

Book Reviews

Jerusalem and Albion. By HAROLD FISCH. New York: Schocken Books, 1964. Pp. ix, 301. \$6.95.

Jerusalem and Albion is a study of "The Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth-Century Literature", but it attempts much more by implication and by its chosen terms of reference—taken from William Blake—than its sub-title suggests. It is an interesting book which, when one thinks about it, should have been written a long time ago. By the "Hebraic Factor", Professor Fisch refers to both the style and the vision of the Old Testament, which he rightly describes as a "living experience". Its "literary unit . . . is, after all, not the parable but the poetic image"—a very sound point. As Professor Fisch goes on to say, "a rich ambiguity belongs to the inner soul of Old Testament poetry [and prose, I assume]. It is destroyed as soon as the imagery is looked upon as merely functional", a point which only idiots would argue. *Jerusalem and Albion* is a fine demonstration of the value of Blake's imagery to the history of ideas, a point of view generally and long held by Blake's best critics. Professor Fisch is not a critic of Blake, and probably will not be treated as suspect by students or scholars of the history of ideas who often betray an almost mystical distrust of anything remotely associated with William Blake or his admirers.

The book is composed of fifteen chapters, enveloped by an introduction and an epilogue, fundamental to his presentation, and divided into five parts: "The Background of Style", "The Background of Ideas", "Milton", "Characterisms of Virtue", and "Albion Disrobed". His fourteenth chapter, "The Infernal Covenant", the first of the two chapters in Part Five, is my personal favourite. It is a brilliant critique of Thomas Hobbes as an "apostate Jew". To describe Hobbes' point of view as a perverted Hebraism that "is the utmost limit of human pride" and "a prodigious blasphemy, ruinous and insane" is to do the author of *Leviathan* the kind of justice his chosen image evokes. "In short," says Professor Fisch, "such a blasphemy is only possible to the Pagan who has entered the Sanctuary and there laid his hand upon the Ark of the Covenant". The chapter is soundly argued and is well-based upon the nicely developed association of Puritanism and scientism that is an important feature of the entire study. Professor Fisch's analysis of Bacon and Baconianism earlier in the book is a very fine assessment of the philosophy of the first person of Blake's demonic trinity. He sees Bacon's scientific temper as a

“secularized and perverted” form of the “prophetic zeal of Hebraism”, “a determined crossing of Renaissance Humanism and Reformation Puritanism” without “spiritual content” or “poetry” and at odds with the “healthier Hebraism” of the Cambridge Platonists. “Science in his sense [Bacon’s] becomes a sort of religious enterprise. The urgent demand for inquiry and invention, [is] cut off from all moral sanctions and all liminary feelings of awe, . . .” In fact, Professor Fisch says, in tracing Bacon to his alchemical ancestors, “Bacon’s Faustian dream of magical power over the world continues to possess us and drive us on”. The first two parts of the study do trace effectively the breakdown of Elizabethan rhetoric under the forces of scientific and Ramist or Puritan logistics while also charting the way in which the Great Chain of Being was slowly giving way to the Will to Power.

The three chapters on Milton in *Jerusalem and Albion*, along with his examination of the meaning of the Covenant, are at the centre of Professor Fisch’s critique. The “Baconian spirit represents, like Puritanism itself (which collaterally inspired Bacon to a great extent), a dissociated and perverted form of Hebraism. Bacon had not the Hebraic vision of sanctified nature (sanctified by worship and sacrifice) and of a far-off divine event—other than simply human self-aggrandisement—to which the whole creation moves. The ethical context of Hebraism is missing in Bacon”. But such is not the case with Boyle, Browne, Henry More, and John Milton. Milton tried to strengthen the dialogue between God and man, and between Jerusalem and Albion. He was moved fundamentally by the idea of a “Covenant-nation”.

Milton’s three most considerable poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, would, in fact, serve well to illustrate the pattern proposed earlier on in connexion with the history of prose rhetoric in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Chapters I-III). Here again in Milton’s poetry we have three phases (whether or not they were historically consecutive is unimportant) which we may denominate in Hegelian fashion: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The traditional epic form, the heavy style of orotundity in *Paradise Lost*, is comparable to the grand style in prose which we discerned in Hooker: the style of *Paradise Regained* reminds us of the Puritan and Baconian revolt against this—the new realism: whilst the style of *Samson Agonistes* represents Milton’s ultimate synthesis. It is the most completely realized of Milton’s poems and also, we will now add, the most genuinely Hebraic.

Discussing the importance of Miamonides and other Jewish scholars as well as the Old Testament to Milton and the Cambridge Platonists, Professor Fisch is able to examine the importance of the Hebraic perspective to the reactions against Puritanism in Taylor, Browne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, and others, showing how it temporized their return to the *logos*-oriented Platonism of the Renaissance. After quoting briefly from John Smith’s *Discourses*, he says that Smith expresses,

one of the central images in what might be termed the Hebraic reaction against secular developments in Science during the period reviewed in this

study; it is the image of the World as Temple and Man as Priest. According to this *topos*, the outer world is not the Baconian universe stripped of its divine penumbra, nor is Man the unlicensed conquistador of Nature's secrets obedient only to his own will and desires. The world is seen instead to be itself radiant with divinity, and Man to whose rule indeed the material universe is given over, undertakes this task in a spirit of humility and reverence. He is not the "Final Cause" of the Creation, but the servant and steward of the Creator.

Realizing that everything that lives is holy, as Blake says, man stands and waits upon the Creator he must serve.

The disrobing of Albion finally reveals, of course, John Locke, who is "the ghost [spectre in Blake] of seventeenth-century Hebraism, sitting crowned [like Rahab] upon the ruins thereof". Once the temple had been desecrated, man's lost freedom became "a mere shred of germ-plasm in a vast and dismal laboratory". I find it impossible to disagree with Professor Fisch's essential perspectives, and I cannot but hope that all students and scholars of the seventeenth century and other centuries will read this book. I have, however, one reservation. I wish Professor Fisch would abandon those tired and mistaken views of Romanticism he shares with many others. And although he has much working for him, I do not think he has read Blake's best critics, including Frye and Erdman, and I am, therefore, as much put off by his shaky conclusions and tired platitudes about certain Blakean and Romantic views as he is about the false (indeed, false) equation of Hebraism with Puritanism. He would have done better with Emerson and Henry Miller in his conclusion than with Arnold and Eliot, were he looking for an alternative to the desiccated laboratory of the fisher-king who brings home the bacon in his sanitized white lab-coat of rat-skin in the dry cellar of the fallen temple—no priest or prophet he. Were Professor Fisch to improve upon the insights he has already into the works of Blake, Shelley, and Whitman, he might also be able to understand why Thoreau calls the intellect a cleaver. Some kinds of dissociation are needed in order that the divine marriage of Jerusalem and Albion be celebrated.

University of Alberta

E. J. ROSE

Seven Daughters Of The Theatre. By EDWARD WAGENKNECHT. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964. Pp. 234. \$6.50.

Seven Daughters Of The Theatre contains six portraits of famous singers, actresses, and one dancer who contributed much to their own form of theatre during the past hundred and fifty years. Though born with a great potential, all achieved stardom through their capacity for hard work and the acclaim of live audiences around the world. Asked to select their own list of such women, most readers would agree that the author's choice

at least comes from the same constellation. The six portraits are of Jenny Lind, Sarah Bernhardt, Ellen Terry, Julia Marlowe, Isadora Duncan, and Mary Garden.

Most readers might be surprised at Professor Wagenknecht's choice of a seventh daughter. He has selected a shooting star, one arising from a lesser galaxy because hardly proved under the same conditions, and initially made famous for quite different reasons. No one could doubt, however, that she was the most famous of them all. Her name is Marilyn Monroe. According to the foreword, she is the reason for the book, which began, as the author says, "with my feeling that I must write something about her, and because what I had to say was not long enough to be published by itself, I conceived the idea of constructing the book around her, to build, as it were, a house for her to inhabit." "The wound", he writes, "which Marilyn's death left in the world's psyche and in mine is still too fresh to permit me to treat her with the detachment which psychography requires."

Professor Wagenknecht's approach to the first six daughters succeeds in being detached and is the result of much research. After a general discussion of the artistry and of the public response of each personality, there is a brief biography. The author discusses their private and public lives, and their attitudes and approach to work. A few similarities and many differences emerge, suggesting that, given the talent, there is no one type of woman likely to succeed and that in the theatre, as in life, it takes all kinds to make a world.

Two of the daughters, Jenny Lind and Sarah Bernhardt, were illegitimate. Two, again Jenny Lind, and Julia Marlowe, eventually found happiness in marriage and in a working partnership with their husbands. One, Mary Garden, now over ninety and living in a nursing home near her native Aberdeen, never married. She emerges as a capable publicist, able to dramatize herself and to channel all her energy into her career. Bernhardt is seen as the most orchidaceous of the portraits with her elaborate clothes, travelling rosewood coffin, and her childlike orgies of spending. But, while all the daughters possessed a common lode of courage that is a pre-requisite in such an uncertain, overpraised, and under-estimated profession, Bernhardt found a personal heroism which is a great part of her example and her legend. At the end of her portrait there is a moving account from Joanna Richardson's book of one of her last performances of Cleopatra. Then over seventy, she was still touring and still able to create a glory of illusion in spite of her amputated leg.

The portrait entitled "The Dance Of Life As Art And As Orgy: Isadora Duncan" hardly lives up to its name, and instead we meet a woman with a lack of private responsibility to men, to children, and to other women. In contrast there is an extreme of public responsibility, and a need to champion beauty and a variety of causes which include the Russian Revolution and an apparent right to have children without the burden of marriage. The tragedy of the deaths of her own two children, however, found her wanting in the courage of her idealism. But this nonconformist, this dancer without luggage who

discarded all grammar of recent tradition in her art, possessed a further gift common to those in the other portraits. In performance she found a magic which could at all times weave a spell around an audience.

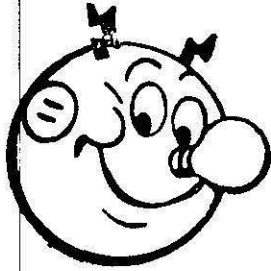
The picture of Ellen Terry is the most alive of all the portraits, partly because her personality was the most endearing, and partly because she has left such a legacy of her own thoughts and sayings. Her correspondence and her lectures are evidence of her potential talent as a writer. Here were brains to match beauty, and endowed with such charm as to throw stardust in the eyes of all, including the eyes of Bernard Shaw. Her appraisal of Irving shows her ability to cut a swath through pomposity with delight and with humour. The "silly old cautious thing" was "such a dear Donkey! Darling Fellow. Stupid Ass!"

The author's sub-title for the Monroe section of his book is "Rosemary For Remembrance", and in the foreword he states that it "is less of a portrait than the others and more of an essay—or elegy." He begins with the comparison of "two very exciting Sunday mornings" in 1962. One was concerned with the settlement of the Cuban crisis; the other with the desolation left by Marilyn's death. He continues by opposing the belief that Marilyn Monroe committed suicide and moves into a diatribe against her detractors which alters the tone of the book. The result is an outlet of personal feeling for a "poor child" who was pilloried, to be sure, but who volunteered for a profession which made her eligible for such treatment. But whatever the nature of the "Who-killed-cock-robin" controversy which has provided and will continue to provide much copy, a picture does emerge of an immensely attractive human being. Where possible she saw to it that her image was created with taste, and she has left a double legacy of a few shrewd remarks and of a beauty that is held forever in her photographs.

The author's treatment of these seven daughters is somewhat varied and esoteric, although his subjects were among the popular representatives of the most public arts of their day. He considers that Ellen Terry's unevenness in acting was due to her reliance on intuition and "disdain of male schematization". He describes Jenny Lind as "The nightingale as avatar and evangel." There is a passage about Marilyn Monroe as creating "a great mythopoeic image comparable to those created by the great stars of the silent era." There are many footnotes for further reference, some of which add anecdotes, but there are no translations of the German verses in the Monroe section. He concludes the portrait of Julia Marlowe with a magazine-type interview of the actress in her old age. The final impression is of sentiment for a dead dog and the firm rule of her maid. The result is a contrast to the dignity of the final strokes in the picture of Sarah Bernhardt.

A publisher's note at the end of *Seven Daughters Of The Theatre* gives details of the type used, and states that the book "has been printed on paper intended to have an effective life of not less than three hundred years." In view of such a statement, it is unfortunate that the total design has not been more carefully presented. My review

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copy included a section of pages so badly cut that it was often hard to read the Julia Marlowe portrait. Lines are cut off at the top, and there is an equal distortion of space at the bottom of a page. The illustrated motifs at the beginning of each section are hardly uniform with the research of the content. The motif for Isadora Duncan shows a pair of dancing slippers, yet she was famed for her freedom of performance in bare feet, and in almost bare everything else. There is, however, clear arrangement of a good bibliography, and an index for those who feel the need.

Ontario College of Education

ESME CRAMPTON

Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture. By LAWRENCE W. CHISOLM. New Haven: Yale University Press [Montreal: McGill University Press], 1964. Pp. 297. \$7.50.

As with other great Victorians, Ernest Fenollosa's life offers material for several biographies. He was born on Chestnut Street, Salem, Massachusetts, son of a Spanish musician and a member of the prominent Silsbee family. At the age of twenty-five he joined Edward S. Morse and Thomas C. Mendenhall as the first Westerners to teach at the newly-formed Tokyo University. When Fenollosa arrived in Japan, the country was in a frenzy of change, ruthlessly engaged in scrapping the past and adapting itself to Western ways. While lecturing on Hegel and Herbert Spencer, he discovered Japanese art, hitherto mainly known to the West through wood-block prints, and compiled the first history of it by either Westerner or Japanese. In 1890 he returned to Boston to become curator of a collection largely formed by himself. Five years later he was forced to leave Boston because of divorce and remarriage. The remaining thirteen years of his life he spent writing, lecturing, and formulating the theories that were to prove so influential of such diverse figures as John Dewey, Ezra Pound, and Georgia O'Keeffe. When he died in 1908, he was certainly the foremost interpreter of the Far East in the United States and one of the foremost in the world.

Fenollosa was by no means without personal problems. He was something of an outsider: he liked to think of himself as descended through his father from the Tlascalan princess who had married Cortez' lieutenant Alvarado, and all his life he maintained a certain independence, breaking with convention where necessary, as in his divorce, if never flaunting it as a Shelley or a D. H. Lawrence might have done. There are hints of a darker side, too, but for the most part this was controlled by a Victorian capacity for hard work. His life took him from New England to Meiji Japan and ultimately to the Chautauqua circuit, and he knew many of the colourful personalities of the time: Henry Adams and John Lafarge; Lafcadio Hearn ("The white, blind left eyeball is a terrible defect and one feels always his consciousness of this"); the slightly nasty Sturgis Bigelow, who became a Buddhist without ceasing to be a Boston Brahmin. Mr. Chisholm has a keen eye

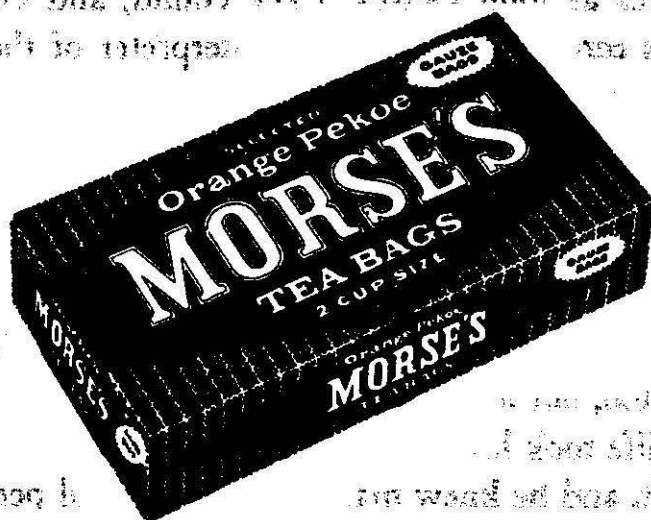
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for personality and for details of setting, yet this side of Fenollosa's life, fascinating as it is, is not his primary objective; it is with the ideas that he is most concerned.

It is as art historian and teacher that Fenollosa has always been most widely known. At the time of his arrival in Japan, Japanese art was enjoying a considerable vogue in the West, particularly in France. Knowledge of it, however, was confined largely to wood-block prints, porcelains, ivories, with little recognition of such great masters of the past as Sesshu or Kano. In an important review of the chapter on painting in Louis Gonse's *L'Art japonais* (1884), Fenollosa first showed the limitations of such an approach and in his own collection and later in his posthumously published *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* he was able to demonstrate that Asiatic art is not merely decorative or exotic, but based on the same principles that animate all great art. At the same time he exerted a considerable influence on art education in both Japan and the United States. In Japan he was instrumental in founding the Fine Arts Academy, which helped bring the Japanese back to their own artistic heritage, and in the United States, through his friend Arthur Wesley Dow, who was for many years at Teachers College, Columbia, his theories revised to a considerable extent the teaching of art in the public schools. Though never subjectivist, Fenollosa was on the side of individual creativity as opposed to artistic imitation and belongs with those early twentieth-century poets and painters who were attempting to break the sway of an academic tradition.

Fenollosa was also one of the last of the Victorian prophets. He recognized the mutual need of East and West, and hoped that through art a common basis could be found. Like others of his generation he probably underestimated political and economic antagonisms, but his idealistic vision of one world should not be forgotten. It is perhaps significant that in the brief moment of hope that followed World War II many of Fenollosa's insights were used by Professor Northrop in his provocative *Meeting of East and West*. That that moment has passed would probably not have surprised Fenollosa; it gives one a curious feeling today to read his analysis of a certain recurrent, though not necessarily dominant, strain of Chinese civilization: "Their ideal is uniformity; their standard is not insight but authority; their conception of literature is bounded by the dictionary; what they hate most is any manifestation of human freedom."

One can hardly praise Mr. Chisolm's work too much, or—if this is any sample of Yale's programme in American studies—the atmosphere that stimulated it. Apart from an essay by Van Wyck Brooks there is little available about a man who deserves to be much better known. *Fenollosa* cannot have been an easy book to write: in addition to his usual duties, the biographer had to familiarize himself with most of the important literary and artistic developments from Thoreau to T. E. Hulme, to say nothing of the complexities of Asian thought. All this Mr. Chisolm has done with the greatest thoroughness and good taste; his judgments are always mature and restrained, and his style is often brilliant without being flashy. He also shows a nice eye for the dramatic moment; this, for example, is the end of Part IV, next to last of the five sections: "At the end of the second World



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War the United States State Department and the Art Commission for Protection of Monuments sent to Japan Langdon Warner, one of America's leading art historians and connoisseurs, a scholar and teacher trained at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. On landing, Warner went directly to Miidera and placed a wreath on Fenollosa's grave."

Temple University

EDWIN B. BENJAMIN

The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley. By ROSS WOODMAN. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964. Pp. xv, 209. \$6.00.

The present work aims to interpret the nature of Shelley's poetic vision and to analyse the process by which his imagination absorbed the concept of Man and Society into the body of his visionary works. The author does not recognize Shelley as a moral or a political reformer, but he puts considerable stress upon the mythopoeic nature of the poet. The author feels convinced that "the apocalyptic nature of Shelley's vision" is born out of the fury of a passionate imagination, and that Shelley intended to set forth the archetypal form of certain radical beliefs, and transcend them beyond the limits of Time and Space, correlating them to moral reforms.

Professor Woodman's interest was first aroused by Shelley's view of Milton in *A Defence of Poetry*: his subsequent researches into Shelley's interests in the occult enable him to explain its fusion into the unique form of the poet's vision. According to him, Shelley's occultism is as significant a base for the understanding of his poetry as is his training in the radicalism of the eighteenth century. The poet was as much interested in magic as in science. And his passion to recreate social conditions was defeated not by the current events of his time, but by an occult Platonism which appeared to transcend the universe. Professor Woodman interprets Shelley's *Adonais* as a metaphysical defence of suicide which plumbs the depth and core of his system of the occult.

Lovers of Shelley tend to put great emphasis upon his doctrine of inspiration, particularly upon his Platonic notion as divinely inspired and thereby subjected to influences "beyond and above consciousness". This attitude, according to Professor Woodman, ignores the attention that Shelley gave to absorbing these influences, particularly in his abiding interest in occult studies. The nature of Shelley's poetic vision is examined in some detail and its development traced from *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life*. The author pays greater attention to such occult writers as Frank Newton and Thomas Taylor, who basically expounded the mythological mode of thought, than to those reformers of the eighteenth century, such as William Godwin or Baron d'Holbach, who seem to have influenced the moral, social, and political make-up of the poet.

Shelley's view of poetry was philosophical and rational. He subordinated the philosopher to the poet because he subordinated analytical reason to the creative imagination; in fact, he asserted a hierarchy of faculties with imagination at the apex. His

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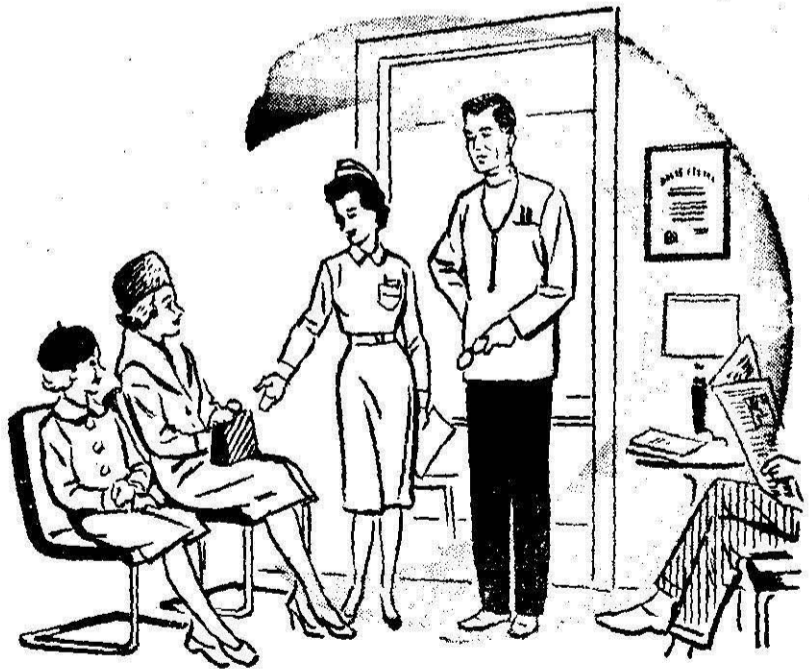
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vision is never obscured by any cloud of philosophical reason. A poet's vision, according to Shelley, awakens humanity.

Shelley's experience as a visionary poet focussed his attention from time to eternity, from man to the divine in human being, eager to soar beyond the muddy vesture of decay. Shelley had admired Plato more than any other philosopher, although Plato had exiled that visionary type of poet that Shelley had sought both to defend and become.

This excellent book seeks to reveal the tension of Shelley's apocalyptic vision of the continued renewal of life, never forgetting the deeper roots of metaphysical doctrine concerning death and extinction. Professor Woodman throws out a large philosophical perspective beyond the interpretation of the major visionary works of Shelley. This work appears to be a profound appreciation of Shelley as a metaphysical poet, and incidentally discovers and reveals the true nature and worth of perhaps the greatest of English romantics, the poet's poet. This publication should be of great interest not only to students of Shelley but also to all general readers of the Romantic movement. There is in it a considerable amount of interesting material, but it is the conviction of the writer that makes the work dynamic.

Dalhousie University

DEVENDRA P. VARMA

The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume IV, 1832-1834. Edited by ALFRED R. FERGUSON. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press [Toronto: S J. Reginald Saunders], 1964. Pp. xxi, 474. \$12.50.

The fourth volume of the new edition of Emerson's *Journals* covers what could be described as the true early beginnings of Emerson's literary life. This impression comes as much from the style and expression of the entries as it does from his ten-month trip to Europe, where he met Landor, Lafayette, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle. Having left the ministry in the fall of 1832, Emerson, dogged again by ill health and in search of a new career, set sail aboard the brig *Jasper* for Malta, headed for a climate less harsh than that of New England. The *Jasper* plunged Pequod-like into the cold Atlantic on Christmas Day, taking Emerson into the new year in the old world, more at sea in some ways than ever before. Until he returned to New York in October of 1833, Emerson wandered through Europe from Malta to Sicily, Italy, France, and, finally to England—a quiet American Byron still at sea and disappointed by the poverty of experience his memoirs would reveal.

Covering just under three years of Emerson's life, Volume Four offers many insights into Emerson's development as a poet-philosopher and writer-critic. In Journal Q for December 1, 1832, he writes, "I never read Wordsworth without chagrin.—A man of such great powers and ambition, so near to the Dii majores to fail so meanly in every attempt. A genius that hath epilepsy, a deranged archangel." In Journal A for August 17, 1834,

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he writes, "Milton was too learned, though I hate to say it. It wrecked his originality. He was more indebted to the Hebrew than even to the Greek. Wordsworth is a more original poet than he. That seems the poet's garland. He speaks by that right that he has somewhat yet unsaid to say. Scott & Coleridge and such like are not poets, only professors of the art." Emerson's opinion of Wordsworth had changed indeed, and though, as always, he placed a priority on originality, his description of Scott and Coleridge was ironically an accurate but unintended self-characterization.

The fourth volume contains reconstructions of his conversations with Coleridge at Highgate, Wordsworth at Mount Rydal, and Carlyle at Craigenputtock. Though much of Emerson's experiences were to appear later in *English Traits*, the *Journals* have that rough immediacy that communicates Emerson's own excitement at the time. Carlyle's influence as a person and a writer was clearly the most pronounced. He was, after all, closer to Emerson's age than Wordsworth or Coleridge, and both his personality and his literary interests (Burns, for instance) were near to Emerson's own. He even defended his "fantastical Scotchman" to Wordsworth who, according to Emerson, thought Carlyle "insane sometimes".

Throughout the early eighteen-thirties, Emerson's reading continued to be broad and intense, and included, besides the major English writers from Shakespeare to Scott that he had always read, much more Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle, some read before his visits to them and more after his return to America. To the list Emerson added Manzoni, Byron, Madame de Stael, Goethe, and the usual periodicals which he had been reading for some time, such as *The North American Review* and *The Edinburgh Review*. Under Carlyle's influence, his "Germanick" studies steadily increased. Many important literary figures of the age—now reduced by the passage of time—appear in the *Journals*, as Emerson indulged his eclectic tastes. His literary landscape was animated and well-populated, but, then, Emerson was as active a reader as he was a writer, and little escaped him. "This book is my Savings Bank", he wrote at the beginning of Journal A at the end of 1833. Much of the phraseology and many of the ideas in the fourth volume anticipate the Emerson soon to appear as the Sage of Concord.

In one of the most interesting entries in the volume, in Journal A for December 29, 1834, Emerson reveals his grim sense of the absurd. The passage begins with that two-word Coleridgean aphorism which was the English poet's favourite. I find it surprising that the editor does not comment upon it as he does elsewhere when Emerson reveals his considerable debt to Coleridge.

Extremes meet. Misfortunes even may be so accumulated as to be ludicrous. To be shipwrecked is bad; to be shipwrecked on an iceberg is horrible; to be shipwrecked on an iceberg in a snowstorm, confounds us; to be shipwrecked on an iceberg in a storm and to find a bear on the snow bank to dispute the sailor's landing which is not driven away till he has bitten off a sailor's arm, is rueful to laughter.

Some people smile spite of themselves in communicating the worst

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Shades of Captain Ahab. Melville once called Emerson a "deep diver"; I suspect he would not have been surprised at Emerson's existential grasp of the tragic-comic character of that shipwreck which a famous modern existentialist has called "The Ultimate" and which Stephen Crane said was "apropos of nothing"—a combination of views both Emersonian and Melvillian, and thoroughly American.

As I have said before in reviews of the first three volumes of the new Emerson *Journals*, the editing and format are excellent and the books well-made in every detail.

University of Alberta

E. J. ROSE

The Saga of Gisli. Translated from the Icelandic by GEORGE JOHNSTON. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963. Pp. xiii, 146. \$3.50.

The Saga of Gisli, a beautiful piece of mediaeval literature, is powerfully translated by Professor George Johnston of Carleton University, Ottawa. He steers clear of the quaint and the archaic, maintains the texture of the Icelandic original, and succeeds in impressing upon the reader an awareness of a literary movement. Mr. Peter Foote, Reader in Old Icelandic at the University of London, appends some lively and informative notes, and contributes a valuable survey of the historical and literary background of the Icelandic sagas as a whole. Consequently, this publication is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of one of the most remote and least explored facets of ancient communal literature. The general reader can handle it with both profit and pleasure.

"Saga" means "something said", and signifies a sort of running prose narrative. This form of oral literature first developed in Ireland, Iceland, Norway, and Anglo-Saxon England. The Irish sagas deal with incidents taking place during the first century after Christ, incidents which were not recorded until nine centuries later. The Icelandic sagas, written during the Middle Ages, present pictures of the people who lived between 870 and 1025 A.D.

Certain characteristics of the sagas stand out prominently: being oral literature, they were subject to continual change of verbal context; being a form of communal literature, they were chanted in farm-houses and at winter bonfires or harvest gatherings. Although sagas are anonymous works, consisting of a fusion of history and imagination, the incidents contained in them are often factual: "characters" are painted from ordinary life, which, at the period, was primitive, and inclined to violence. They deal with the exploits and careers of historically real men and women and, being written in simple, realistic prose, they are rich in dramatic narrative. The incidents are arranged chronologically and indicate the line of historical and social development of the Icelandic people.

The earliest written record of *The Saga of Gisli* dates back to the early thirteenth century. The theme is an imaginary reconstruction of the life-history of a Norwegian

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and his family who migrated to Iceland, about 950 A.D., from dusky Scandinavia. The story covers a whole decade before it is revealed that Gisli, the chief character, is outlawed for having killed his brother-in-law. For the next period of thirteen years we find him living in hiding, a sort of underground life in the remote, northern regions of cold Iceland. Finally he is discovered, arrested, and compelled to pay the wages of his sin. On the basic foundations of these historical facts, the author weaves a tale of jealousy, hate, and love, of primal human passions, and seeks to project these intricate emotional relationships against the malignant background of an inevitable doom.

Gisli, the hero, is a dynamic character, full of life and vitality; he is honourable, strict, and ruthless; and at several places we discover glimpses in him of a poet and dreamer. The torments of his nightmarish visions plumb the emotional depths of his character as the construction of the compelling narrative climbs to a central climax.

There is a basic similarity of outlook in the writers of sagas. While depicting pre-Christian men and women, it suited neither their philosophy nor their prejudices to portray these characters as mentally and morally subject to the heathen pantheon. The gods could shape the destinies of men, but they had nothing to do with character, and the writers of sagas were deeply interested in the individual human personality.

Honour is always an emphatic keynote in the sagas. It uncovers "love" as the integral relationship between man and woman, but its deeper implications are seldom explored. Yet, the *Saga of Gisli* presents an interplay and open conflict between personal and family honour, and personal and family love. Consequently a sustained dramatic sequence is built out of the emotional relationships of characters. Because of the introduction of dreams and their symbolism, the character grows more complex.

The style and the construction of the story deserve high praise. The descriptions provide graphic excitement in Gisli's hair-breadth escapes and adventures, while the formal construction of the saga is extraordinarily neat and effective. Some portions are as readable as a novel; the narrative appears to be drenched in lyricism like Macpherson's *Ossian*. Lively, subtle, and eloquent, the style is directly geared to the narrative, which radiates more local colour because of its slightly outlandish tone. The images are drawn from myths and legends, while the author's dramatic sense and his effective narration make this one of the most memorable of the Icelandic sagas.

The Norwegian place names in the opening part are convincing and authentic; the author displays concrete knowledge of old burial customs; the Icelandic topography is precise and accurate. One feels grateful to the translator for having exhumed this moving study of human character which is also a masterly narrative of suspense and action. To translate a powerful primitive drama like the *Saga of Gisli* demands more than supreme scholarship in linguistics; it demands a literary ability and an artistic sensitiveness not inferior to that of the original, and one does not hesitate to assert that George Johnston has all the requisite qualifications.

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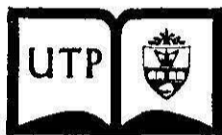
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