critical essays on John Barth, Charles B. Harris states that "book-length collections of previously published articles on recent American writers are common, but no such collection of the best of Barth criticism exists, a curious lacuna in Barth studies that one hopes some enterprising scholar will soon fill" (p. 5). And he even points out some of the critics that he thinks should appear in such a collection: Beverly Gray Bienstock, Cynthia Davis, Barbara C. Ewell, Robert F. Kiernan, Daniel Majdiak,

Campbell Tatham, and Victor J. Vintanza. Joseph J. Waldmeir has taken up Harris's charge, and although he does not completely follow the latter's advice in his choice of critics, it would be less than fair to deny that he has been able "to bring together out of the spate of Barth criticism a fairly representative selection of approaches and attitudes, both favorable and unfavorable, toward his work" (p. ix).

In addition, the editor's further claim that these essays were also chosen "because of their excellence in conception, in content, and in writing" (p. x) can be confirmed—with the important reservation that whenever excellence and representative value were in conflict with each other, excellence apparently had to give way. Thus, the essay by Beverly Gross, "The Anti-Novels of John Barth" (1968) is certainly representative of many critics' imposition, upon Barth, of an attitude of noncommittal nihilism (the implications of which Barth had already carried to the "end of the road" in his novel of that title, written in 1955); but the truth of her conclusions is highly questionable. In *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy*, ethical nihilism is not carried over into form to become aesthetic nihilism; these novels are not "Attacks on themselves. Attacks on the novel genre. Attacks on the narrative impulse" (p. 36). Rather, parody in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and allegory in *Giles Goat-Boy* have a redeeming function: they serve to include the voice of an Other, of history in the first and of myth and religion in the second case, which are thus affirmed while they are being deconstructed. Similarly, the essay by Earl Rovit, "The Novel as Parody: John Barth" (1963), which describes *The Sot-Weed Factor* as parody for its own sake, "without the rigorous passion that can make effective satire" (p. 119), is clearly representative insofar as Rovit's argument has been repeated regularly ever since; but at the same time, it has been of lamentable disservice to much subsequent criticism. Rovit's argument has allowed some critics to hide their own shallowness and lack of precision behind the charge that Barth indulges in merely self-reflexive and presumptuously self-sufficient literary strategies.

However, shallowness or lack of precision do not mark the critical essays included in this collection. (The reviews and review articles are another matter: they are sometimes flippant, often off the mark. But they reflect much of the spontaneous

response to each of Barth's novels on its appearance, and they also render some of the gems of Barthian critical lore, like Denham Sutcliffe's conjecture that *The Sot-Weed Factor* "was begotten by Don Quixote upon Fanny Hill" [p. 113].) *Critical Essays on John Barth* is divided in two main sections titled "Surveys" and "The Individual Novels." The second section is accordingly subdivided into six parts to include reviews and essays on each of Barth's published novels, from *The Floating Opera* through *Chimera*. The first section is probably the weakest part of the book—with the notable exceptions of the above-mentioned review essay by Charles B. Harris (which, because of its different mode, should have comprised an entire section by itself), and of Campbell Tatham's excellent study on "John Barth and the Aesthetics of Artifice" (1971).

Outstanding in the sections devoted to the individual novels are the essays by Daniel Majdiak, "Barth and the Representation of Life" (1970) on *End of the Road* (the scant selection of two articles on this novel could have been nicely supplemented by David Hirsch's "John Barth's Freedom Road"); Manfred Puetz, "John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*: The Pitfalls of Mythopoesis" (1976); James T. Gresham, "*Giles Goat-Boy*: Satyr, Satire, and Tragedy Twined" (1974); Beverly Gray Bienstock, "Lingering on the Autognostic Verge: John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*" (1973); and Cynthia Davis, "The Key to the Treasure: Narrative Movements and Effects in *Chimera*" (1975). (A note should be made here on the disconcertingly high number of misprints, especially of names, throughout the book; for instance: David instead of Daniel Majdiak, Beinstock instead of Bienstock.)

In reviewing these articles as a series, two important observations emerge. First, criticism on John Barth appears to be representative of the development of American literary criticism over the last two decades. The predominant concern with existential values, which marked the novel of the Fifties and spilled over into much of the criticism of the Sixties, gradually gave way to what at first appeared to be a shift towards a preoccupation with form—form being treated as a kind of anti-content—and what came eventually to be understood as an increasing enchantment with the freedom involved in the recognition of the artificiality of fiction and of the imaginative power of narrative.

Second, one reason why Barth has come to be considered a central figure in contemporary American literature is his ability to welcome and indeed encourage the dialogue between critics and himself. Of course, as every Barth critic knows, Barth reverses the common notion that the writer tends to be his own worst critic. In his fiction, the joke always seems rather to be on the critic, whose work is all but superfluous because all his possible arguments and interpretations seem to be already incorporated in Barth's fiction. On the other hand, this feature makes Barth's fiction into a challenge for the critic who, if he meets it, is rewarded by the author's attentiveness to his argument. Thus, Barth has repeatedly pointed out in interviews that he first learned from critics of *The Sot-Weed Factor* that he had unconsciously supplied the hero of that novel with twenty-one out of twenty-two of Lord Raglan's documented characteristics of the classic hero, and that this freshly gained knowledge became one of the starting points for his next novel. And whether or not Beverly Gray Bienstock's well-prepared observation that "when Barth has shuffled off this mortal coil, only Ambrose will be left to represent him" (p. 208) has helped to prompt Barth's treatment of Ambrose as *alter ego* in his recent novel *LETTERS*—the coincidence bespeaks the possibility. As many a figure in his fiction indicates, Barth is always responsive to a critic who is a good reader.

Heide Ziegler

### SAAD ELKHADEM

*The York Companion to Themes and Motifs of World Literature: Mythology, History and Folklore*  
Fredericton: York Press, 1981.  
Pp. 308. \$12.95

This paperbound work is divided in two parts: the first is a 226-page lexicon; the second part, printed on yellow paper, comprises some 80 pages of bibliography. This book represents an outstanding feat, and it is most welcome for students of mythology, literature, and history. It is a useful tool, clear and succinct while it encompasses an immense amount of information in a most handy format.

Whereas in the past one had to refer to a multiplicity of encyclopedias, now everything is condensed. Everything can be located readily in this work which is quite portable enough to be kept at one's fingertips. This easily decipherable volume combines a clear presentation of classical and mythological themes with more modern motifs.

As the author explains in his foreword, the work is restricted to those motifs which constitute part of the thematic material in literature. Yet historical information and geographical data relevant to the plot have been added.

Some choices may seem a bit arbitrary as certain figures are included, for example Vergilian King Latinus, Lavinia and Turnus, whereas Queen Amata has been omitted. Nowhere is there a mention of the god Wotan or Odin, although other Nibelungen archetypes are deemed worthy of mention. Likewise, the Cabiric deities so often referred to by Thomas Mann and C. G. Jung are notoriously absent. However, in his preface Professor Elkhadem warns the reader that any selection or omission of themes will seem arbitrary because his book, by nature, had to be subjected to limitations in order to be suitable for ready and simple reference.

Professor Elkhadem was eminently successful in accomplishing his worthwhile task. In addition, he performed another tour de force which he may not even have consciously planned. The book constitutes such fascinating reading that although it was intended primarily as a work of reference to be thumbed through, this reviewer was unable to put it down until it had been read in its entirety. (The experience was reminiscent of the reviewer's first reading of Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*!)

In summary, the material is well presented, clear, relevant, easily found, and can fill gaps not only for graduate and undergraduate students, but for scholars of the classics, world literature, humanities, and thematics in general. It is a worthwhile addition to everybody's library.

Adèle Bloch