

of Faulkner's greatest period, and he advances a theory about how Faulkner evolved these books. With *Flags in the Dust*, Parker argues, Faulkner recognized, with a sense of elation, that he had been trying to tell six novels in one all at the same time, resulting in, or at least threatening, a chaos of form. So in *The Sound and the Fury*, facing this chaos again, he developed two novel forms: on the one hand to concede chaos, making no pretense of continuity; and, in the exact opposite direction, "to turn the making no pretense of continuity into a mere pretense itself, for no one of [the four selections of *The Sound and the Fury*] can be understood alone" (p. 18). Parker continues, "These two principles, the one of conceding the discontinuity of chaotic material and the other of trying to stitch the discontinuities back together, are the two principles that separately direct nearly the whole scheme of Faulkner's remaining novels" (p. 19). He says that through *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* "Faulkner shapes his novels by . . . trying to construct a form that can weave that chaos into a continuous whole" (p. 19). In later work, nearly all the rest, he again assumed the chaos but also conceded the lack of unity by "dividing the novels . . . into strongly discontinuous parts" (p. 19). The former method, Parker contends, resulted in better novels.

The specific technique for welding unity out of the chaos of these early books was that of withholding information, sometimes merely tactically, as with the corn cob in *Sanctuary*, sometimes epistemologically, as with the whole mystery of the Bundrens' lives in *As I Lay Dying*, sometimes using both methods, as—triumphantly—in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where everything from the presence of Henry Sutpen in the house to the moral dilemma over racism with which the novel ends is withheld and misrepresented. In his careful and original analyses of the technique of withholding in these four books, Parker provides much fresh insight into Faulkner's methods and interests, insight buttressed by careful research.

What is puzzling about Parker's performance is why he or some good editor did not keep his argument always to expressed purpose. Frequently he abandons his analysis of Faulkner's technique to offer interesting but unfounded generalizations about the author or about some aspect of the book which has nothing to do with the technique of withholding or the "novelistic imagination." "Furthermore, Horace's link to Popeye and his mixture of attraction with revulsion also signal Faulkner's own involvement, through Horace, in Popeye and Popeye's crime. In fact, the relation of the novel to certain aspects of Faulkner's life suggests that *Sanctuary* is partly the vicarious representation—and perhaps exorcism—of Faulkner's own will to abuse and his despair at feeling abused himself, of Faulkner as victim and victimizer" (p. 75).

Following this statement are two pages of very reckless speculation about Faulkner's connection to Popeye and Horace Benbow and Faulkner's wife Estelle's to Temple Drake. Similarly there is a long discussion of the unprecedented strangeness of Anse Bundren; and, in the discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the "novelistic imagination" which Parker has posited is frequently lost sight of. It is as though he himself has attempted, not altogether successfully, to weld together the chaos of his interests in Faulkner and these novels by his thesis of a novelistic imagination.

Still, Parker does give the reader many new insights into the methods and structures of *As I Lay Dying*, *Sanctuary*, *Light In August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Probably this will be more satisfying to Faulkner specialists—and to novelists—than to readers in general.

Robert Secor and Debra Modellmog, Comps.  
*JOSEPH CONRAD AND AMERICAN WRITERS: A  
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF AFFINITIES,  
INFLUENCES, AND RELATIONS*  
Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985. Pp. 240

Arnold E. Davidson  
*CONRAD'S ENDINGS: A STUDY OF THE FIVE MAJOR  
NOVELS*  
Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984. Pp. 124, \$27.95  
Reviewed by Camille R. LaBossière

This first volume is the bibliography of a book yet unwritten. Conrad, Robert Secor avers in his introduction, "has an essential and continuing presence in the American literary tradition" (vii). Extensive research confirms the fact of that presence. Its *why*, however, remains hidden in the lavish array of facts; and what suggestions Professor Secor makes regarding

the nature or significance of the Conrad-American relationship(s) have the force of sweeping, yet qualified, generalizations. The volume's thesis—"Conrad's importance on the American imagination and in the American literary tradition" (xii)—has vagary enough to tantalize, and therefore invites clarification. Even in the introduction, though, the scholarship serves best when it records more than interprets, as in the brief and informative history of Conrad's contribution to Melville's "renaissance." Professor Secor shows himself an able historian.

The contribution of the annotated bibliography itself is substantial. It provides in a clear and well-organized way access to the documents which must enter into the study of Conrad's conversations with such writers as Cooper, Hawthorne, Poe, Crane, London, Twain, Faulkner, Hemingway, Huneker, Mencken, Bellow, Nabokov, Heller, and Pynchon, for example. "Conrad and American Film" presents an instructive supplementary overview, and "Conrad's American Visit" implicitly revises important misapprehensions. The annotations are beautifully done, and the crossreferencing is exemplary in the elegance of its detection. Of value, as well, are the questions which this bibliographical study tacitly sets. Why, for example, no Emerson? The absence of the representative U.S. sage intrigues. Could it be that Conrad's apparent Americanness is not so very American?

Professors Secor and Modellmog have worked hard and well on this book, which is worth the candle.

"I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all," Conrad writes in *A Personal Record* (1912). The presence of conflicting opinions and absurd contradictions in this world argue as much. This being so, the object of creation in the Conradian scheme of things is "purely spectacular," and the visions of the artist, a man among men, are "a moral end in themselves" (Dent Collected Edition, p. 92). A work of art is self-enclosed and autoletic, leaving its reader in quest of conclusion no better off than the artist confronted by the enigmatical spectacle of the visible universe. If lesson there is to be learned from reading and writing, it is that the quest for positive understanding is vanity.

The quest for light where there is none is inherently comical, as fit to provoke laughter of different degrees of grimness as the search for a happy ending which the title of Professor Davidson's introduction evokes. "A Beginning in Which Little is Concluded," he alludes to Johnson's *Rasselas*, and so recalls a long tradition of speculation which stretches back to the darkly hilarious Ecclesiastes. Appropriately, the figure which *Conrad's Endings* repeatedly returns to is a circle and the action it frequently engages, suicide. Professor Davidson's brief introduction is long enough to set the reader spinning in darkness. Nothing can be concluded there, of course, as the author wittily appeals to quotidian sense privileging the world of light. Question follows question, and there is no end to the making of resolutions. The rhetoric of the extended interrogative which is the introduction is nicely suited to its subject.

Close readings of *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, and *Victory*, often focusing on their ethical action, show the elegance of Conrad the artist as he toils with the perplexities of (un)closure in a moral universe which must forever remain impenetrable to the light of reason and words. The strength of Professor Davidson's well-argued study lies in particulars. Attention to fine detail allows him strongly to support the case that Jim only masquerades as a *bona fide* hero; to detect the ubiquity of solipsism or ontological greed in *Nostromo*; to show that illusion is the sole palliative to illusion in *The Secret Agent*; to correct misapprehensions regarding the ending of *Under Western Eyes* in relation to that of *Crime and Punishment*; and to read the parodying of Christian myth in *Victory*.

Unlike the writer of self-consuming artifacts, however, Professor Davidson does not come to paint himself into a corner. His language speaks unequivocally and clearly. And when he unwinds his study (which is without formal conclusion) with the proposition that "nothing" is what "we are required to comprehend more fully," the joke is plain enough. Inconclusive as Conrad's art is, it does exist. Words do belong to the conception of light and order, as the wit of *Conrad's Endings* shows.