

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICS

Second Edition

Macmillan Reference Books

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICS

SECOND EDITION

ELMER BORKLUND

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CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CRITICS

Contemporary Writers of the English Language

Contemporary Poets

Contemporary Novelists
(including short story writers)

Contemporary Dramatists

Contemporary Literary Critics

Preface to the First Edition

Contemporary Literary Critics is a descriptive reference guide to the work of 115 modern British and American critics, most of them still very much alive and flourishing. In order to hold this book down to a reasonable size, however, and to keep it reasonably within the limits of my own competence, I have not taken into account three worthy groups of writers: the aestheticians and professional philosophers (Susanne Langer and R.G. Collingwood, for example), even though they often make valuable observations about particular works and artists; the textual scholars and literary biographers, even though serious criticism obviously depends upon their achievements; and the continental critics (Erich Auerbach, for example, or, at the moment, Roland Barthes) whose work, even in translation, has already had an impact on the thinking of their Anglo-American counterparts. As for the critics I have included here, I am grateful to M.H. Abrams, Robert Martin Adams, F.W. Bateson, Wayne Booth, Martin Dodsworth and William Empson for looking over my initial list of candidates and giving me their recommendations. As it turned out, they usually agreed with each other; but no one adviser, probably, would be entirely happy with all of my choices: I am responsible for the final decisions and for what I have to say about each critic.

Anyone preparing a reference book of this sort has to live with the uncomfortable knowledge that his efforts may be misunderstood or abused. Partly to frustrate the impulse some readers might have to regard my comments as a substitute for the hard work of reading each critic complete and judging him by a wider range of standards than I generally apply here, I quote whenever possible, and often at great length. By doing so I hope to convey a sense of how each critic handles his texts and talks to his readers, even, sometimes, reasons with them. Nevertheless, the longest passages still appear out of context, and hence the bibliographies, which are designed to indicate the full range of each critic's work to date. For separately published critical books I have tried to make the listings complete; for uncollected essays and occasional reviews I have been generous but necessarily selective, as I also have been for publications in areas other than criticism and for studies of the critic as a critic (I have not listed studies, for example, of Auden and Eliot as poets or of E.M. Forster as a novelist). Over the past two years a few of the critics represented here have been writing their books faster than I could expand my comments, and thus in some instances the bibliographies are more up to date than my essays. I particularly regret not being able to describe very recent work by Walter Jackson Bate, Harold Bloom and John Holloway, among others.

Substantial quotations and bibliographies may reassure skeptical readers—up to a point. Although my primary aim has been to be descriptive, and fairly so, I have never hesitated to judge as well as describe when an important issue was at stake; and since the grounds for my judgments are not always apparent in each particular case, let me be explicit here: "critical pluralism," as it is now being called a little belatedly, seems to me to do the greatest possible justice to the diverse aims and methods of valid criticism. I have described this position in my remarks about Elder Olson and R.S. Crane, but once again, and very briefly: the crucial premise here is that the situations critics investigate are too complex to be encompassed by any one frame of reference. A literary work is a mental event for its author, a potential cause of similar or dissimilar events in the minds of his readers, an historically conditioned phenomenon, an embodiment of certain stylistic possibilities and ethical convictions, and so on. Each of these areas is perfectly suitable for investigation, but each can be adequately grasped only by the use of a limited set of principles and an appropriate methodology. As R.S. Crane demonstrates in *The Languages of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry*, the moral is that we should welcome as many frameworks or "languages" as there are "distinguishable major aspects in the construction, use, and appreciation of literary works." What we want to do with a text depends upon our immediate purposes and the power of our analytical tools. Intelligible discourse about literature or anything else depends, Crane continues, upon a finite conceptual scheme which

delimits what the critic can say about any of the questions with which he may be concerned—and this for the simple reason that we can discuss only those aspects of existent objects which are represented or implied in the terms we select or have available

for the discussion: we cannot, for example, say anything about the specific forms of individual poems in a mode of criticism of which the distinctions used as principles in the argument pertain only to the poet's mind or to the constitution of his medium or to the psychology of his audience. We are thus committed, in any instance of coherent critical discourse, to a particular subject matter, which can be said to be of our own making, not in the sense that it may not correspond to something real, but in the sense that, by our choice of one rather than another possible set of definitions and hypotheses, we have decided what it is to be.

Pluralism is not a form of relativism: as Elder Olson points out, the men on the Tower of Babel were not talking nonsense to each other, they were simply talking in different languages. And of course once a critic has set his goal and selected his language we have a right (to quote Crane once more) to "hold him to the accepted canons of reasoning and hypothesis-making, as well as of common sense, that apply in any branch of inquiry dealing with particular things." Therefore in my own comments about each critic I have tried to indicate what he wants to do, what assumptions he makes about the nature and function of literature, and what he is able to accomplish, given his analytical tools. If I point out that a critic can do one thing but not another, I am by no means suggesting that what he can do is not worth doing or that a better critic would attempt more: the best critics are often those who have a sharp sense of their own limitations. Not all kinds of criticism seem to me to be equally worth doing, however, and if I have a bias it is against, for want of a more accurate term, "thematic" criticism, in which the critic is content merely to discover the presence of a moral or intellectual motif in a work or group of works. If a critic seems to me to write badly or reason ineptly, I have said so. And finally, I have made almost no historical generalizations about British and American criticism during the past fifty years or so: even if it were not too soon to do so pluralism compels us to recognize that critical terms are stipulative and mean only what the critic makes them mean within a given framework. When critics are as far apart as, say, Maud Bodkin and Northrop Frye, or John Crowe Ransom and I.A. Richards, it is worse than useless to believe that labels such as "myth criticism" or "the New Criticism" have any descriptive value.

It would have been impossible for me to undertake this project without the resources of the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago and the courtesy of its staff. I am also grateful to a number of friends and colleagues: to Paul West for suggesting that a book about critics would make a sensible addition to the *Contemporary Writers* series, to Henry Sams for giving me the chance to teach criticism at Pennsylvania State University, to Dennis Marnon and John Shiltz for their help with some of the bibliographies, to Albert Tsugawa for many conversations about critical problems, and to George Walsh and James Vinson of the St. James Press for their endless patience and aid. My greatest debts are to Maurice Cramer for many years of support, to the late David Farquhar, and to Elizabeth Borklund, to whose memory this book is dedicated.

ELMER BORKLUND

A Note to the Second Edition

I have added nine writers to this new edition of *Contemporary Literary Critics* (Terry Eagleton, Stanley Fish, Joseph Frank, Norman Holland, Edgell Rickword, C.H. Sisson, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Ian Watt and Raymond Williams), brought the biographical and bibliographical information for writers included in the First Edition up to date, and commented on the important work some of them have done since 1977. If I were revising the Preface to the First Edition, I would remove the late Roland Barthes—now a household name—from his parenthetical position and replace him with Jacques Derrida, whose influence over the past few years has been remarkable, to the joy of some and the misery of others. I am indebted once more to George Walsh for his editorial aid, and especially to Daniel Kirkpatrick for his scrupulous attention to errors and omissions in the First Edition.

E.B.

M.H. Abrams
Robert Martin Adams
John W. Aldridge
Walter Allen
A. Alvarez
Quentin Anderson
Newton Arvin
Louis Auchincloss
W.H. Auden

Carlos Baker
Owen Barfield
Walter Jackson Bate
F.W. Bateson
John Bayley
Eric Bentley
Marius Bewley
R.P. Blackmur
Harold Bloom
Maud Bodkin
Wayne C. Booth
Malcolm Bradbury
Cleanth Brooks
Van Wyck Brooks
Kenneth Burke

Christopher Caudwell
Lord David Cecil
Richard Chase
Cyril Connolly
Malcolm Cowley
R.S. Crane
Frederick C. Crews
J.V. Cunningham

David Daiches
Donald Davie
C. Day Lewis
Denis Donoghue

Terry Eagleton
Leon Edel
T.S. Eliot
Richard Ellmann
William Empson
D.J. Enright
Martin Esslin

Francis Fergusson
Leslie Fiedler
Stanley Fish
E.M. Forster
Joseph Frank
G.S. Fraser
Northrop Frye

Dame Helen Gardner
Maxwell Geismar

Paul Goodman
Robert Graves

D.W. Harding
Barbara Hardy
Geoffrey H. Hartman
Ihab Hassan
Robert B. Heilman
Granville Hicks
E.D. Hirsch, Jr.
Norman Holland
John Holloway
Graham Hough
Irving Howe
Stanley Edgar Hyman

Randall Jarrell

Alfred Kazin
Hugh Kenner
Frank Kermode
Arnold Kettle
H.D.F. Kitto
G. Wilson Knight
L.C. Knights
Murray Krieger

Robert Langbaum
F.R. Leavis
Q.D. Leavis
Harry Levin
C.S. Lewis
R.W.B. Lewis
Robert Liddell
David Lodge
Percy Lubbock

F.O. Matthiessen
Mary McCarthy
Josephine Miles
J. Hillis Miller
Edwin Muir

Elder Olson

Roy Harvey Pearce
Morse Peckham
Richard Poirier
Ezra Pound
V.S. Pritchett

Philip Rahv
John Crowe Ransom
I.A. Richards
Edgell Rickword
Christopher Ricks

Mark Schorer

Delmore Schwartz
Karl Shapiro
C.H. Sisson
Barbara Herrnstein Smith
James Smith
Stephen Spender
George Steiner

Tony Tanner
Allen Tate
Lionel Trilling

John Wain

A.J.A. Waldock
Austin Warren
Robert Penn Warren
Ian Watt
René Wellek
Paul West
Raymond Williams
Edmund Wilson
W.K. Wimsatt
Yvor Winters
Virginia Woolf

Philip Young

ABRAMS, M(eyer) H(oward). American. Born in Long Branch, New Jersey, 23 July 1912. Educated at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, B.A. 1934, M.A. 1937, Ph.D. 1940; Cambridge University, England (Henry Fellow), 1934-35. Married Ruth Gaynes in 1937; has two children. Instructor, 1938-42, Research Associate, Psycho-acoustic Laboratory, 1942-45, Harvard University. Assistant Professor, 1945-47, Associate Professor, 1947-53, Professor of English, 1953-60, F.J. Whiton Professor, 1960-63, and since 1973 Class of 1916 Professor, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Since 1961, Advisory Editor, W.W. Norton, publishers, New York City. Fulbright Scholar, Royal University of Malta and Cambridge University, 1953; Roache Lecturer, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1963; Alexander Lecturer, University of Toronto, 1964; Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, California, 1967; Visiting Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford University, 1977. Recipient: Ford Fellowship, 1946; Rockefeller Fellowship, 1946; Phi Beta Kappa Christian Gauss Prize, 1954; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1957, 1960; James Russell Lowell Prize, 1972. D.H.L.: University of Rochester, New York, 1978; Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1981. Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences and American Philosophical Society. Address: Department of English, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14850, U.S.A.

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* * *

In *The Mirror and the Lamp* M.H. Abrams observes that the crucial distinction between different modes of thinking lies in "the choice of initial premisses (often, if I have not been mistaken, the analogical premisses) of our reasoning, and the validity of the choice is measured by the adequacy of its coherently reasoned consequences in making the universe intelligible and manageable." In the humanities at least, no one method of inquiry can exhaust the complexities of its subject matter; and if this is true, then a critical system, like any other intellectual framework, is a kind of set or language game: the assumptions it employs, often unconsciously, determine what aspects of the subject it can grasp; its definitions and grammar generate an appropriate method of investigation and limit the range of criteria for judgment. Thus in his discussion of English Romantic theory Abrams is careful first of all to distinguish among the four different possibilities or "orientations" which have always been open to literary critics. Mimetic theory, such as Aristotle's, concentrates primarily on the work as an imitative representation of an objective, pre-existing reality; pragmatic criticism, such as Sidney's, emphasizes the effect the artist should strive to induce in his audience; objective criticism, versions of which appear in some extreme forms of modern criticism, isolates the work as a heterocosm, a complex, self-sufficient creation to be discussed only in its own terms. And a final mode, expressive criticism, such as that practiced by Wordsworth and Coleridge, deals primarily with the qualities of mind or soul supposed to be characteristic of the artist. (These languages are not, of course, rigidly exclusive: a pragmatic critic, for example, may well need to say something about appropriate formal qualities. The critic's overall purpose determines where we place him.)

The Mirror and the Lamp describes, within this larger "metacritical" context, the important shift in English critical theory from a primarily mimetic concern for the work as a kind of mirror reflecting external nature, to a primarily expressive mode of thinking which sees the mind of the artist as a kind of lamp, contributing its own essence to what it perceives. From this point of view, then, "the shift from neo-classical to romantic criticism can be formulated in a preliminary way as a radical alteration in the typical metaphors of critical discourse" (these

metaphors are the "analogical premisses" referred to above.) Abrams' method is to scrutinize "the role in the history of criticism of certain more or less submerged conceptual models...in helping to select, interpret, systematize and evaluate the facts of art." The questions Romantic, "expressive" criticism raises and the conclusions it seeks are thus quite different from the questions and goals of the other modes.

The greater part of *The Mirror and the Lamp* traces this shift, a subject to which Abrams is able to bring a formidable amount of scholarly knowledge. For all his learning, however, Abrams seems unwilling to commit himself to a fixed conception of causation: the facts, the manifestations of the shift, are unmistakably there, but the causes of the shift may be complex beyond hope of recovery (thus at the very start of his argument Abrams reminds his readers of Aristotle's warning that an educated man, that is an experienced man, will look for precision only insofar as his subject matter permits). Given Abrams' skill in detecting recurrent metaphors and lines of action, he might be called a kind of "archetypal" critic, and this is in fact a label he seems willing to endure—provided it does not restrict him to "implications which are equally unnecessary and undesirable." He observes, characteristically, that there is no "rational need" to embrace Jung or the ingenious work of Maud Bodkin, which reduces literature to "mere variations upon a timeless theme" and thus has little value for a critic who must deal with the problems and powers of an individual text.

The shift from mimetic to expressive criticism at a particular moment in intellectual history leads to a problem which has concerned Abrams for some time: the question of poetic belief, the status and possible value of imaginatively generated statements that cannot be verified—and may well be discredited—by the increasingly prestigious language of science. Can poetry still be defended as a mode of knowledge and source of value? In an important essay, "Belief and the Suspension of Disbelief," Abrams demonstrates that several tactics have been used to defend poetry against science. The critic may argue that a work is a self-contained second creation, non-referential and therefore subject only to the laws of its own being; or he may argue, with Whitehead and John Crowe Ransom, that the genuine work, while not factually true, nevertheless returns to us that vital, concrete fullness which science strips from experience. Or he may argue, as John Stuart Mill did, that poetic statements are revelations not of the real world, but of the speaker's feelings about that world, and thus constitute a kind of knowledge that still has powerful claims on our attention. Abrams' own position is essentially pragmatic: taking the climactic line of the *Paradiso*, "In His will is our peace," he maintains that

the testimony of innumerable readers demonstrates that the passage can certainly be appreciated, and appreciated profoundly, independently of assent to its propositional truth. It touches sufficiently on universal experience—since all of us, whether Catholic, Protestant, or agnostic, know the heavy burden of individual decision—to enable us all to realize the relief that might come from saying to an infallible Providence, "Not my will, but Thine be done." This ability to take an assertion hypothetically, as a ground for imaginative experience, is one we in fact possess.

Here Abrams seems close to postulating a sort of general moral consensus, even among men who may be separated, at more particular levels of experience, by sharp doctrinal differences; and he also implies that this general moral sense is relatively fixed. Thus if the values embodied in a work are too special or idiosyncratic to touch our common humanity, the poetic effect will be impaired, as in fact it is, Abrams suggests, in a novel like *Aaron's Rod*.

If *The Mirror and the Lamp* deals primarily with the differences between Romantic theory and its predecessors, *Natural Supernaturalism* is designed to show the remarkable persistence of certain type-metaphors and archetypal actions, and to assert the essential continuity which exists between Christian concerns and the characteristic ventures of Romanticism. The background of scriptural metaphors and exegesis, Abrams argues, will prove "of repeated relevance to our understanding of the Romantic movement," since the Romantics revived these "ancient matters" in order to save the "cardinal virtues of their religious heritage" and thus make them "intellectually acceptable, as well as emotionally pertinent, for the time being." The archetypal Romantic plot—it may of course be an inner plot of meditation—fundamentally involves "the Neoplatonic paradigm of a primal unity and goodness, an emanation into multiplicity which is *ipso facto* a lapse into evil and suffering, and a return to unity and goodness." This familiar pattern of fall, quest, and return at a higher level of awareness Abrams demonstrates not by any

special psychological apriorism but by solid argument and far ranging investigations into German philosophy of the period.

Abrams develops his metacritical position most fully in "What's the Use of Theorizing about the Arts?" Here he defends not poetry against science, but poetic theory against the attacks of some powerful, scientifically-minded analytic philosophers who maintain that coherent critical discourse is impossible. Like R.S. Crane, he argues that we should welcome a diversity of critical methods whose justification can only be pragmatic; we must accept the difficult conclusion, he maintains, that "once a concept or assertion has been adopted as the basis of a critical theory, its origin or truth-claim, whether empirical or metaphysical, ceases to matter, for its validity in this context is to be determined by its power of illumination when brought to bear in the scrutiny of works of art." Although critical languages should be subject to the general rules of common sense and sound hypothetical reasoning, "criticism must initiate its chief function where these simplified calculi [the precise sciences] stop; for the models of logic and scientific method achieve their extraordinary efficacy...by the device of systematically excluding just those features of experience that, humanly speaking, matter most."

As a critic of criticism then, Abrams is a pluralist or "pragmatist" in the usual sense: is he therefore a relativist? And as the historian of a particular period, is he also a pragmatist in the rather special sense of the term as it appears in *The Mirror and the Lamp*? That is, can he tell us anything about the human value of the tradition he has worked so carefully to define? As for relativism, no pragmatist has ever tried to maintain that all methods work equally well on all occasions. The value of a critical system lies in what it can tell us about a work viewed from a particular vantage point. As readers we are free to occupy the same point and judge, by perfectly ordinary, commonsense methods, the accuracy of what the critic has seen. The number, or rather the essential *kinds* of vantage points cannot be infinite—not even so radically "subjective" a critic as Barthes has proposed that. And as for critical judgments in the usual sense, Wayne Booth has recently argued at length, and persuasively, that "Abrams performs literary criticism through history—though he never quite tells us that he has done so":

Abrams has described those moments in Romanticism when poets defined the universe, with their imagination, as essentially "friendly," in the precise sense that there was a natural marriage between the human spirit and the world it inhabits. And he leaves no doubt—though he says little directly about himself—that he clearly thinks their kind of hope, their faith in life and joy, can still be recommended, in some sense, even in our own blighted times. [*Natural Supernaturalism*] is his own (muted) theodicy, and those who think all theodicies by definition faulty are right in feeling challenged. In choosing our attitudes, the book implies, let us not pretend that rational defenses are all on the side of considering nature or the universe unfriendly to men, who are *essentially* alienated Showing us where we came from, demonstrating that it was a place of greatness in our past, transmitting forgotten connections that join us to the past, *Natural Supernaturalism* becomes a portrayal of who and where we are. It thus not only makes "extrinsic" criticism possible—because after all if one act of criticism is possible, the thing becomes possible. It makes life itself, in a post-Romantic age, tangibly, demonstrably livable.

This is high praise, as Booth intended it to be, but during the past few years it has become fashionable to question the very foundation of the kind of criticism which Abrams—and Booth—practice. In a 1972 review of *Natural Supernaturalism*, J. Hillis Miller also praised the book, calling it an achievement in "the grand tradition of modern humanistic scholarship, the tradition of Curtius, Auerbach, Lovejoy, C.S. Lewis"; but then, following Jacques Derrida, he went on to argue that Abrams' premisses and by implication the premisses of every major British and American critic of the twentieth century are based on fundamentally mistaken views of language and interpretation. Thanks to Nietzsche, we now know that "there is no 'correct' interpretation," since the very act of reading is "never the objective identifying of a sense but the importation of meaning into a text which has no meaning 'in itself.'" By the late 1970s the lines were firmly drawn: on one side are the "conservative" critics, such as Abrams, Booth and E.D. Hirsch, for whom there can be rational consensus about the determinate meaning of a literary text; on the other, Derrida and his American sympathizers, Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman and Miller himself (the challenges which Harold Bloom and Stanley Fish pose to the conservative critics are based on quite different principles). Given his view of the

false metaphysics underlying our traditional, "logocentric" view of language and the universe, Derrida (in Abrams' patient summary) undermines "the possibility of understanding language as a medium of decidable meanings." His theories eventuate in "a radical scepticism about our ability to achieve a correct interpretation, proposing instead that reading should free itself from illusory linguistic constraints in order to become liberated, creative, producing the meanings that it makes rather than discovers." But such a position, Abrams warns, is "suicidal" since it is "self-reflexive," in that Derrida's "subversive process destroys the possibility that a reader can interpret correctly either the expression of his theory or the textual interpretations to which it is applied." This is not a clash of rival critical approaches—nothing, for example, like the opposition between the Neo-Aristotelians and the New Critics during the 1940's: what is at stake here is something much more basic. Derrida and his followers have made a decisive break with what Abrams eloquently defines as the entire Western "humanistic paradigm of reading and writing," in which

the writer is conceived, in Wordsworth's terms, as "a man speaking to men." Literature, in other words, is a transaction between a human author and his human reader. By his command of linguistic and literary possibilities, the author actualizes and records in words what he undertakes to signify of human beings and actions and about matters of human concern, addressing himself to those readers who are competent to understand what he has written. The reader sets himself to make out what the author has designed and signified, through putting into play a linguistic and literary expertise that he shares with the author. By approximating what the author undertook to signify the reader understands what the language of the work means.

The "deconstructive" criticism of the opposing camp, he concludes, "has nothing whatever to do with the common experience of the uniqueness, the rich variety, and the passionate human concerns in works of literature, philosophy or criticism."

ADAMS, Robert Martin. Formerly Robert Martin Krapp. American. Born in New York City, 27 November 1915. Educated at Columbia University, New York City, B.A. 1935 (Phi Beta Kappa), M.A. 1937, Ph.D. 1942. Served as a captain in the United States Air Force, 1943-46: Bronze Star. Married Elaine Rosenbloom (divorced, 1957), 1 son; married Janet Malkin. Instructor in English, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1942-43; Instructor and Assistant Professor, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1947-50; Assistant Professor and Professor of English, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1950-68. Since 1968, Professor of English, University of California at Los Angeles. Recipient: *Hudson Review* Fellowship in Criticism, 1956; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1960. Address: 813 Waldo Street, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501, U.S.A.

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"It is only through the vigilant, the militant use of our critical faculties," Robert Martin Adams maintains, "that we can confer any real benefit on the authors whom we love." This might stand as the motto for Adams' own work, for behind his learning and sophistication there is always a kind of energy and sense of enjoyment which has all but vanished from modern criticism. And while Adams' taste is catholic and acute, it is also clear that he is most attracted to a certain kind of artist, anxious to pay tribute and communicate his enthusiasm, and determined to protect the qualities he most admires from inflexible and misapplied criticism. The primary value of art lies in the challenge it poses to complacency: "I mean simply and

seriously," Adams asserts, "that literature by its very nature is committed to questioning yesterday's assumptions and today's commonplaces"; and as a corollary he adds that "one prime aim of scholarship is to promote uncertainty." Again, "'I come to disquiet' says a writer like Gide. And he is right."

Adams' first book, *Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics*, introduces most of his characteristic concerns. The immediate purpose here is to question the versions of Milton which some influential modes of modern criticism have proposed. These conceptions, he argues,

no longer offer a fruitful multiplicity but a blurred confusion and sometimes a downright contradiction. Each of these images is rooted in philosophical presuppositions, with which it is often useful to quarrel....If I interpret the contemporary prospect correctly it calls out, not for more seed and energetic cultivation, but for a firm hand on the pruning shears.

Thus he devotes one essay to challenging the assumption of some of the New Critics that *Comus* should be read as a closely-woven metaphysical lyric, thereby neglecting the "larger architecture" of the poem as a dramatic structure made for a specific occasion. In another essay he demonstrates the confusion introduced into discussions of *Paradise Lost* by critics eager to reduce Satan to an archetypal figure. In short, *Ikon* offers the reader a catalogue of the distortions and contradictions which modern criticism has fostered; but at the same time Adams also provides more appropriate ways of dealing with *Comus*, the figure of Satan, Milton's habits of revision, or whatever the topic may be (and it should be noted that his characterization of Milton's verse style is as informed and helpful as readers will find anywhere). His methods for correcting the partial views of other critics are diverse and flexible; he is uncommitted to any one mode of argument, bringing forward whatever seems relevant—classical learning, precise textual knowledge, even that most formidable of weapons, shrewd common sense. The image of Milton which finally emerges is convincing and of central importance in understanding Adams' general position:

Milton wrote for the morally committed reader...but he also wrote from beliefs which constantly surpassed or evaded the formal categories of his art, so that his great literary achievements, like those of Ibsen and Flaubert, Euripides and Swift, end rather in a stalemate than a fully resolved stasis. The antinomy on which Milton's work centers undergoes a full exploration, not a full resolution; we admire not the formal perfection with which a conclusion is worked out, but the truth and energy with which a conflict is explored down to its last grinding incompatibility.

While there is no reason to question his sensitivity to works which confirm rather than disquiet and which rest comfortably in conventional, well-made forms, Adams is temperamentally most intrigued by the tensions which this view of Milton suggests. Throughout his criticism he has tried to rescue the disturbing and restless writers he most admires from the simplification—or scorn—of complacent formal analysis which presupposes that "a work of art which is not ultimately unified thematically, ideologically, emotionally, imagistically, and on the narrative level—or which does not at least do its best to be unified in some or all of these ways—must remain diffuse and undirected. Conflicts must be resolved...so that a mere 'end' can be elevated to the dignity of a 'conclusion.'" But the novels of Stendhal, for example, "are not written to fill out certain patterns or achieve certain structural, textual, or verbal relations; they engage in a special kind of freedom and open possibility which is incompatible with the security of a fixed structure.... Reading the novels of Stendhal is like riding a surfboard—one is not exactly oblivious of the past or the future, but they do not help much to balance the perilous present." Thus "literary experience which does not fit into systems is 'wrong' only if we are more interested in systems than in literature." Clearly there are works which by design include "a major unresolved conflict with the intent of displaying its unresolvedness" and thus can hardly be judged failures if there is a purpose for their "openness." (Adams is perfectly aware of—but quite untroubled by—what Yvor Winters called the fallacy of imitative form: the "fallacy," for example, of letting a work remain formless simply because its subject matter is a certain kind of disorder). The would-be critic should remember that

it is no more probable that an elaborate over-all pattern exists (especially when one already has a number of other, perhaps lesser patterns) than that it does not. Even the most elaborately minded author may be unwilling or unable to maintain consistently all the levels of structure for which he has occasional uses. He may even find it aesthetically advantageous, now and then, to do what is (in isolation) structurally anomalous.

Adams is unwilling to legislate the "proper" uses of openness but suggests that "without putting a premium on novelty or magnitude as such, one may attribute value to any work of art which helps man to see experience from a new point of view or to see further into it than an old point of view has allowed him. This is no negation of formalism, but a supplement to it." The ultimate test of such works seems to be that they "extend experience instead of compacting it." A paradox remains, but one which could be resolved only at the cost of simplifying both literature and criticism: "And yet, why else does the continuing effort of criticism, comparison and judgment go on, if not to enable us to absorb even the great disquieter, the most mercurial and destructive of writers?"

Stendhal and Joyce strongly attract Adams' own restless intelligence. The games Stendhal plays, the ways in which he frustrates conventional expectations naturally appeal to those happy few who have "flexible, alive imaginations." In fact Adams' impassioned defense of Beylism is finally an argument for a way of living, not merely for the appreciation of unconstrained literary techniques: "a part of life is an art just as much as art formally defined. The self is or can be an artificial creation, not a discovery but a creation, which man is capable of directing, controlling, and adapting to the ends he selects for himself." For those capable of such self-creation Beylism suggests "a whole series of resilient resources." *James Joyce: Common Sense and Beyond* is a patient but far from oversimplified introduction which more than replaces Harry Levin's standard volume, while *Surface and Symbol* is, in comparison with *Strains of Discord* and *Stendhal*, essentially pre-critical. By examining the uses Joyce makes of raw materials around him and by asking which elements add to the realistic surface of the novel and which are pressed into symbolic service, Adams attempts to "discover what the object was made with as a step toward deciding how it should be looked at and (perhaps) what it should be measured with."

Nil is loosely structured and speculative, quickly sketching the ways in which a number of nineteenth century writers tried to express the sense of vacuums, abysses and emptiness, inner and outer, which leads to our own "void-haunted, void-fascinated age." If we ever see how we got here, Adams suggests, "we may know a little better where we are." The survey is inconclusive, perhaps inevitably so, since "even the history of other men's adventures into non-being defies regularity and method." *Proteus, His Lies, His Truth* is also discursive, a brilliantly conducted tour ending with a predictably gloomy commonplace: exact equivalences are hardly to be expected, since translation is "always a compromise, and great art is rarely a compromise." Yet even here there are prizes for the sensitive and the alert: "the chief reward of studying translations [is] an augmented sense of suspicion, including suspicion of one's own assumptions and responses."

In *The Roman Stamp* Adams traces some of the ways in which artists seeking—or forging—their own identities have turned to the image of Rome:

for self-creators in the name of Rome, the city is an occasion if not a downright pretext. There are energies within them that Rome releases. Perhaps indeed only Rome could have released them, or only in the particular direction they took. But the men are not passive, plastic wax on which Rome printed its masculine stamp. Quite the contrary, they demanded to be influenced, required it. If Rome had not been handy they would have found something else—or perished from exasperation at the lack of it. The Roman stamp may well be a seal, an impression, but it is also an imperious stamp of the foot, a military "no" to the life of nature as given. In saying this "no," in various tones of voice, various figures over the ages drew upon Rome as a repertoire of attitudes, a set of stylistic devices, embodied in myth, history, architecture, religion, ethics—whatever.

Although some writers are included here, most of the figures are visual artists and architects—Mantegna, Palladio, Canova, and Piranesi, among others. Adams concludes (or rather doesn't conclude) that regarding the making of self-hood,