

J. E. DEARLOVE

*Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Nonrelational Art*  
Durham: Duke University Press,  
1982. Pp. 167. \$16.75.

J. E. Dearlove has written a perceptive, detailed analysis of Beckett's fiction. The book's thesis, stated clearly in the preface, is that Beckett has unremittingly attempted "to find a literary shape for the proposition that perhaps no relationships exist between or among the artist, his art, and an external reality" (p. vii).

Dearlove traces Beckett's shifting attitudes towards the problems posed by the absence of relation through different periods of his writing. He finds that Beckett's earliest prose works "parody the traditions and conventions of relational art without proposing an alternate vision" (p. 13). *Murphy* represents a turning point in which Beckett "expands and distorts the assumptions beneath relational art until they explode into intentional ambiguity" (p. 14). The central section of Dearlove's book focuses on the fiction written between 1944 and 1950 in which Beckett's art takes on the shape of "fragmentation and tessellation" (p. 14; Dearlove does not define this latter term which is the act of fitting pieces together to form a mosaic). In a long chapter on *How It Is*, Dearlove demonstrates how Beckett "explores the possibilities of a voice unrelated to any world." The "residual fiction" which follow *How It Is* create "self-conscious and arbitrary" constructions as a response to the absence of order. And finally, in his most recent works, Beckett permits the elements of traditional narrative to coexist with those of a non-relational narrative, thus reconciling "an impotent speaker with an unknowable world" (p. 14.).

The book is organized by the chronology of Beckett's fictional work. The central thesis shapes the analysis of each individual work. Despite touches of brilliance and originality, these discussions often seem diffuse. Paragraphs tend to drag on, conclusions become repetitious, and arguments lack sharpness and cohesiveness. Dearlove's relatively more succinct analyses of *Watt*, *Mercier and Camier*, *Lessness* and *The Lost Ones*, for example, are much more readable than his longer analyses of the trilogy and *How It Is*.

The book is also somewhat marred by occasional pretentiousness of language, by a tendency to make value judgments of Beckett's early fiction on the basis of its attempts to deal with the absence of relation, by occasional stretching of the central thesis to a degree of generality which makes it obvious, and by fragmented quotations which strung together out of context lose their intended significance (as on p. 102 where Dearlove feels we are allowed to "borrow Pim's images to develop a prose context for the narrator," and proceeds to link arbitrarily quotes and summaries which are deformed from their context).

These flaws should however be overlooked, for the book's thoroughness, intelligence, and deep understanding of Beckett's fictional universe constitute a significant contribution to Beckett studies.

Paul J. Schwartz

DONALD D. STONE

*The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction*  
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard  
University Press, 1980. Pp. 396.  
\$17.50.

Although there has been no full analysis of the Romantic impulse in Victorian fiction, the scope of Donald Stone's study makes not the scholarly gap, but his achievement in filling it, surprising. He proposes that Victorian novelists drew on their Romantic predecessors for themes, styles, and a new sense of authorial importance. This awareness of the author's powerful creative impulse, "as sage, as hero, as inspired genius, as magician" (p. 2), unites the novelists he discusses: Trollope, Disraeli, Charlotte Brontë, Eliot, Dickens, and Meredith.

These Victorian novelists were ambivalent toward the Romantic ideals they grew up with, and Mr. Stone does not oversimplify how each refined and redefined Romantic values. He is also aware of the slipperiness of the label Romantic, and much of his book is a careful delineation of the categories of Romanticism.

In his Introduction, Mr. Stone considers two novelists (Scott, Carlyle) who mediate between the Romantics, especially Byron, and their Victorian descendants and three novelists (Thackeray, Lytton, Emily Brontë) who reflect the many responses to Romanticism open to Victorian authors. Scott and Carlyle reflect the Victorians' ambivalence toward, and the inconsistency of style and philosophy within, Romanticism. Although Scott drew on Romantic themes and settings and on Byronic heroes, he never became a Romantic egoist. Carlyle, on the other hand, rebuked both Byron's self-mocking irony and Wordsworth's "visionary quietism" (p. 23), illustrating the often warring extremes of Romanticism.

Thackeray, Bulwer Lytton, and Emily Brontë show the extremes of Victorian response to the Romantic impulse. Thackeray's crusty anti-Romanticism and burlesque of Romantic excess perhaps reflect a Romantic element in his own nature. The excesses he criticizes are best seen in Bulwer Lytton, whose self-conscious Romanticism and delusions of grandeur make him important for what his novels lack: intelligent questioning and reworking of Romantic themes. The gap between Bulwer Lytton's ambitions and his achievements becomes clear when he is compared to Emily Brontë, whose Romantic rebel-hero, Heathcliff, is set in a realistic social framework like Scott's. The only criticism of Mr. Stone's Introduction is that he treated these five figures so briefly. One wants more, which would admittedly mean doubling the size of his study.

Byron was the chief Romantic influence on Trollope, Disraeli, and Charlotte Brontë. Although Carlyle and Scott influenced Trollope, Byron "haunts" his characters, usually described as victims of their own egoism, and he constantly had to "chastize" Byronism in his characters and in himself. That Trollope spent so much of his career debunking Romantic illusions and Byronic excess attests to their power over him. He was also drawn to Byron as the proponent of imagination and will. Although Trollope claimed always to control his imagination, the persuasive realism of Barseshire (for both novelist and novel reader) testifies to the sway of Trollope's imagination.

The Romanticism of Disraeli's political beliefs has long been a commonplace, but Disraeli's fiction also exposes and uses his Romantic sensibility. As with Trollope, Byron's "faith in the transforming power of human will" (p. 77) is a central theme in

Disraeli's fiction. Although the early novels (*Vivian Grey*, *Alroy*, and *Contarini Fleming*) are, at best, egoistic and narcissistic, from the trilogy of the 1830's (*Venetia*, *Henrietta Temple*, *The Young Duke*), Disraeli is more humanitarian and reverential, celebrating will and power less and something like social conscience more. Perhaps this movement parallels the shifting Romantic attitudes from Byron to Wordsworth. Although Disraeli was not an original thinker, part of his appeal to an age of uncertainty was his adoption of Romantic ideals as literary themes and as his own credo. Unlike Bulwer Lytton, however, Disraeli's assumption of Byronic irony as well as ideals kept him from taking himself or his politics too seriously.

If Disraeli wanted the world to accommodate itself to his Romanticism, Charlotte Brontë struggled to fit her Romantic dreams into the real world. Like Trollope, she is a Romantic in spite of herself: not quite Victorian in her emphasis on the individual rather than the social, not quite Romantic in her gloomy doubt that the individual can ever find "truth or happiness or salvation" (p. 100) alone. Although her heroes and heroines are unromantically plain, her submissive Victorian ladies in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are descendants of Byron's slave-maidens by way of Brontë's "Angrian Tales." If Blanche in *Jane Eyre* is, physically, the Romantic heroine, then Bertha is Romantic energy and will personified. St. John Rivers, however, is the true Byronic hero to whom Jane refuses to submit, preferring Mr. Rochester's domesticated and moralized Byronism. *Shirley* and *Villette* present female submissiveness less successfully. In *Villette*, Lucy's sufferings are too extreme to have the wide appeal of *Jane Eyre*. Lucy's ultimate master is Fate, to whom, perhaps, Brontë yielded when she herself married and stopped writing. Rather than resolving her realistic/Romantic dilemma, she abandoned her idea of a romance of will and creativity on earth.

Byron was not the only, or even the dominant, Romantic to influence the Victorians. Wordsworth's "fortitude and resignation" and his "religion of gratitude" (p. 134) made him especially congenial to Victorians who shied from Byron's egoism or irony. Gaskell's novels show this Victorian tension between humanitarianism and individualism. She could pay tribute to a Wordsworthian "potential for nobility and tragedy" (p. 143) among the poor and the

consolations of memory and nature, but still be drawn, in *North* and *South*, to industrial, Carlylean heroes who affirm individual energy. Although her novels suffer from sentimentality and long-suffering women, at her best, as in *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell can balance Wordsworthian quiescence and Romantic aspiration.

If Gaskell shows the tension between self-expression and repression, Eliot illustrates Wordsworthian reverence and duty paired with a Byronic will to power, and her novels are the fullest expression of the Romantic impulse in Victorian fiction. Besides a Wordsworthian belief in feelings, Eliot drew on Bray, Schiller, and Rousseau, not to mention such diverse writers as Sand, Goethe, and Feuerbach. She avoided following Rousseau's religion of feelings to his anti-social extremes and used Schiller for an acceptable public and moral frame for feeling. She thus approached the poet-sage, although Kermodé's comment that "in some ways a typical Romantic artist, [Eliot] could call herself an aesthetic teacher, yet protest that she had no desire to instruct or change the world" is a needed qualification (*The Romantic Image*, p. 110).

As a vatic author, she wanted art to be true and responsible without becoming "the truth of verisimilitude" (p. 202). Aiming for both honesty and emotional and intellectual clarity, she saw the need for ideals or even noble illusions. *Adam Bede*, for example, mocks Hetty's illusions but fosters the Wordsworthian myth of the Loamshire countryside. In *Silas Marner*, a social outcast is reclaimed through the innocent love of a child in a rural setting, which fuses her Wordsworthian tendencies with social realism. Eliot's novels also show the tensions among kinds of Romanticism. *Mill on the Floss* fails because Eliot cannot reconcile Maggie Tulliver's Wordsworthian ties to the past and her Rousseau-esque emotions. *Middlemarch* succeeds, however, because Eliot weds Will's Shelleyan (and Rousseau-esque) idealism and feelings with Dorothea's Schilleresque call for social action. This balance is not easily sustained. In *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, the social outcast celebrates his Wordsworthian reverence for nature only outside the spiritual and industrial prison of England.

Chapter Seven describes Dickens as an instinctive rather than a learned Romantic, drawing less on the Romantic poets than on sources ranging from eighteenth-century novels to the *Arabian Nights*. Although

Dickens's focus on the imagination and the child's viewpoint are Romantic, he prefers the city to the country, the present to the past, and the police to human benevolence. His sentimental characters show Wordsworthian fortitude and quiescence, but his attraction to Byronic rebelliousness colors his comic characters. Byronic willfulness and Wordsworthian quiescence finally seem like alternatives of the same Dickensian death wish, as seen in his emphasis on sleep, sentimental deaths, and grotesque deaths of villains. Perhaps Dickens's lack of clear ties to Romanticism makes this the least satisfactory chapter. "Instinctive Romanticism" seems a vague way of forcing Dickens into a scheme where he does not easily fit.

Meredith combines the almost intuitive Romanticism of Dickens with Eliot's learnedness in both native and Continental Romanticism, Byron's irony, and Brontë's and Trollope's struggle against Romantic values. A throwback to the generation of Scott, Stendhal, and Byron, Meredith found inspiration in *Orlando Furioso*. However, he debunks the heroic myth of Scott's generation. Although attracted to Romantic ideals, he recognized the egoism they can induce. His women, however, move beyond the Victorian submissiveness of Scott, Brontë, or Eliot. Combining Ariosto's advocacy of women's potential with Romantic elevation of individual rights, he brought the "New Woman" into literature.

Any work of such ambition and scope must set its own limits. Mr. Stone chooses to omit Gissing and Hardy, although Hardy reworks Romantic themes and Gissing might parallel Thackeray: a professed non-Romantic whose novels do not always bear out his claims. Still, in analyzing the complexity of Romanticism and the diversity of the Victorian novelists' responses to it, Mr. Stone has made an important and frequently elegant contribution to nineteenth-century studies.

A. Leslie Harris