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## Brief Reviews

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## BRIEF REVIEWS

*The Mirror and the Lamp*, by M. H. Abrahms. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953. 406 pp. \$7.50.

THE MIRROR represents the mind which is a mere reflector of the objects it beholds; as a convenient explanation of the creative processes, this figure prevailed "from Plato to the eighteenth century." The Lamp signifies the mind which projects outward upon and so contributes to the objects of its perceptions; suggesting the interaction of an inner with an outer world, the joint effect of passion and external nature, this image typifies the peculiarly romantic conception of creativity. *The Mirror and the Lamp*, accordingly, is an extended treatment of two distinct theories of the origins of art, and an analysis of how the mimetic tendencies of the first were challenged and displaced by the self-expressive impulses inherent in the last. But in the book, the Lamp is at once the more significant metaphor and the one most central to the investigation as a whole. For just as Mr. Abrahms is more concerned with the romantics than with the critical tradition they abandoned, so he is primarily interested in the *how* of romantic poetry—in the mental urges and forces and processes which brought such poetry into being—and not in the poetry itself.

Consequently, his study becomes an elaborate treatise on the psychology of romantic composition. Mind, the dynamic, organic, formative mind of romanticism, is here charted through all its various manifestations. It superimposes subjective states over the objective world, and the results are such familiar romantic properties as symbolism, lyricism, metaphor, personification. It discovers a mysterious capacity for inner growth, finds this same growth recapitulated in the development of biological organisms, shapes the finished poem to the pattern of this development; the result is organic form, that complex romantic doctrine for which Mr. Abrahms offers an unusually comprehensible explanation. In the work of art, creating mind is presumed to shadow forth its inmost recesses (composing poetry, as John Keblē wrote in the 1830's, "gives healing relief to secret mental emotions"); and among romantic critics like Keble, Blake and Carlyle, we find adumbrated the Freudian's propensity for shifting from the text to its source in the author's subconscious. Above all, the romantic mind participates dynamically in the creative act: like an all-working deity, it *makes* the poem; and the poem in turn is a self-sufficient second

Creation, a heterocosm freed from all necessary reference to outer reality, responsible only to its own laws and to the inner genius which gave it being. These, then, are characteristic of the topics Mr. Abrahms explores most incisively. Although he writes ably and at length on diverse spokesmen for the Mirror, the stress in his work falls, as I have said, on the functionings of the Lamp. Hence it is in terms of its exposition of romantic aesthetics that *The Mirror and the Lamp* must ultimately be judged.

With some justice, one can say that the book presents a thesis which is not absolutely new. But the fact that the same ground has, to some extent, already been covered should not obscure the value of this particular coverage. For one thing, Mr. Abrahms' is surely the fullest account. Broad in scope, drawing freely from English and German sources alike, it does shed new light on the romantic revolution and does deal intensively with specific problems (organicism and Coleridge's view of the imagination are prime examples) which other recent critics have been inclined to distort or to treat with condescension. Still more importantly perhaps, the book forces us to reconsider certain major romantic writers in their proper intellectual context. Mr. Abrahms holds little brief for the tendency to "modernize" Coleridge by pretending that he was somehow not a romantic—by stripping his criticism of its philosophical bases or quietly ignoring some of his more abstruse terminology. Assuming Coleridge to be the leading critical theorist of the romantic movement, he makes the corollary assumption that the general background of romanticism provides the best possible insight into Coleridge's ambiguities. His several sections on Coleridgean aesthetics are models of clear, precise explication; one feels that they possess an enduring significance. Finally, this investigation is sometimes valuable for what it suggests as well as explicitly says. Both romantic prose and symbolist techniques are peripheral to the main drift of the study. Yet through indirect references to the symbolic imagination, Mr. Abrahms enlarges our understanding of writers like Hazlitt and De Quincey, whom he mentions only in passing, and even of romantic novelists like the Brontës, who do not appear at all.

In contemporary scholarship the trend has been to push romanticism backward into the eighteenth century, to underscore—possibly to exaggerate—the kinship between Classic and Romantic. As the key metaphors indicate, *The Mirror and the Lamp* deals mainly with differences rather than with similarities. It is not a narrowly partisan

book. The very breadth of the literary history forestalls any real hardening of the metaphors into ironclad categories. But aware that Wordsworth can sound like Johnson or that Coleridge is indebted to Hartley, Mr. Abrahms is likewise careful to qualify these resemblances and to refrain from overstating their closeness. Perhaps, indeed, this is his principal achievement. Certainly the *Lamp* did not suddenly commence to glow in 1798. Nevertheless, the romantics did modify their literary heritage. And by demonstrating how romanticism rejected the imitative standards of earlier poetics and turned inward for poetic inspiration, *The Mirror and the Lamp* presents clear-cut evidence of the modification.

CLARK GRIFFITH

*At the Turning*, by Martin Buber. New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952. 62 pp. \$1.50.

IN A one-sentence prologue to these three addresses Professor Buber reminds the reader "that a Jew speaks here to Jews, in the center of the Diaspora, in the hour when the deciding crisis of Judaism begins to become manifest." However, Buber's restatement of his position in this small book should prove interesting to non-Jews as well. While there is almost nothing new in these lectures, nothing that Buber has not said before, they are an excellent and succinct distillation of his religious thought. They are also a moving call to the Jewish people to return to a God-centered life, and in so doing to hasten mankind's salvation.

Buber sees every "great" civilization as a life-system which grows out of a supreme principle. (How we can distinguish "great" civilizations from others is never made clear.) The supreme principle is both religious and normative. By "religious" Buber means that it involves attachment to an absolute transcendent Being. By "normative" he means that this Being exemplifies the ideal toward which man feels obligated to move. "Everywhere transcendent Being has a side facing toward man which represents a shall-be; everywhere man, if he wants to exist as man, must strive after a super-human model; everywhere the outline of a true human society is traced in Heaven." Finally, in every great civilization man rebels against the ideal demands, de-

mands which he acknowledges to be binding. "But it is precisely in this mute struggle of man with the spirit that the rise of a great civilization originates. The spirit conquers and is conquered, it advances and is checked, it hits upon the human materia and finds in it a barrier; and here, in the lulls of the fighting between Heaven and earth, there emerges, again and again, the specific forms of a civilization which also determine all its wisdom and art."

Israel, Buber believes, is a unique expression of these tendencies which are present in the structure of all civilization. Every civilization has its attachment to God and its commission to fashion its life in accordance with the supreme principle which derives from God, "but only Israel knew a God Who had chosen a human people—just that people—to prepare the created earth as a kingdom for Him by the realization of justice." Only in Israel is all of life thought to be hallowed. Only in Israel does all of life respond to the divine command. For it was "that civilization in which, as in no other, the absolute had made a covenant with the entire domain of human existence and refused to abandon any part of that domain to relativity." The prophets of Israel are the highest teachers of this absolute demand. Buber finds the ceaseless effort to sanctify every aspect of human life joined with the militant battle against the backsliding of ordinary men to be unique in prophetic Judaism. No other civilization has been completely dedicated to the call of God. But through the force of historical circumstance Israel has been denied the opportunity to bring to fruition its own deepest motivations. It has been denied the opportunity to sanctify the whole of its life, and thus has been unable to bring about for all peoples the kingdom of God. However, Judaism is not dead, and Israel is not dead. The roots are still healthy even if the branches have withered. Buber calls Israel to save itself and to save the world.

In the last two addresses Buber attempts an exposition of Judaism. He wants to tell his Jewish audience (and only incidentally anyone else who may be listening) who they really are and what their tradition really is. All too often Judaism has been rejected by Jews and non-Jews primarily because they had failed to penetrate its outer shell and to capture its inner motivations and inner spirit. What Jews like Bergson and Simone Weil rejected was a misshapen caricature of Judaism which did not even bear a resemblance to the genuine Jewish tradition. When Judaism is seen through the eyes of Christianity it will inevitably be misapprehended. The Christian picture shows

the God of Judaism as "a God of justice who exercised justice essentially on His own people, Israel, being followed in Christianity by a God of love, of love for humanity as a whole." It hardly seems necessary to lay this ghost again. Fair-minded Christian scholars have shown repeatedly what a warped picture this is of Judaism. Nevertheless, Buber feels driven to show again, what every one should know by now, that the God of Judaism combines justice with love, and that both are extended to all mankind, not only to the Jewish people.

Buber also disposes of the conventional view that the spirit has no place in Judaism, or that it is, at best, so overburdened by the law that it can never express itself. He shows, on the contrary, that Judaism is essentially spirituality, but a spirituality which goes into the world rather than one which withdraws from the world. "It is not true that Israel has not accorded to spiritual inwardness its rightful place; rather, it has not contented itself with it. Its teachings contest the self-sufficiency of the soul: inward truth must become real life, otherwise it does not remain truth. A drop of Messianic consummation must be mingled with every hour; otherwise the hour is Godless, despite all piety and devoutness." Buber then goes on to show the falsity of the notions that Judaism exalts the corporate body of society above the individual and that it is concerned only with Jewish society rather than with all humanity.

In the third address, "The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth," there is a restatement of Buber's I-Thou philosophy. "The basic doctrine which fills the Hebrew Bible," he says, "is that our life is a dialogue between the above and the below." Judaism is not primarily dogma or creed. It is not, in its essence, a frozen system of ritual practices or moral prescriptions. It is rather the wholly sanctified life of justice and love which flows from man's encounter with God. He speaks to us not only in the pages of Scripture but in all the "essential moments of personal life." We can answer not with words, but rather through the "language of our actions and attitudes, our reactions and our abstentions." Nor does God speak only to individuals. Scripture teaches us that he speaks also to Israel as a people. Communal life, like personal life, finds the way to sanctification only in the encounter with the divine. "The people is not a sum of individuals addressed by God, it is something existent beyond that, something essential and irreplaceable, meant by God as such, claimed by Him as such, and answerable to Him as such." The distinction between "moral man and immoral society," which Niebuhr made famous in our own time, is

intolerable to Buber and intolerable to Judaism. This is why he addresses himself both to individual Jews and to the Jewish community. Neither the individuals nor the community may be freed from their historic responsibility. Buber, playing the role of the prophet, seeks to awaken the Jewish people. His addresses are not arguments or demonstrations. They are, rather, the moving expression of the faith of a man which he identifies with the faith of Israel. And through this faith he calls the Jewish people to return to their roots, to stand again before God, and thereby to bring salvation to the world.

There is no doubt that Buber has offered us a legitimate representation of Judaic and Biblical faith. Even though Judaism is richer and more complex than he seems able to recognize, Buber has seized on one of the central messages in all Jewish teaching. It is the doctrine that as individuals and as a community the Jewish people have a responsibility for the spiritual health of mankind. This is perhaps epitomized in a passage which Buber wrote forty years ago when he delivered a similar set of addresses to the Jews of Prague. He closes the first of his *Drei Reden über das Judentum* with this story:

When I was a child I read an old Jewish saying which I could not understand. These were the words: "At the gates of Rome a leprous beggar sits and waits. He is the Messiah." I went to an old man and asked him, "For what is he waiting?" The old man gave me an answer which I did not understand then, and only came to understand much later; he said, "He is waiting for you."

Buber believes today as he did then that the Messiah is waiting for each of us to free him from his chains.

MARVIN FOX

*African Folktales and Sculpture.* Folktales selected and edited by Paul Radin with the Collaboration of Elinore Marvel. Introduction to the tales by Paul Radin. Sculpture selected with an introduction by James Johnson Sweeney. New York: Pantheon Books (Bollingen Series XXXII), 1952. 165 plates, map. 355 pp. \$8.50.

THE BOLLINGEN Series has maintained a high standard of book-making in all of their publications. Once again the series has been enriched by the publication of an exceptionally beautiful book. The

collaborative effort of the book designer (Andor Braun), the distinguished book jacket and poster artist (E. McKnight Kauffer), and of two of America's finest photographers (Walker Evans and Eliot Elisofon), has resulted in the making of this handsome volume.

Certainly the materials presented here—some of the best tales from world folk literature, and the very finest pieces of sculpture from one of the great plastic traditions—were worth all the care that the book-maker has lavished on this publication. It is to be regretted that the work of the authors, Dr. Radin and Mr. Sweeney, falls short of the mark. They have not succeeded in producing more than a handsome anthology of African folklore, and a well-mounted catalogue of sculpture. As such it might have fared better as two separately published works, for there is no attempt at an integration between the plastic and the literary traditions of these African tribes. Nor is there a welding together of the aesthetic approach of the art critic with the cultural interpretation of the anthropologist.

This need not be the case. It should no longer be maintained that the artist (and art critic) and the anthropologist must view man's aesthetic works from mutually exclusive vantage points. The fact is that a common meeting ground exists which may be shared by the anthropologist sensitive to plastic (and literary) values, and the art historian (and critic) who is discerning of the cultural matrix of the arts. The joint work of Ralph Linton and Paul S. Wingert in their *Arts of the South Seas* has demonstrated that the reader is the richer for their dual approach. Because Dr. Radin has not ventured out from his corner sufficiently, and Mr. Sweeney not at all, this book does not achieve the professed objective of the Bollingen Series: "The Series, in brief, comprises works that contribute to the interrelation of ideas leading towards a synthesis of knowledge."

One has the impression that this is one of those book ideas that has come from the publisher, rather than from the author. Of course, editors often spark ideas which combust in the minds of writers with full force. But in this case the spark had little effect; that is, little effect if the objective of this book was that of the Bollingen manifesto.

The book at hand comes off better if we criticize it as two separate works, an anthology plus a catalogue.

Dr. Radin, with consummate skill, selected from many volumes of folktales, most of which are unavailable to the layman, some of the very best. Radin well knows that in primitive cultures, as in our own western civilization, every teller of tales is not a literary artist, and

every tale in the ethnographers' monograph does not have aesthetic merit. By choosing only the best Radin has demonstrated that "We are, essentially, in the presence of a true art form, often possessing a high degree of sophistication and formalism."

The author has not attempted to give the reader the ethnological background of each group represented in the collection of tales. But he has given the lay reader some generalizations which distinguish negro Africa as an area of folklore style. These similarities of form and content outweigh the minor tribal and regional differences. A characteristic that runs through all of negro African folk literature is the tale of strife, of man pitted against man living in a world made insecure and semi-chaotic by European conquest. The author-racounteur points the moral in his tales: death is the inevitable fate for those who do not stand up to the conquerors.

Mr. Sweeney's introduction to the second part of the book is in large part a rehash of his earlier *African Negro Art*, published as a catalogue to the exhibit he assembled for the Museum of Modern Art in 1935. Many of the plates which follow are from the same source. In that volume Mr. Sweeney wrote:

In the end, however, it is not the tribal characteristics of Negro art nor its strangeness that are interesting. It is its plastic qualities. Picturesque or exotic features as well as historical considerations have a tendency to blind us as to its true worth.

The author has modified this point of view in the present volume, for here he writes:

The Non-African can only hope to respond directly through his visual experience—his personal non-African eye. But the more he can bring to the basic sculptural expression the richer will be his response and enjoyment. That will be the gift of the ethnographer; the widening of horizons, the broadening of our embrace, the opening of new fields of aesthetic experience to explore into which, alone, we might never find our way.

It is evidently the intent of Mr. Sweeney to let the reader widen his own anthropological horizons with respect to African sculpture, for he does not incorporate into his introduction, nor even refer the reader to, such a work as that of the Africanist Dr. Melville Herskovits, *Backgrounds of African Art*. In that short volume the artist and art critic steeped only in the western plastic traditions will find the "widening of horizons" which Mr. Sweeney now exhorts.

JOHN ADAIR