

## Review Articles

### *Dickens, Jung and Coleridge*

As Bacon says, "some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." This book\* is undoubtedly one that must be well chewed. Not only is it a complicated dish, it is also a remarkably gristly one. What Sidney Smith once said when reviewing a book by Bentham applies precisely to Miller's work: Mr. Miller is long; Mr. Miller is occasionally involved and obscure; Mr. Miller invents new and alarming expressions; Mr. Miller loves division and subdivision. Served with such threats to digestion, the reviewer, says Smith, should act as a mental dietitian: "One great use of a Review, indeed, is to make men wise in ten pages, who have no appetite for a hundred pages; to condense nourishment, to work with pulp and essence, and to guard the stomach from idle burden and unmeaning bulk." But one remembers that only books of the meaner sort are to be distilled and summarized. And *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels* is far from being a mean sort of book.

Mr. Miller, concerned with Dickens' novels "as autonomous works of art," not with their political, moral, or social relationships to their age, associates his critical method with Trilling's as manifested in Trilling's study of *Little Dorrit*, and with that of the 'new critics' in general. He seeks particularly "to assess the specific quality of Dickens' imagination in the totality of his work, to identify what persists throughout all the swarming multiplicity of his novels as a view of the world which is unique and the same, and to trace the development of this vision of things from one novel to another throughout the chronological span of his career." What is most interesting about Mr. Miller's method, however, is the assumption upon which it is based and what it implies about the nature of Dickens' work. The emphasis on autonomy and vision directs us to Jung, and the conception of Dickens' unity of vision directs us to Coleridge.

Miller's work excepted, Dickensian criticism has been dominantly Freudian. A great impetus was given to Dickens studies by Edmund Wilson, who related Dickens' development as a writer to his misery in Warren's blacking factory and described Dickens' alternation of murderous gloom and high exuberance as characteristic of the manic depressive. This showed the power of the Freudian approach to illuminate Dickens' work,

\**Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels*. By J. Hillis Miller. Cambridge: Harvard University Press [Toronto: S. J. Reginald Saunders and Co. Ltd.], 1958. Pp. xvi, 346. \$7.95.

although Jack Lindsay's psychological hypotheses in *Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study*, characterized by one critic as "a non-stop flight through the inane," went a long way toward obscuring the lights. Freudian attempts to explain Dickens' work by relating it to his personal experience were a step forward from the many studies attempting to explain Dickens by reference to his social environment. No one surveying the development of Dickensian scholarship could fail to observe what richness of material is at hand for either of these methods. His work is intimately, if not always accurately, engaged with the problems of his society. And to which of his novels would Freud's description (in "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming") of the origin of artistic phantasy not apply? "Some actual experience which made a strong impression on the writer had stirred up a memory of an earlier experience, generally belonging to childhood, which then arouses a wish that finds a fulfilment in the work in question, and in which elements of the recent event and the old memory should be discernible." Miller's approach marks a further change in the climate of criticism, a movement to consider Dickens' art not in terms of outside relationships but in terms of itself, to examine it as a unique, autonomous vision. This change is not merely a question of critical techniques: its real significance lies in attendant implications about the nature of Dickens' art.

Jung differentiates (in "Psychology and Literature") between the "psychological" and the visionary novel. The former is of little interest to the psychologist since it "has done its own work of psychological interpretation," and since "Everything that it embraces—the experience as well as its artistic expression—belongs to the realm of the understandable." The visionary novel, erected on implicit psychological assumptions, is less tractable. It is the record of "a primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding," which is "foreign and cold, many-sided, demonic and grotesque," and which "bursts asunder our human standards of value and of aesthetic form. . . . We are reminded in nothing of everyday, human life, but rather of dreams, night-time fears and the dark recesses of the mind that we sometimes sense with misgiving." The vision itself is not to be dismissed as poetic licence. It is "not something derived or secondary, and it is not a symptom of something else. It is true symbolic expression—that is, the expression of something existent in its own right, but imperfectly known." The vision's content is a manifestation of the collective unconscious.

For Jung as for the "new critics," among whom Miller ranks himself, art is autonomous, not explainable by reference to the personal experience of the artist. Attempting to show that the author's personal history accounts for his vision, the Freudian, says Jung, "takes us away from the psychological study of the work of art, and confronts us with the psychic disposition of the poet himself." This method reduces the work of art to a symptom of psychic disturbance, secondary, "a mere substitute for reality." As the expression of a neurosis, it is "a mistake, a dodge, an excuse, a voluntary blindness." Freud's conception of art is firmly Baconian: "every child at play," he says, "behaves like an imaginative writer, in that he creates a world of his own or, more truly, he rearranges the things of his world and orders it in a new way that pleases him better." In the

day-dream thus produced, "past, present and future are threaded, as it were, on the string of the wish that runs through them all." Numerous recent biographies of Dickens show how popular the tracing of these threads has become.

That treating Dickens' novels as visionary in Jung's sense has definite advantages will be apparent to anyone who reflects on the interminable nonsense that is talked about Dickens' caricatures, his distortion of reality, his melodrama, and his lack of form. Realists and exponents of form in "the novel proper," ever willing to run a tape-measure over Dickens' irregularities for us, are better at showing us what Dickens is not than at showing us what he is. To note the distortion is commonplace; our purpose must be to see the significance of the distortion, its significance within the total vision, not simply as a symptom of the author's mental quirks. Miller proposes to see the work "not as the mere symptom or product of a pre-existent psychological condition, but as the very means by which a writer apprehends and, in some measure, creates himself." His statement echoes Jung's remark: "It is not Goethe who creates *Faust*, but *Faust* which creates Goethe. . . . The secret of artistic creation and of the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state of *participation mystique*—to that level of experience at which it is man who lives, and not the individual . . ." Though this statement implies universality in the vision, the work may be far from clear. *Faust* points to something "not clearly known and yet profoundly alive." This dark vitality is evident in a principal characteristic of the visionary work: its demonic, nightmarish quality. That this quality is pre-eminently Dickensian has become ever more obvious. It accounts for the frequency with which Kafka's name keeps recurring in Dickensian criticism. Figures such as Quilp, Fagin, and Sikes exude a demonic atmosphere—Sikes loses himself in a ritual of fire; Quilp dies wrapped in a blackness impenetrable except for the glare of distant flames; and in *Little Dorrit* a principal character in the action is the devil himself. It is insufficient to dismiss such figures along with the saintly characters and the fairy-tale elements of Dickens' works as melodrama—for one thing that would imply a shallow conception of melodrama (his remarks about *Nicholas Nickleby*, "the elaborate performance of a cheap melodrama," show that Miller himself is susceptible to such shallowness). As Miss Van Ghent and others have observed, not only the people but even the supposedly inanimate objects of Dickens' world are invested with sinister life. "Dickens's world," says Praz (in *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*), "is akin to that of Doré, of Hugo, of Breughel, and of the gargoyles of Gothic cathedrals. It has about it some quality of hallucination." In view of Jung's statement that "It is not alone the creator of this kind of art who is in touch with the night-side of life, but the seers, prophets, leaders and enlighteners also," it is significant that Carlyle was one of the first to detect beneath Dickens' "sparkling, clear, and sunny utterance. . . deeper than all, if one has the eye to see deep enough, dark, fateful silent elements, tragical to look upon, and hiding amid dazzling radiances as of the sun, the elements of death itself."

One of the merits of Miller's study, then, is that it frees itself from the traditional clichés of Dickensian scholarship and systematically reveals the sombre vision. Assuming that "each sentence or paragraph of a novel, whether it is presented from the point of view

of the narrator or of some imagined character, defines a certain relationship between an imagining mind and its objects," Miller pursues one theme through Dickens' novels: "the search for a true and viable identity." Exploring this theme of the self's relationship to its environment involves a close analysis of style: the novel is an "embodiment in words of a certain very special way of experiencing the world." The physical world of *Oliver Twist*, for example, is not just 'setting'; it is a symbolic expression of Oliver's spiritual predicament. "If *Oliver Twist* is in one sense Oliver's procession through a sequence of opaque and meaningless present moments, it is in another sense the slow discovery, in the midst of that confusion, of a secret which will make all seem orderly and significant." In *Bleak House* everyone dwells in a chaotic world symbolized by the mud and fog. Faced with this apparently meaningless jumble, character after character—Krook, Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby, Guppy, Esther, Lady Dedlock, Tulkinghorn, and Bucket—seeks to find the clue that will reduce everything to order, or else fears the revelation that may come. The book is full of detectives, not only Bucket, but Krook poking inquisitively among his rags and rubbish, Richard obsessed with the mysteries of the Jarndyce case, Tulkinghorn secretly amassing evidence about the lives of others, Guppy pursuing Esther's background. Each investigation has its own peculiarities: Tulkinghorn's knowledge of secret lives, for example, is gained at the cost of his own separation from all other living people. Each character is the center of an isolated bubble of experience; all together inhabit a world that is undifferentiated chaos. How does one escape both chaos and isolation and establish a satisfactory relationship with the world? In exploring his theme Miller carefully analyzes not only the surface relationships of characters in conflict but the total stylistic texture of the work.

After what has been said it will not surprise the reader to find that Miller's assumptions bear affinities not only to Jung's theory of visionary art but also to Coleridge's theory of artistic form. By examining the multitudinous details of monologue, reminiscence, action, and description, and regarding each as "the definition of a certain relation between mind and world," the reader, says Miller, detects a profound harmony amid the apparent chaos. "Through the analysis of all the passages, as they reveal the persistence of certain obsessions, problems, and attitudes, the critic can hope to glimpse the original unity of a creative mind. For all the works of a single writer form a unity, a unity in which a thousand paths radiate from the same center. At the heart of a writer's successive works, revealed in glimpses through each event and image, is an impalpable organizing form, constantly presiding over the choice of words." Miller, of course, is speaking of a form that includes within itself the author's whole creative output, a shaping principle that governs all he writes. But that form detected goes a long way toward revealing the coherence of any single work, as Miller's studies of individual novels show. The adequate estimation of Dickens' power as a novelist has had to wait for critics capable, like Miller, of discerning what Coleridge calls "the essential difference betwixt the shaping skill of mechanical talent, and the creative, productive, life-power of inspired genius"; or again—"the difference between form as proceeding, and shape as superinduced;—the latter is either the death or

the imprisonment of the thing,—the former is its self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency." That such critics have arrived is evident in the work of Crompton, Leavis, Morse, and Van Ghent, to name only the most striking examples. The Coleridgean conception of form and Jung's theory of visionary art are complementary (if Freud's view of art is Baconian, Jung's is surely Coleridgean) and peculiarly applicable to Dickens' work. And the importance of Miller's study, therefore, consists not only in the insights he gives into the nature of that work but in the emergence, evidenced in his study and in those of the others mentioned, of a new and meaningful interpretation of Dickens.

Unfortunately, Miller's study is difficult to read, and not because the ideas he broaches are complex, though they are, but because Miller fails in lucidity. Whatever conclusions one may come to about the accuracy of its content, his writing sometimes smacks more than a little of one-up-manship. "The proper model of the universe of *Our Mutual Friend*," he says, "is not that of a non-Euclidean space filled with incommensurate local monads entirely isolated from one another. It is rather that of a large number of interlocking perspectives on the world, each what Whitehead would call a *prehension* of the same totality." Any questions?

University of Alberta

R. D. McMASTER

### *Shakespeare and the Oxfordians*

*The Six Loves of "Shake-Speare"*\* is one of a number of volumes that have been appearing in recent years based upon the hypothesis that the plays and poems published under the name of William Shakespeare were actually written by Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, England's premier earl in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. This hypothesis was first advanced in the earlier years of this century by a gentleman who rejoiced in the name of J. Thomas Looney, and it has been gaining adherents increasingly, as the rival candidacies of Francis Bacon, the Earls of Derby and Rutland, Christopher Marlowe, and others have failed to attract any considerable following among those who call themselves anti-Stratfordians. Nowadays, the fashion of cipher-hunting has waned. The recent and conclusive demonstration of its futility by William and Elizabeth Friedman in their entertaining book, *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined*, may indeed be said to have laughed this particular folly out of court. But the territories ruled by Erasmus's goddess are very wide; and those who still wish to make a mystery of the authorship of Shakespeare's works, with any show of plausibility whatever, have been increasingly attracted to Oxford, who can be shown to have had some interest in the theatre, in place of the former favourite Bacon, who can hardly be thought, even by the most fanciful, to have had any.

All such speculations doubtless arise out of the love of mystery hunting. The circumstances that we know very little of Shakespeare's early years or of his beginnings as a

\**The Six Loves of "Shake-Speare."* By Louis P. Benezet. New York: Pageant Press, 1958. Pp. 126. \$3.50.

dramatist; that the personality behind the plays, and especially the sonnets, has remained enigmatic and elusive; and that responsible Shakespearian scholars have in general rigorously opposed speculation concerning the personal life of the author where evidence is lacking—all these conditions, in the light of the unrivalled reputation of "Shakespeare," have invited the creation of the supposed mystery concerning his identity. Everyone who is known to have any concern with Shakespeare learns to sympathize with Coleridge's *Wedding Guest* when he feels the detaining hand upon his sleeve, the glittering eye fixed upon him, and awaits the inevitable question: "But don't you think that the Earl of Oxford—or Sir Walter Raleigh or Queen Elizabeth, as the case may be—could have written Shakespeare?"

The inquirer, of course, does not really want to listen to your views: he wants to explain the elaborate and ingenious grounds of his own; and you are lucky if you can escape without resort to violence. There is a sufficiently wide reading-public apparently willing enough to listen, however, and there are a surprising number of otherwise seemingly responsible people who continue to produce books year after year—there must be hundreds of them cluttering our library shelves—devoted to clearing up, once and for all, the mystery of who wrote Shakespeare that has baffled all inquirers, except the author, for nearly four hundred years. Serious students of Shakespeare do not ordinarily find time to read these works, which often run to impressive-looking bulk. But for the sake of those who have never found time to read a reputable life of Shakespeare, it is occasionally worth while to glance at an example of what the anti-Stratfordians have to tell us.

The present argument is, I think, very fairly representative. The author, as the title-page states, has had certain academic connections, and has been responsible, at various times, for such sober works as *The Story of the Map of Europe*, *The Story of Society* (subtitled: "a Juvenile"), and a history of Evansville, Indiana, as well as for *Shakspeare*, *Shakespeare*, and *De Vere*—the last presumably a companion-piece to the present study. We may take the writer as a convinced and sincere spokesman for the argument he presents: that William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon lacked the education necessary for the writing of "Shakespeare's" works, whereas the author's reading of the sonnets clearly demonstrates that the Earl of Oxford was responsible for them.

The opening chapter purports to offer a survey of what are commonly accepted as the known facts of Shakespeare's career; and this, to anyone who has read a scholarly life of the dramatist such as that of either J. Q. Adams or E. K. Chambers, is more than sufficient to demonstrate the incapacity of Mr. Benezet to examine evidence dispassionately. Vague and sweeping claims are made for "Shakespeare's" knowledge of languages: "The dramatist has been thoroughly grounded in Latin and Greek," the author writes. It would be interesting indeed if the writer could show that the author of the plays was grounded in Greek; for it is well known that the claim could hardly be made for any other Elizabethan dramatist except Ben Jonson. In fact, the classical learning revealed in the plays has been very carefully examined by J. A. K. Thomson and others (and found to be about as modest as Ben Jonson described it to be), and the sort of education that the dramatist

did have (as far as the works reveal it, that is) has been exhaustively studied by T. W. Baldwin in *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*. Mr. Benezet shows no acquaintance with these authorities, and, in general, to judge by his few remarks on school and university education in Queen Elizabeth's day, he is largely in a state of ignorance concerning the whole subject. He makes sport of what he is pleased to regard as the incompetence verging upon illiteracy shown in the wording of Shakespeare's will but without making it clear that the phrasing conforms to the legal formalism of the day and was almost certainly supplied by the lawyer who drew the will; it is demonstrably not written by the man who signed it. All this, besides a pointless ridicule of Shakespeare's signatures (apparently based upon ignorance of the distinction between Elizabethan Italian and secretary hands), is in the interest of showing that the man of Stratford could not possibly have written the plays and poems that go under his name. What the author fails entirely to notice is that the same will that he would thus dissociate from the author of "Shakespeare's" works leaves bequests for John Heminge and Henry Condell, the two editors of the plays of the First Folio, and for Richard Burbage, who was the leading actor in them.

Having thus established, by arguments that could persuade only those readers who are in a greater state of ignorance concerning Shakespeare and his times than the author himself, but to the author's own evident satisfaction, the impossibility of the Stratfordian's having written the works of Shakespeare, he has a clear field, in the succeeding chapters, for expounding the veiled references and correspondences in the sonnets that reveal the Earl of Oxford's own story, the story of his "six loves." These are, respectively: (1) Queen Elizabeth, who is alleged to have forcibly betrayed the Earl's youthful innocence, a deed for which the Earl discreetly reproaches her in five sonnets; (2) his first wife, Anne Cecil, whom he celebrates, without reproaches, in another five sonnets; (3) his second wife, Elizabeth Trentham, who gets six; (4) the Earl of Southampton (the inspirer of thirty-eight, whom the Earl of Oxford hopes to marry to his daughter); (5) his (putative) illegitimate son by Anne Vavasor, Edward Vere (the largest recipient with forty-two); (6) and finally, the disreputable Anne herself, who is, of course, the Dark Lady and who gets "at least thirty-six." The author summons a remarkable restraint, at the end of this catalogue, in leaving some twenty-two sonnets unassigned to any of Oxford's contemporaries or acquaintances.

If a really interesting story were to be made out of this fanciful collection of allegations, there might be something to be said for it, independently of its plausibility. One thinks of Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*, for instance, which is a first-rate detective story without purporting to be history and yet with a pleasing air of historical conjecture. But even as detective fiction or pseudo-historical romance, *The Six Loves of "Shake-Speare"* would have to be placed abysmally low in the scale of this modest kind of fiction. The method, throughout, is simply to assert a supposed circumstance in the Earl of Oxford's career and then to quote a sonnet in support of the alleged circumstance. These juxtapositions have an increasingly oppressive flatness. Thus *When in disgrace with fortune*

and men's eyes is explained as referring to a temporary loss of Queen Elizabeth's favour by Oxford. We are told, in another place, that "the Earl's passion for Anne Vavasor was the strongest and most lasting emotion of his whole life. Wanton and faithless he knew her to be, but the beck of her small finger or a 'come hither' glance in her eye never failed to bring him to her feet" (p. 61). This, of course, amply explains *Thou blind fool, love, what dost thou to my eyes*, (sonnet 137) and several others. Somehow, the style of the sonnets and that of the commentary do not go very well together. If the style of the sonnets is the Earl of Oxford's, the style of the commentator is much more like that of Ethel M. Dell.

If the endeavours of the Oxfordians are neither scholarship nor even passable fiction, their persistent energy of conviction is nevertheless an odd, and, in its way, impressive social phenomenon. For Mr. Benezet, it would appear, there is an inexhaustible allurements in this dreary vein of speculation. He evidently enjoys it all immensely. According to the biographical sketch that accompanies his book, he was born in 1878 and is thus no novice in years. Yet he can nevertheless write, in his conclusion:

Many Stratfordians say, "After all, we have the works. What difference does it make who wrote them?" The answer is found in the chapters which precede this Epilogue. How impossible it is to make sense of the *Sonnets* without Oxford's life story to illuminate them! *The same thing is true of the plays*. They are full of historical characters, slightly disguised. But that, as Kipling says, is another story, and must wait for another time. (p. 109).

Though I cannot promise to be myself among the readers of this writer's further discoveries of the Earl of Oxford's autobiographical reminiscences in Shakespeare's plays, I cannot but salute, in parting from him thus finally, the indomitable zest which beckons him, when past eighty, towards the illimitable project of examining each of the plays as he has examined the sonnets. This zeal, at least, is in the authentic manner of the Elizabethans.

University of Toronto

H. S. WILSON