

modern political Zionism, and resounds in some of the poetry written in the Vilna and Warsaw ghettos (483-90). Thus, man looks for a ray of hope in the valley of the shadow of death.

The editor of the present volume, Professor David Roskies, has not merely selected and collected the material, but annotated it with references to early sources—a significant help to the student of this literature. He also provided introductions to the twenty chapters into which this book is divided.

The present reviewer does not always agree with the tenor of Professor Roskies's comments, such as his implicit criticism of the reluctance of the Talmudic rabbis to promote the martyrological tradition. It rather indicates that they were concerned with promoting the sane aspects of reality, above and beyond preoccupation with suffering and the mental and literary response to it.

Camille R. LaBossière

*THE VICTORIAN "FOL SAGE"*

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Reviewed by Edwin Barton

Camille La Bossière's *The Victorian "Fol Sage": Comparative Readings on Carlyle, Emerson, Melville, and Conrad* offers an inspired grouping of writers. In his admirable preface, La Bossière asserts that his "comparative reading of four rhetorical responses to the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* aims to contribute to the history of wisdom's decline as a principle of knowledge and certainty in the nineteenth century" (9).

The first chapter, "Carlyle and Montaigne: Their Silent Conversation," proves to be the most formidable of the four, owing largely to its specific density. The welter of quotations, many in untranslated French, makes the section difficult to read. Indeed, the defects have much to do with La Bossière's desire to propose a sphere of thought whose gravitational pull will keep the minds of Emerson, Melville, and Conrad in orbit; for the planet around which he sets the others to revolve is not so much Carlyle's as Montaigne's. He begins by pointing to Carlyle's accustomed response in his correspondence with Emerson of falling into meaningful silence whenever the subject of Montaigne arose. In spite of his refusal to broach the subject in conversation, Carlyle's writings betray a profound awareness of the challenges Montaigne's skepticism presented. In the end, the "Carlylean dialectic, too, leads to a suspension between contraries; and, like Montaigne's thought, suicidal in its practice of contradiction, it must allow the equal truth or falsehood of its antithesis, of a positive philosophy grounded in the principle of noncontradiction" (35).

The second chapter, "Emerson's Divine Comedy," is far less grim. For Emerson, the marriage of opposites was a consummation devoutly to be wished. Whereas Carlyle resisted Montaigne, Emerson rather blithely gave up the role of sage for that of a poet who "ministers . . . to a humanity sick with discord. A turning of hell's roundabout logic against itself, his synthetic art provides a mirror in which to read the way to health and joy" (49). Indeed, Emer-

son was obliging to a fault: "So manifestly playful are Emerson's topsy-turvy antics that they cannot horrify. Rather, they are acts of self-disqualification from the responsibility of the navigator, making of Emerson a harmless comic. Not for him the serious work of a divine comedian . . . He is only a diverting landlubber, a man of infinite jest" (58).

Melville, on the other hand, was no landlubber. La Bossière suggests that, by degrees, Melville came to appreciate the extent to which "'the true wisdom' [is] 'ignorance,' an argument frequently sustained . . . by evidence from the Old Testament wisdom books and the Pauline epistles, Ecclesiastes and 1 Corinthians in particular" (61). The controlling allusion in this chapter is to 1 Corinth. 13:12—"For now we see through a glass darkly . . ." Through "Melville's Mute Glass," one learns that "an accurate map of the heart of man is no more available to readers than is a true delineation of the divine living character. This being so, Melville argues, the deceiving cartography of *The Confidence Man* is conformal with the reality of man's nescience and folly" (81).

The last of the four readings, entitled "Of Blindness in Conrad's Spectacular Universe," plays off Conrad's Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, wherein he states that his goal is to make the reader "see." La Bossière employs the story of the blind pilot in *The End of the Tether* as a parable. The artist, too, may seem a pilot of sorts. But one follows him at a risk, for he "appeals to what is capricious in man. Those who take him for a sage, then, do so foolishly and at their own peril. With a fool as a guide, they travel blind, in unending circles" (91). In short, like "Montaigne's *Essais*, Conrad's speculative fictions, founded as they are on unstable emotions and their roundabout logic, contain their own warning" (97).

In his "Postscript: The Consolation of Folly," La Bossière allows that the Victorian sage does provide a "service of public and private value": "In the words of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, the musical thinker's 'vocation [fills] . . . that need of lulling a feeling of emptiness and hunger, by means of an art which is . . . an 'opiate.' The sound of the Victorian sage's art produces a narcosis precious to the solitary mind inhabiting a place of folly, endlessly spinning in an abyss of stress and strife and doubt, where extremes meet" (101). *The Victorian "Fol Sage"* satisfies a desire as well: it provokes mental activity. One does not have to agree with the author to appreciate his scholarship and erudition.