Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

NCLC 197

ISSN 0732-1864

Volume 197

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1800 and 1899, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Kathy D. Darrow
Project Editor

GALE
CENGAGE Learning

Detroit • New York • San Francisco • New Haven, Conn • Waterville, Maine • London

GALE
CENGAGE Learning

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Vol. 197

Project Editor: Kathy Darrow

Editorial: Dana Barnes, Thomas Burns, Elizabeth Cranston, Kristen Dorsch, Jeffrey W. Hunter, Jelena O. Krstović, Michelle Lee, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Noah Schusterbauer, Lawrence J. Trudeau

Data Capture: Frances Monroe, Gwen Tucker

Rights and Acquisitions: Mollika Basu, Matt Derda, Jacqueline Key

Composition and Electronic Capture: Gary Oudersluys

Manufacturing: Cynde Bishop

Associate Product Manager: Marc Cormier

Gale
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 84-643008

ISBN-13: 978-1-4144-0878-1
ISBN-10: 1-4144-0878-1

ISSN 0732-1864

Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 12 11 10 09 08

Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (*NCLC*) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an "Outstanding Reference Source" by the American Library Association with the publication of is first volume, *NCLC* has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 500 authors representing 38 nationalities and over 28,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *NCLC.*

Scope of the Series

NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors' works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, *NCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *NCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *NCLC* is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (*TCLC*).

Organization of the Book

An *NCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.

- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

Each volume of *NCLC* contains a **Cumulative Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *NCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *NCLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *NCLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism, Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800, Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism,* and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* Yearbook, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association style.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Franklin, J. Jeffrey. "The Victorian Discourse of Gambling: Speculations on *Middlemarch* and *The Duke's Children.*" *ELH* 61, no. 4 (winter 1994): 899-921. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism.* Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 39-51. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

Frank, Joseph. "*The Gambler*: A Study in Ethnopsychology." In *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson,* edited by Elizabeth Cheresh Allen and Gary Saul Morson, 69-85. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism.* Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 75-84. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,* 6th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Franklin, J. Jeffrey. "The Victorian Discourse of Gambling: Speculations on *Middlemarch* and *The Duke's Children.*" *ELH* 61.4 (Winter 1994): 899-921. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism.* Eds. Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker. Vol. 168. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. 39-51.

Frank, Joseph. "*The Gambler*: A Study in Ethnopsychology." *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson.* Eds. Elizabeth Cheresh Allen and Gary Saul Morson. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. 69-85. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism.* Eds. Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker. Vol. 168. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. 75-84.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

Associate Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series
Gale
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8054

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *NCLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 197, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

American Imago, v. 27, summer, 1970. Copyright © 1970 by The Association for Applied Psychoanalysis, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—***American Literature,*** v. 35, May, 1963; v. 38, November, 1966. Copyright © 1963, 1966 Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Both used by permission of the publisher.—***Arizona Quarterly,*** v. 59, autumn, 2003 for "The Dysfunctional Families of Jacksonian Melodrama" by Alan Ackerman. Copyright © 2003 by Arizona Board of Regents. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—***Bucknell Review,*** v. 30, 1987. Copyright © 1987 by Associated University Presses. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—***Bulletin of the History of Medicine,*** v. 44, July-August, 1970. Copyright © 1970 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—***Colby Library Quarterly,*** v. 24, September, 1988. Reproduced by permission.—***Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts,*** v. 29, spring, 1987. Copyright © 1987 Wayne State University Press. Reproduced with permission of the Wayne State University Press.—***Georgia Review,*** v. 31, fall, 1977. Copyright © 1977 by The University of Georgia. Reproduced by permission.—***Journal of American Culture,*** v. 15, summer, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by Ray B. Browne. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.—***Markham Review,*** v. 9, spring, 1980. © 1980 Wagner College. Reproduced by permission.—***Modern Language Studies,*** v. 30, fall, 2000 for "Conquering Histories: The Historical Romances of Robert M. Bird" by Nancy Buffington. Copyright © 2000 Northeast Modern Language Association. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—***Papers on Language and Literature,*** v. 18, winter, 1982; v. 24, winter, 1988. Copyright © 1982, 1988 by The Board of Trustees, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Both reproduced by permission.—***Philological Quarterly,*** v. 60, winter, 1981. Copyright © 1982 University of Iowa. Reproduced by permission.—***Rhetoric Society Quarterly,*** v. 35, winter, 2005. Copyright 2005, The Rhetoric Society of America. All rights reserved. Republished with permission.—***Romanticism,*** v. 7, 2001. Copyright © Edinburgh University Press Ltd. 2001. Reproduced by permission.—***Russian Review,*** v. 22, July, 1963; v. 23, October, 1964; v. 32, April, 1973. Copyright © 1963, 1964, 1973 by the Russian Review, Inc. All reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers./ v. 56, October, 1997. Copyright 1997 by The Ohio State University Press. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.—***SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,*** v. 4, autumn, 1964; v. 13, autumn, 1973. Copyright © 1964, 1973 William Marsh Rice University. Both reproduced by permission.—***Slavic Review,*** v. 23, March, 1964; v. 42, summer, 1984. Copyright © 1964, 1984 by the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Inc. Both reproduced by permission.—***Slavonic and East European Review,*** v. 78, January, 2000. © 2000 The School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. Reproduced by permission.—***Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South,*** v. 23, spring, 1984. Copyright © 1984 by The Southern Studies Institute. Reproduced by permission.—***Studies in American Fiction,*** v. 33, autumn, 2005. Copyright © 2005 Northeastern University. Reproduced by permission.—***Studies in Philology,*** v. 61, October, 1964. Copyright © 1964 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission.—***Studies in Romanticism,*** v. 3, autumn, 1963; v. 43, fall, 2004. Copyright © 1964, 2004 by the Trustees of Boston University. Both reproduced by permission.—***The Wordsworth Circle,*** v. 10, autumn, 1979. Copyright © 1980 Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Reproduced by permission of the editor.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 197, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOK:

Brisman, Leslie. From ***Romantic Origins.*** Cornell University Press, 1978. Copyright © 1978 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.—Dahl, Curtis. From ***Robert Montgomery Bird.*** Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1963. Copyright © 1963 by Twayne Publishers, Inc. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Jasper, David. From "The Two Worlds of Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*," in ***An Infinite Complexity: Essays in Romanticism.*** Edited by J. R. Watson. Edinburgh University Press, 1983. Copyright © University of Durham 1983. Reproduced by

Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Barbara M. Bibel
Librarian
Oakland Public Library
Oakland, California

Dr. Toby Burrows
Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library
Nedlands, Western Australia

Celia C. Daniel
Associate Reference Librarian
Howard University Libraries
Washington, D.C.

David M. Durant
Reference Librarian
Joyner Library
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Nancy T. Guidry
Librarian
Bakersfield Community College
Bakersfield, California

Heather Martin
Arts & Humanities Librarian
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library
Birmingham, Alabama

Susan Mikula
Librarian
Indiana Free Library
Indiana, Pennsylvania

Thomas Nixon
Humanities Reference Librarian
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis Library
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Mark Schumacher
Jackson Library
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Greensboro, North Carolina

Gwen Scott-Miller
Assistant Director
Sno-Isle Regional Library System
Marysville, Washington

Contents

Robert Montgomery Bird
1806-1854

American novelist and playwright.

The following entry presents an overview of Bird's life and works. For additional discussions of Bird's career, see *NCLC,* Volume 1.

INTRODUCTION

At the height of his career, Bird was among the most popular and critically acclaimed authors in America. Bird began his literary career as a playwright and wrote a number of prize-winning plays for the renowned theater producer and actor Edwin Forrest. In the mid-1830s he turned his attention to writing fiction, publishing six popular novels over a five-year span. He remains best known for the 1837 romance *Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay,* a violent saga depicting the conflict between settlers and Indians in post-Revolutionary War Kentucky. Described by Bird scholar Curtis Dahl as a "man of fascinatingly varied talents and interests," Bird boasted many professions over the course of his career; in addition to enjoying success as an author, Bird also practiced as a physician, served as an editor for several magazines, and devoted the later part of his life to such diverse pursuits as banking, painting, farming, and politics. Many commentators have argued that the versatility and scope of Bird's intellectual pursuits played an integral role in shaping the character of his writings. Bird's historical knowledge is evident in such plays as *Oralloossa, Son of the Incas* (1832) and *The Broker of Bogotá* (1834), while his interest in human psychology informs the novels *Sheppard Lee* (1836), *Nick of the Woods,* and *The Adventures of Robin Day* (1839).

Aside from *Nick of the Woods,* however, Bird's body of work remains generally unknown to modern readers, and relatively few studies of his life and career have emerged. Still, a handful of scholars continue to find relevance in his writings, both as representative works from an early period of American literature and as historical documents capturing the geographical, political, and social forces that helped shape the nation during its formative years. Many scholars believe that Bird's plays and novels represent some of the earliest examples of literary Romanticism in the United States, a tradition that later found some of its finest expression in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. At the same time, scholar Joan Joffe Hall has argued, Bird's work remains vital because it is so "typically American," particularly in its preoccupation with issues of conquest, settlement, and the struggle between forces of civilization and nature. In this respect, Hall suggests, Bird's central themes echo those of such writers as James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bird was born in New Castle, Delaware, on February 5, 1806. Although his family had been wealthy, their circumstances changed drastically in 1810, when Bird's father suddenly died, leaving the family bankrupt. Soon after his father's death, Bird went to live with an uncle, Nicholas van Dyke, while his mother and older brother moved to Philadelphia. According to most accounts Bird had a troubled relationship with his uncle; in *The Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird* (1919), Clement E. Foust refers to van Dyke's "stern integrity" while characterizing his attitude toward parenting as "severe." Although his time living with his uncle was generally unhappy, Bird discovered his passion for literature and art during these years, devouring the works of Shakespeare and Dante and developing a talent for music and drawing.

In 1820 Bird rejoined his mother and brother in Philadelphia, where he went to a school run by Mr. Pardon Davis. A year later he enrolled in New Castle Academy, and from there he moved on to Germantown Academy. Most scholarly records maintain that Bird never excelled at his studies, preferring to devote his energy to writing poetry and short sketches. In spite of his lackluster academic performance, however, Bird managed to earn admittance to the medical school and the college of pharmacy at the University of Pennsylvania, which he attended from 1824 to 1827. During these years he began to publish his first poems in local newspapers and tried his hand at writing plays.

After earning his degree in 1827, Bird established a medical practice in Philadelphia. He soon decided that a doctor's life wasn't for him, however, and he abandoned his practice after less than a year, determined to pursue a literary career. During this period he wrote several plays, including *The Cowled Lover* (published posthumously in 1941), while also publishing a number of poems and short stories. His earliest published works include the short stories "The Ice Island," "The Spirit

of the Reeds," and "Phantom Players," all of which appeared in the *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine* in 1828. That year he also completed a new stage comedy, *The City Looking Glass*; although the play was never produced, it was eventually published in 1933.

Bird's breakthrough came in 1830, when his tragedy *Pelopidas; or, the Fall of the Polemarchs* earned first prize in a contest sponsored by acclaimed Philadelphia theater actor Edwin Forrest. Although Forrest ultimately declined to stage the drama (it was reprinted in Foust's *Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird*), his encouragement inspired Bird to write a new play, and a year later he submitted a more ambitious tragedy, *The Gladiator* (1831). Forrest agreed to produce the work, and *The Gladiator* premiered at New York's Park Theatre on September 26th of that year. The play proved an immediate critical and commercial success; Curtis Dahl has asserted that *The Gladiator* was "one of the most popular plays ever written and produced in America." The play also enjoyed successful runs in Philadelphia and Boston, and by 1854 it had been performed more than a thousand times.

Bird followed the success of *The Gladiator* with two more acclaimed dramatic works, *Oralloossa, Son of the Incas* and *The Broker of Bogotá,* both of which were produced by Forrest. Bird's plays provided a significant boost to Forrest's career; indeed, Forrest received some of his greatest acclaim as an actor for his role as Baptista Febro, the protagonist of *The Broker of Bogotá.* In 1834 Bird also published his first novel, *Calavar; or, The Knight of the Conquest.* Two more novels, *The Hawks of Hawk-Hollow* and *The Infidel; or, The Fall of Mexico,* appeared the following year, and in 1836 he published what many scholars regard to be his most original and complex work of fiction, the psychological novel *Sheppard Lee.* Throughout this period Bird continued to collaborate with Forrest, traveling extensively throughout the United States, Mexico, and South America in order to gather research for future projects.

By 1837, however, Bird's relationship with Forrest had deteriorated, largely over a series of disputes concerning profits and copyright issues relating to Bird's plays. Bird's demands for compensation were continually rebuffed, and by the middle of the year, he terminated his association with Forrest's company. Disillusioned, Bird abandoned the theater for good and began to focus solely on his fiction writing. He soon published the book that would prove to be his most enduring work, the novel *Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay.* Shortly after leaving the theater Bird also became an editor for the *American Monthly Magazine,* but health problems forced him to resign after less than a year. In July 1837 Bird married Mary Mayer; the couple's only son, Frederick Mayer Bird, was born the following June.

In 1839 Bird published his final novel, *The Adventures of Robin Day.* A year later, after continued health problems, Bird moved to a farm on the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland; before the end of the year, though, he had rejoined his family in New Castle. In 1841 Bird received an appointment as a professor at the Pennsylvania Medical College in Philadelphia, where he remained for the next two years. During this period he became involved in politics, serving as a delegate to the Whig party convention of 1842. In 1843 Bird undertook a thorough revision of his plays, although he was unable to get any of them published. Over the remaining decade of his life, Bird wrote magazine articles and essays on a variety of scientific and political subjects, and in 1848 he published a biography of presidential candidate Zachary Taylor. A revised edition of *Nick of the Woods* appeared in 1853. Bird died in Philadelphia on January 23, 1854.

MAJOR WORKS

During his early career Bird enjoyed his greatest critical and popular acclaim as a dramatist. His most famous tragedy, *The Gladiator,* debuted in New York City in 1831. The play recounts the story of Spartacus, a gladiator who leads a slave uprising in ancient Rome; scholars have praised the work for its complex exploration of such themes as tyranny, imperialism, and individual freedom. Bird examined many of the same issues in *Oralloossa, Son of the Incas,* a tragic retelling of the Spanish conquest of Peru. Many scholars consider Bird's 1834 play, *The Broker of Bogotá,* his most accomplished dramatic work. More character-driven than Bird's earlier plays, *The Broker of Bogotá* concerns a humble moneylender, Febro, whose son Ramon conspires to steal a large sum of money from his father's vault. Ramon's actions implicate his father in the crime, and Febro ultimately dies of grief.

Of the several novels that Bird authored during the 1830s, *Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay* is regarded as the most important. The novel revolves around Nathan Slaughter, a hunter living on the Kentucky frontier. In the novel's early pages, Slaughter professes himself a pacifist and refuses to join his fellow settlers in waging war against the Native American population. As the narrative progresses, it soon becomes apparent that Slaughter has a second, more violent persona, known as "Nick of the Woods," who ruthlessly hunts and executes Indians. Abnormal psychology also plays a central role in *Sheppard Lee,* the story of a farmer who has the power to inhabit the bodies of other people, thereby enabling him to gain insight into a variety of different lives and personalities. Bird's last novel, *The Adventures of Robin Day,* is a coming-of-age story based to a large extent on Bird's own experiences growing up without a father.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

In the 1830s the majority of theater reviewers in the United States regarded Bird as one of America's most important dramatists. Philadelphia critic Francis Courtney Wemyss described *The Gladiator* as "the perfection of melodramatic tragedy," while actor and author James Rees praised Bird's depiction of Spartacus as "the perfection of the art histrionic." Bird's fiction also received highly favorable notices by contemporary critics, most notably Edgar Allan Poe, who praised the author's "fertility of imagination" in his 1835 review of *The Infidel.* In the twentieth century most scholars have reconsidered Bird's body of work from a historical perspective. A number of commentators focus on Bird's portrayals of Native Americans. While author James Fenimore Cooper idealized the American Indian as a "noble savage," scholar Albert Keiser argues in his 1933 study *The Indian in American Literature* that Bird depicted them not only as coarse and barbaric, but as a threat to the civilized, Christian societies embodied in the earliest frontier settlements. Other modern critics focus on the insight and depth of Bird's understanding of the human psyche. In an article published in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* in 1970, John Bowen Hamilton argues that Bird was among the first American writers to apply the principles of psychology to the portrayal of fictional characters. In the late 1990s and the early years of the new century, scholars Nancy Buffington and Patricia Roberts-Miller investigate the political and ideological underpinnings of Bird's writings, while Gary Hoppenstand and Michael T. Wilson examine the role of violence in Bird's depictions of the American frontier.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Gladiator (play) 1831
Oralloossa, Son of the Incas (play) 1832
The Broker of Bogotá (play) 1834
Calavar; or, The Knight of the Conquest. 2 vols. [anonymous] (novel) 1834
The Hawks of Hawk-Hollow. 2 vols. [as "The Author of 'Calavar'"] (novel) 1835
The Infidel; or, The Fall of Mexico. A Romance by the author of "Calavar." 2 vols. (novel) 1835
Sheppard Lee. Written by Himself . . . 2 vols. (novel) 1836
Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay. 2 vols. [as "The Author of 'Calavar'"] (novel) 1837
Peter Pilgrim: or, A rambler's recollections. By the author of "Calavar," "Nick of the woods," &c. (novel) 1838
The Adventures of Robin Day. 2 vols. [as "The Author of 'Calavar'"] (novel) 1839
The City Looking Glass (play) 1933
The Cowled Lover and Other Plays (plays) 1941

CRITICISM

Robert Montgomery Bird (essay date 1853)

SOURCE: Bird, Robert Montgomery. Preface to *Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay,* pp. iii-vii. New York: J. S. Redfield, 1853.

[*In the following preface to the 1853 edition of the novel, Bird reflects on some of the historical and geographical influences that shaped the book's composition.*]

In preparing for the press a new and revised edition of a story received with some favor—much more, perhaps, than it deserved—fifteen years ago, and kept partially in recollection by certain dramatic versions, the work of other hands, which still maintain a place on the stage, the writer takes the opportunity, though he scarcely deems it necessary, to refer to one or two particulars which were subjects of a little animadversion among the critics at its first appearance.

So far as he can remember motives that actuated him in such a matter so long a time back, the work was written, as such works are usually written, with no other object than to amuse himself, and—if that might also be—the public. One does not often compose novels with any grave and sinister design of fomenting discord, of instigating or defending cruelty, or even of provoking the hostilities of readers: at least, that was not the fashion among novelists when ***Nick of the Woods*** first saw the light. He found what he deemed a proper field and subject in the history of early Western colonization; and, with the Kentucky border as his scene, and Indian warfare his principal theme, he naturally sought to construct such a story, marked by such events and characters, as would illustrate the more remarkable features of frontier life in the not yet forgotten days of frontier heroism. The savage and the man who fought and subdued the savage—the bold spirits who met him with his own weapons in his own hunting-grounds and villages, and, with a natural vengeance, retaliated in the shadow of his own wigwam some few of the cruel acts of butchery with which he so often stained the hearthstone of the settler—necessarily formed the writer's *dramatis personæ*; and if he drew his Indian portraits with Indian ink, rejecting the brighter pigments which might have yielded more brilliant effects, and added an

"Indian-hater" to the group, it was because he aimed to give, not the appearance of truth, but truth itself—or what he held to be truth—to the picture.

At the period when ***Nick of the Woods*** was written, the genius of Chateaubriand and of our own Cooper (not to speak of Marmontel before them) had thrown a poetical illusion over the Indian character; and the red men were presented—almost stereotyped in the popular mind—as the embodiments of grand and tender sentiment—a new style of the beau-ideal—brave, gentle, loving, refined, honorable, romantic personages—nature's nobles, the chivalry of the forest. It may be submitted that such are not the lineaments of the race—that they never were the lineaments of any race existing in an uncivilized state—indeed, could not be—and that such conceptions as *Atala* and *Uncas* are beautiful unrealities and fictions merely, as imaginary and contrary to nature as the shepherd swains of the old pastoral school of rhyme and romance;—at all events, that one does not find beings of this class, or any thing in the slightest degree resembling them, among the tribes now known to travellers and legislators. The Indian is doubtless a gentleman; but he is a gentleman who wears a very dirty shirt, and lives a very miserable life, having nothing to employ him or keep him alive except the pleasures of the chase and of the scalp-hunt—which we dignify with the name of war. The writer differed from his critical friends, and from many philanthropists, in believing the Indian to be capable—perfectly capable, where restraint assists the work of friendly instruction—of civilization: the Choctaws and Cherokees, and the ancient Mexicans and Peruvians, prove it: but, in his natural barbaric state, he is a barbarian—and it is not possible he could be any thing else. The purposes of the author, in his book, confined him to real Indians. He drew them as, in his judgment, they existed—and as, according to all observation, they still exist wherever not softened by cultivation,—ignorant, violent, debased, brutal: he drew them, too, as they appeared, and still appear, in war—or the scalp-hunt—when all the worst deformities of the savage temperament receive their strongest and fiercest development.

Having, therefore, no other, and certainly, no worse, desire than to make his delineations in this regard as correct and true to nature as he could, it was with no little surprise he found himself taken to account by some of the critical gentry, on the charge of entertaining the humane design of influencing the passions of his countrymen against the remnant of an unfortunate race, with a view of excusing the wrongs done to it by the whites, if not of actually hastening the period of that "final destruction" which it pleases so many men, against all probability, if not against all possibility, to predict as a certain future event. Had the accusation been confined to the reviewers, he might not, perhaps, have thought it safe to complain; but currency was given to it in a quarter which renders a disclaimer the more reasonable or the less presumptuous. One may contend with a brother author who dares not resist the verdict of the critics. In the English edition of the novel, published at the same time as the American, in a preface furnished by Mr. Ainsworth, the distinguished author of "Rookwood," "Crichton," &c., &c., to whom he is debted for many polite and obliging expressions respecting it, it is hinted, hypothetically, that the writer's views were "colored by national antipathy, and by a desire to justify the encroachments of his countrymen upon the persecuted natives, rather than by a reasonable estimate of the subject." The accused notices this fancy, however injurious he first felt it to be, less to refute than to smile at it. He prefers to make a more philosophic and practical application. The real inference to be drawn is, that he has succeeded very ill in this, somewhat essential, portion of his plan,—on the principle that the composition must be amiss the design of which is so readily misapprehended. He may plead guilty to the defect; but he cannot admit the charge to have had any foundation in truth.

The writer confesses to have felt a little more—but still not much—concern at another imputation, which was once faintly attempted to be made, he scarcely now remembers by whom, that in the character of Nathan Slaughter, he intended to throw a slur upon the peaceful Society of Friends, of which Nathan is described as having been an unworthy member. This notion is equally undeserving of serious challenge. The whole object was here to portray the peculiar characteristics of a class of men, very limited, of course, in number, but found, in the old Indian days, scattered, at intervals, along the extreme frontier of every State, from New York to Georgia; men in whom the terrible barbarities of the savages, suffered through their families, or their friends and neighbors, had wrought a change of temper as strange as fearful. That passion is the mightiest which overcomes the most powerful restraints and prostrates the strongest barriers; and there was a dramatic propriety, at least, in associating with such a character as Nathan's, obstacles of faith and habit, which gave the greater force to his deeds and a deeper mystery to his story. No one conversant with the history of border affairs can fail to recollect some one or more instances of solitary men, bereaved fathers or orphaned sons, the sole survivors, sometimes, of exterminated households, who remained only to devote themselves to lives of vengeance; and "Indian-hating" (which implied the fullest indulgence of a rancorous animosity no blood could appease) was so far from being an un common passion in some particular districts, that it was thought to have infected, occasionally, persons, otherwise of good repute, who ranged the woods, intent on private adventures, which they were careful to conceal from the public eye. The author remembers, in the published journal of an old traveller—an Englishman, and, as he thinks, a

Friend; but he cannot be certain of this fact, the name having escaped him and the loose memorandum he made at the time having been mislaid—who visited the region of the upper Ohio towards the close of the last century, an observation on this subject, which made too deep an impression to be easily forgotten. It was stated, as the consequence of the Indian atrocities, that such were the extent and depth of the vindictive feeling throughout the community, that it was suspected in some cases to have reached men whose faith was opposed to warfare and bloodshed. The legend of Wandering Nathan is, no doubt, an idle and unfounded one; although some vague notions touching the existence of just such a personage, whose habitat was referred to Western Pennsylvania, used to prevail among the cotemporaries, or immediate successors, of Boone and Kenton, McColloch and Wetzel. It is enough, however, for the author to be sustained in such a matter by poetical possibility; and he can afford to be indifferent to a charge which has the scarce consistent merit of imputing to him, at one and the same time, hostility towards the most warlike and the most peaceable of mankind.

Robert Montgomery Bird (essay date 1854)

SOURCE: Bird, Robert Montgomery. Preface to *Calavar; or, The Knight of the Conquest,* pp. 1-2. New York: J. S. Redfield, 1854.

[*In the following preface to the 1854 edition of* Calavar; or, The Knight of the Conquest, *Bird discusses some of his motivations for writing the novel.*]

It is now thirteen years since the first publication of ***Calavar,*** which, apart from the ordinary objects of an author, was written chiefly with a view of illustrating what was deemed the most romantic and poetical chapter in the history of the New World; but partly, also, with the hope of calling the attention of Americans to a portion of the continent which it required little political forecast to perceive must, before many years, assume a new and particular interest to the people of the United States. It was a part of the original design to prepare the way for a history of Mexico, which the author meditated; a design which was, however, soon abandoned. There was then little interest really felt in Mexican affairs, which presented, as they have always done since the first insurrection of Hidalgo, a scene of desperate confusion, not calculated to elevate republican institutions in the opinions of the world. Even the events in Texas had not, at that time, attracted much attention. Mexico was, in the popular notion, regarded as a part of *South* America, the *alter ego* almost of Peru,—beyond the world, and the concerns of Americans. There was little thought, and less talk, of "the halls of the Montezumas;" and the ancient Mexican history was left to entertain school-boys, in the pages of Robertson.

Calavar effected its more important purpose, as far as could be expected of a mere work of fiction. The revolution of Texas, which dismembered from the mountain republic the finest and fairest portion of her territory, attracted the eyes and speculations of the world; and from that moment, Mexico has been an object of regard. The admirable history of Prescott has rendered all readers familiar with the ancient annals of the Conquest; and now, with an American army thundering at the gates of the capital, and an American general resting his republican limbs on the throne of Guatimozin and the Spanish Viceroys, it may be believed that a more earnest and universal attention is directed towards Mexico than was ever before bestowed, since the time when Cortes conquered upon the same field of fame where Scott is now victorious. There is, indeed, a remarkable parallel between the invasions of the two great captains. There is the same route up the same difficult and lofty mountains; the same city, in the same most magnificent of valleys, as the object of attack; the same petty forces, and the same daring intrepidity leading them against millions of enemies, fighting in the heart of their own country, and, finally, the same desperate fury of unequal armies contending in mortal combat on the causeways and in the streets of Mexico. We might say, perhaps, that there is the same purpose of conquest: but we do not believe that the American people aim at, or desire, the subjugation of Mexico.

Calavar was designed to describe the first campaign, or first year, of Cortes in Mexico. It was written with an attempt at the strictest historical accuracy compatible with the requisitions of romance; and as it embraces, in a narrow compass, and—what was at least meant to be—a popular form, a picture of the war of 1520, which so many will like to contrast with that of 1847, the publishers have thought that its revival, in a cheap edition, would prove acceptable to the reading community. The republication has, indeed, been suggested and called for by numerous persons desirous to obtain copies of the book, which has been for some time out of print.

The revival of the romance might have furnished its author an opportunity to remove many faults which, he is sensible, exist in it. Long dialogues might have been contracted, heavy descriptions lightened or expunged, and antiquated phraseology modernized, with undoubted benefit. But, after a respectful consideration of all critical suggestions, friendly or unfriendly, the author has not thought it of consequence to attempt the improvement of a work of so trivial and evanescent a character; and he accordingly commits it again to the world precisely as it was first committed, with all its faults—would he could say, its merits—unchanged; satisfied with any fate that may befall it, or any reception it may meet, which should either imply its having given some little pleasure, or imparted some little information, to its readers.

James Rees (essay date 1874)

SOURCE: Rees, James. "Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird." In *The Life of Edwin Forrest,* pp. 421-31. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1874.

[*In the following excerpts, Rees offers a general overview of Bird's writings and literary reputation. Rees praises Bird's "unostentatious" attitude toward literature.*]

Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird was born in Newcastle, Del., in the year 1805, and died in the city of Philadelphia, January 23rd, 1854. It is too often the case, and we deeply regret it, that the memory of our literary men, as well as their works, are permitted to pass away from us, without an effort to keep them before the world, and remain as finger-posts, to point the ambitious to that "majesty of worth," from whence immortality springs. Fame, literary fame, with us is evanescent, a mere streak of sunshine over the dark scenes of dull plodding life. Few live in favor of the world; few die who are remembered afterwards, unless some peculiar and striking feature, in their literary career, is calculated to repay the trouble of re-producing their works. Having no standard of literature of our own, no national feeling upon the subject, it is not to be expected that the works of an author will live in after ages, when the estimate of an age with us—*is a season.*

Dr. Bird was a pupil of Mount Airy College, Germantown; after leaving which, he studied medicine, and received his degree of M. D., from the University of Pennsylvania; but, we believe, never experimented with human life, to test his ability to cure. This, we conceive to have been one of the most humane traits in his character.

His first appearance, as an author, was in 1828, when he published in the *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine,* three spirited tales, entitled, **"The Ice Island," "The Spirit of the Reeds,"** and the **"Phantom Players,"** besides several short pieces of poetry, the best of which was **"Saul's Last Day."** At this time, Dr. Bird had already written several tragedies, in imitation of the old English Drama, but none of his labors at that period had ever been submitted to the public. We recollect perusing the manuscript of two, which gave promise of the distinction that awaited him as a dramatist. They were entitled **"The Cowl'd Lover,"** and **"Caridorf."** If these productions were now to be revived, we have no doubt they would advance the author's reputation as a poet. At this period he had also written two or three regular comedies, but it struck us that his comic powers did not bear him through as triumphantly as his talents for delineating the terrible and sublime had done. Edwin Forrest, who has done more individually, than all the theatres in the country combined, to draw forth and reward the talents of native dramatists, was the means of introducing Dr. Bird at his very onset, as a writer, triumphantly to the whole American people. This was on the first production of the tragedy of the Gladiator, written with a view to the powers and talents of Mr. Forrest; and it has seldom occurred that author and actor were so much indebted to each other, as on this occasion. The piece was eminently successful throughout the Union; and, although written exclusively with a view to the stage, it abounds with poetic passages, and possesses no ordinary share of literary merit. The scene in the arena, at the close of the second act, when the gladiators break loose from their tyrants, and raise the standard of freedom, is not surpassed on the score of originality and effect, by any scene in any modern drama. This tragedy was speedily followed by another, entitled, ***Oralloossa,*** founded on the cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru, but it never acquired the popularity of its predecessor, though received upon the stage with every mark of public favor. ***Oralloossa,*** was succeeded by ***The Broker of Bogota,*** which we consider the most finished of Dr. Bird's dramas. It did not create the decided impression that was produced by ***The Gladiator,*** for there was nothing of the drums and trumpets, and battling for freedom, which this play affords, to put the spirit in motion; but ***The Broker of Bogota,*** viewed as a specimen of dramatic art, surpasses either of the other pieces. All these tragedies were written expressly for Mr. Forrest, and were performed by him with eminent success. Prior to the production of either, Dr. Bird had written a tragedy, entitled, ***Pelopidas,*** fitted to the powers of our tragedian, and every way calculated to enhance the author's reputation.

This play has never been produced, and probably, although it is said to be far superior to ***Oralloossa,*** never will, having been condemned by the author himself.

In 1833, Dr. Bird became a candidate for public favor, in another department of literature, and he met with the same decided success as a novelist, that had attended his labors as a dramatist. His first novel was entitled ***Calavar, a Romance of Mexico.*** This was followed by ***The Infidel, Nick of the Woods,*** and ***The Hawks of Hawk Hollow,*** the scene of which was laid in Pennsylvania. These productions at once placed him in the front rank of American novelists, in the estimation of the intelligent, both at home and abroad. All his novels have been republished in London, and have been reviewed in terms of high commendation. His language is eloquent, imaginative, and powerful. His characters are well contrasted, boldly conceived, and happily and consistently sustained throughout; while his plots are con-

structed with dramatic skill, and his subjects and scenes present a freshness and originality in striking contrast with the *racifimentoes* of some of the novelists of the day.

He was the author of several pieces of poetry, all of which were remarkable for great delicacy, simplicity and sweetness. He was a good classical scholar, possessed a knowledge of several languages, and his reading was extensive and various, and more familiar with the history of South America, and Spanish North America, than any other man in the country.

It has been said by some critics, envious of Dr. Bird's fair fame, that his style, though energetic, is coarse. There are passages in ***Calavar,*** and ***Nick of the Woods,*** which, in point of eloquence, pathos, and all the elementary rules of composition, will compete with any work of a similar kind in the English language. In fact, we would quote ***Nick of the Woods*** throughout, and contrast it with any one of Bulwer's novels, nor have any fears of the result. ***Nick of the Woods*** is a compliment to the literature of our country.

Dr. Bird was much esteemed for his urbanity and unostentatious demeanor. There was about him none of that poetical nonsense which clings to so many who lay claim to a literary character. He had less egotism than any man we ever met with; like the farmer, he cultivated the soil of literature for its fruit, not its blossoms; he garnered up the seed, while others made bouquets out of their productions, and paraded them as they would a diamond breastpin, or a new coat; things seldom, however, available with them for such a purpose. . . .

Oralloossa

The play of ***Oralloossa*** was produced at the Arch Street Theatre, on the 10th of October, 1831. . . .

The piece, however, did not increase the reputation of the author of ***The Gladiator***; something better was anticipated, and the play of ***Oralloossa*** fell beneath the previous productions of Dr. Bird's muse. Neither plot, incident, or dialogue, would bear comparison with ***The Gladiator.*** The audience was evidently disappointed, and Mr. Forrest subsequently struck it from his roll of acting plays, remarking: "It was unworthy of the author, and would never produce anything but mortification to the actor."

We think Mr. Forrest was too hasty in arriving at this conclusion, as ***Oralloossa*** certainly deserved no such censure. Its incidents are strikingly dramatic, and the young hero a character that is calculated to win the approbation of an audience. Had Mr. Forrest taken as much interest in ***Oralloossa*** as he did in ***The Gladiator,*** it would not have met this fate. On its first reception in New York, on the 7th of December, 1832, it was a most decided success. In the hands of that talented young actor, Edwin Adams, ***Oralloossa*** would find an able representative.

The Broker of Bogota

This followed soon after ***Oralloossa,*** which we consider the most finished of Dr. Bird's dramas. Viewed as a specimen of dramatic art, it surpasses all of his other pieces. All these plays were written expressly for Mr. Forrest. This great tragedy ranks in point of poetical and dramatic interest with the *Lear* of Shakespeare.

Charles F. Richardson (essay date 1893)

SOURCE: Richardson, Charles F. "The Lesser Novelists." In *American Literature, 1607-1885.* Vol. 2: *American Poetry and Fiction,* pp. 390-412. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893.

[*In the following excerpt, Richardson evaluates the influence of the American frontier on Bird's literary imagination.*]

Description of nature and of out-door experiences had now become a settled element in many American novels; and naturally, in a country still new, the fields and personages connected with pioneer adventure attracted the pens of writers in nearly all the several sections of the United States. ***Nick of the Woods; or, The Jibbenainosay***—how could such a title fail to interest eager young readers everywhere, and turn their minds once more toward the unfelled forests of the far west? Its author, Dr. Bird, had been an experimenter, deemed successful in his day, in the writing of divers melodramatic plays, and had produced two historical romances of old Mexican life. It was his good fortune to give that robust actor Edwin Forrest one of his more conspicuous successes, in the tragedy of ***The Gladiator,*** with its muscular hero Spartacus. Something exciting or imposing was then demanded by the majority of people who turned to the play or novel for their amusement; ***The Gladiator*** was thought to merit both adjectives, and ***Nick of the Woods*** at least the first. It was dramatized, and long held the boards without impinging very seriously upon the domain of the standard literature of the play. Such stories, after all, are better read than heard, notwithstanding the obvious temptation they offer to playwrights.

The most marked characteristic of the tales of adventure produced in the period under review rests in their general uniformity of style and merit. Parts of ***Nick of***