

already talking about a "new American Majority" and seem intent upon consolidating political gains made on November 7th both by putting together programs specifically designed to appeal to this majority and by reducing or eliminating "bloated government bureaucracy."

If there is a strategy directed against Kennedy, then, it might make sense for the Republicans to force him to stand

up in the Senate as a defender of the Great Society welfare programs that have led to so much dissatisfaction within our society. Should this happen and should Kennedy emerge as a defender of the discredited welfarism that sunk McGovern, the President will have successfully removed a major roadblock in the way of building a "new American (and, incidentally, perhaps Republican) Majority."



Book Review:

Metaphors of Self

— The Meaning of Autobiography

by James Olney

Princeton University, \$12.50

However dull, however tedious, however uninteresting our own, about the lives of others we are insatiably avid of facts. Hence the timeless allure of even atrociously poor biography, with its too smoothly-spinning narrative, elephantine length, and seemingly inexhaustible supply of facts. We salvage all — bits and scraps of clandestine letters, rumored peccadilloes, the itineraries of foreign travel, tales of chronic dyspepsia (and worse), yellowing laundry tickets, the glittering repartee of evenings now only half-legibly inscribed in mouldering journals, countless dates, events both memorable and trivial — hoping to draw from such collections as these a metaphysical (if ultimately deceptive) comfort, hoping against hope that somewhere amid this hoarded debris we may discover the secret unity of self, that substantiality and solidity of personality so plainly evident in the lives of others, and so despairingly elusive in our own. On these grounds even the worst biography pleads extenuation. The attraction of bad biography is best exemplified by a famed nineteenth-century biographer who, lamenting the ubiquity of grossly sentimental, commemorative biographies with which his countrymen pretended to reverence their dead, was forced to concede that however painful to him their "lack of selection, of detachment, of design," so far as the common reader was concerned, "their ill-digested masses of material" really did comfort and console. For no matter how short such hack productions seemed to fall of the ideal of biography — a lucid disclosure of the shape of self by "compressing into a few shining pages the manifold existences of men" — they could still offer the minimal consolations of fiction: sharply-etched characters and effortlessly unfolding plots surrounded by a reasoned universe of order, limit, and finitude, and these in surprising abundance.

Unquestionably, autobiography affords us no such easy consolations; it neither blandishes nor reassures. From the start, its aim is wholly divergent from that of biography, if it is not its generally acknowledged antagonist. Biography samples real life deliberately through the

wrong end of a telescope: it distances and simplifies, selects and omits, clarifies and solidifies. Autobiography reverses the focus, redirecting the instrument at ourselves *from within*, obscuring if not blotting out entirely our characteristic social selves which are visible only externally — appearance, gesture, role, class, and speech — and thus bringing our personalities under our own introspective gaze. Suddenly, our solid identities begin to dissolve into handfuls of words, tags, and empty labels which try in vain to capture and fix our own sense of unique particularity. Having lost hold of our sense of solid identity because we no longer view it from without, our self seems to come disconnected, to multiply into an array of selves as we search helplessly for a thread on which to rejoin our past and future. Freud regarded these symptoms as a form of hysteria, citing the case of a woman who obsessively complained that "it was as though her life was chopped in pieces." Strikingly similar is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's allusion to men who "have ceased to look back on their selves with joy and tenderness. They exist in fragments." More recent is the query of D.H. Lawrence, foreshadowing our preoccupation with role-playing, identity crises, and transformations of self: "I am many men... Who are you? How many selves have you? And which of these selves do you want to be?" But in our time it was Jean Paul Sartre who, though caught up in the extremities of his own case ("I am cast out, forsaken in the present: I vainly try to rejoin the past: I cannot escape") realized that in fact these symptoms occur universally, are part of the basic human condition. He went on to imply that, paradoxically, relief for the common man lay in a careful avoidance (however damnable from another point of view) of the autobiographic impulse to introspect, to become increasingly self-conscious, and at least a possible acceptance of a contingent self, a self immersed in process, a self definable only as continuous change with no constitutive core and no stable past. He well understood that the more we employ "biographical optics" (looking through the wrong end of the figurative telescope) to ponder the order apparent in

the lives of others, the more liable we are to feel cheated by our own.

Introspection and instability exist, at least for most of us, in direct proportion to each other: by focusing on distant goals and ends we can avoid at least partially the uncertainties of the present. Momentum is all — to pause is to falter. The reflective glance, the examination of self is an invitation to doubt, paralysis, disaster. For most of us, the best life is that lived in placid disregard (if not outright defiance) of the classical exhortation: "Know Thyself!" Most importantly, however, Sartre conceded at least implicitly that "pure" autobiography was impossible and that a pitched and uninterrupted awareness of the flux and change of our lives, our bodies, and our existence would prove a nightmare beyond description. For this reason, all autobiography may be said to harbor an internal and irreconcilable conflict: trying to fulfill its theoretical aims of introspection and self-scrutiny while at the same time trying to satisfy our urge to become detached spectators of ourselves — to view ourselves both from a vantage point outside our bodies (as others view us), and outside the reaches of time itself. Autobiography becomes flawed by the inexorable human desire to escape into a world of fiction. And perhaps the chief consolation which fiction alone affords — a lucid disclosure of the shape of self by "compressing into a few shining pages the manifold existences of men" — may help to explain the timeless magic of biography. For like humanity itself, autobiography in its fallen state aspires to the condition of biography.

This far-reaching insight and its consequences for psychology, philosophy, and aesthetics is among the central tenets of James Olney's *Metaphors of Self*, a brilliantly conceived, immensely detailed, and eloquently written account of the nature and meaning of autobiography. "For it is impossible," Olney begins by quoting the words of A.M. Clark, "for a man to get out of his skin." Indeed, that would be the same as "an autobiographer (trying to give) a view of himself from without." And grounded in this remarkable observation is the critical distinction that Olney succeeds in drawing between two "large and loose groups" of autobiography: on the one hand, "autobiography simplex" or "autobiography of the single metaphor," and, on the other, "autobiography duplex" or "autobiography of the double metaphor." Autobiography simplex, the first group, might equally well have been dubbed autobiography as valediction (or autobiography as farewell), since into this category fall autobiographers (Olney dwells at length on George Fox, Charles Darwin, John Henry Newman, and John Stuart Mill) who regard their "autobiographic perceptions" as taking place *ex post facto*, often celebrating and pondering repeatedly the single outstanding event or occurrence responsible for the radical disjunction of past self from present. Each of these men, dissimilar in so many ways, were yet alike in that "all, in one way or another, tried to get out of their skins, tried to separate entirely their former from their present

selves and to relate the events of a lifetime as if the relation were, or could be, after the fact." Autobiography as valediction is structured around an elaborate bidding farewell to a finished past, a formal act of leave-taking, a ritual sanctioning of passage into an achieved — and thus, for the most part, static and ahistorical — selfhood. Perhaps for that reason Darwin ("I am not conscious of any change in my mind during the last thirty years.") and Mill ("From this time... I have no further mental changes to tell of.") and Newman ("From the time that I became a Catholic, of course, I have no further history of my religious opinions to narrate.") sound remarkably similar. And from their own accounts it is apparent that each "reached a clearly defined end point in development, a specific date beyond which there was no change but only more of the same; that in each case, this date came well before the composition of the autobiography; and that again, in each case, it was a partial, not a whole, evolution that ceased — development of a scientific or religious faculty."

To Olney's second broad rubric — "autobiography duplex" or "autobiography of the double metaphor" — might be affixed the further tentative gloss of autobiography as discovery, or autobiography as becoming, since here autobiography no longer serves either to celebrate an act of severance or detachment, or to serve as the vehicle for its accomplishment, but rather symbolizes and participates in a constantly renewing acceptance of and surrender to the felt real, ever in the process of becoming, never finally halted until, theoretically, the moment of our death. But there now arises a problem not simply of trying to gauge the validity of a procedure that defines new categories by a simple inversion of old ones, though some of the characteristics Olney now proposes for "autobiography duplex" — "The acceptance of 'his own skin,' of its being his skin, always around him but around nobody else, and acceptance of all the subjectivity that that implies is (its) most distinctive sign" and secondly, that in "autobiography duplex" there "would be change and development" until either the implications of one's lifework are exhausted or admit of no further development — are clearly the antithesis of the first. The real problem arises in trying to puzzle out the full range of possible implications involved in the ideal conception of autobiography as discovery when we try to measure that luminous ideal against three figures (Montaigne, C.G. Jung, and T.S. Eliot) chosen as its embodiments.

Certainly one of the most significant and, mercifully, concise discussions of this elusive ideal (or, at least, one very closely resembling the ideal sketched by Olney) is to be found scattered throughout the writings of Ortega y Gasset. To begin with, there is the expected exhortation to forego the escapist consolations of fiction, to maintain an openness of outlook and commitment in regard to all the systems and philosophies which, throughout our life, compete for our belief: "To be free means to be lacking in

constitutive identity, not to have subscribed to a determined being, to be able to be other than what one was, to be unable to install oneself once and for all in any given being. The only attribute of the fixed, stable being in the free being is this constitutive instability." According to Ortega, however, the honest acceptance and surrender to our lot of radical freedom need prompt neither hysteria nor the shocks of disorientation; on the contrary, Ortega regards its inevitable corollary as a recognition that it is up to the human imagination itself to forge the overarching scenarios in which we dwell and the succession of goals which, throughout the course of a lifetime, we tentatively embrace:

"Man invents for himself a program of life, a static form of being, that gives a satisfactory answer to the difficulties posed for him by circumstance. He essays this form of life, attempts to realize this imaginary character he has resolved to be. But meanwhile the experience has made apparent shortcomings and limits of the said program of life. It does not solve all the difficulties, and creates new ones of its own. With the back view its inadequacy is straightway revealed. Man thinks out another program of life."

But surely, it will be objected, is it so easy a matter to acknowledge the shortcomings and inadequacies of our "programs of life" (either those we shape personally or those we accept from society), to withdraw our deep belief from, say, one religion or philosophy or view of life, casting around with stoic forbearance until we hit upon another, more satisfactory formulation? Is belief a commodity that admits simultaneously of unquenchable devotion and skeptical appraisal? Are the words of a famous Romantic thinker — "It is equally fatal intellectually to have a system and to have none. One must decide to combine both" — applicable to even a heroic minority of men or do they portray an ideal ultimately unrealizable in human affairs? Certainly the cases of Jung,

Eliot, and Montaigne raise vital questions concerning the underlying human costs of adherence to such divided ideals. There is no questioning the fact that works of autobiography (whether static testaments to the past or monuments to unflagging openness) and larger systems of belief or philosophic elucidations are both ultimately metaphoric elaborations, reflecting an underlying (if often invisible) point of view. Some controversy has surrounded the claim that Jung's work is truly "science," but however outlandish his formal writings appear (and the same attitude of stark incomprehensibility laced with pity is extremely prevalent when we turn from T.S. Eliot's poetry to his writings on culture and religion), it may be that they provided for Jung (as Eliot's writings did for him) a distinctly "simplex" or fixed conception of reality which in turn afforded an underlying security so vitally necessary to the full acceptance by each man of a more fluid, more open, more complexly uncertain notion of self that only then could be chronicled and explored through the medium of autobiography as process.

Despite several of my own differences of opinion (whether, for example, Jung, as Olney would claim, is not a scientist, or whether Montaigne is in fact a true paradigm for modern man), this volume is a distinguished achievement in almost every respect. And given the critical depredations suffered by T.S. Eliot's poetry at the hands of insensitive critics with little if any interest in poetry *per se*, Olney's remarkable chapter on the *Four Quartets* — with its deft and skillful elucidation of complexity and detail, with its felicitous observation that "recapitulation" and "recurrence" of poetic elements in diverse contexts must be accounted a key principle of structure in any literature that strives to mediate between static form and dynamic process, and with its staunch recognition that complexity or difficulty in modern art simply mirrors the condition of life as we find it ("The surest symptom of decadent art," wrote another critic in



**The newest-
and best-of
BUCKLEY!**

"This collection shows him at his best form, a writer of skill, intelligence, style and verve — and, happily, a sense of humor."
— *Publishers Weekly*

By the best-selling author of *CRUISING SPEED* and *THE GOVERNOR LISTETH*

Just Published
\$7.95 • **PUTNAM**

**INVEIGHING
WE WILL GO**
WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

The Bootblack Stand



Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, is celebrating the publication of his new book, which is now available at *avant-garde* bookstores throughout New Jersey. Dr. Plunkitt's book is about the importance of altruism in politics and it is titled *What's in It for Me?* Although Dr. Plunkitt expects to earn ten million dollars from sales of his new book, he has agreed to continue to advise public figures through this column. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, c/o The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

How come it is that you guys are always tearing things down? Why can't you build something up? Why can't you find something nice to say? Why don't you talk about what is right with America?

Cordially,
George Romney

Dear Mr. Romney:

Well let me begin by saying that I am not writing about America. I write about Washington, and I write about things as they are. But it seems to me that a cogent case can be made for inveighing against everything and everyone. A lot of people waste an enormous amount of energy looking for a few specks of gold in a bucket of sand. As a result they lose touch. They begin to dream of great buckets of gold populated with but a few specks of sand. And they begin to confuse their dreams with reality. Soon they think that the fellow over the hill has a bucket of gold. They become sour about their condition. And if they continue to think rather than to take up drink or pouting they are but two leaps in logic from confecting notions of communism, facism, or Consciousness III.

Bah! The truth is that no one has a bucket of gold. Not even the fellow with a smile and a few specks less sand. Everyone lives in his own kind of misery and fundamentally has a miserable time of it. The man who reminds us of it is the man who keeps us from the mischief of the dreamers. And if he does it with style he can keep us reasonably happy. If I neglect to run on effusively about a few specks of gold, it is because I cannot neglect the vast abundance of sand. Neither should you. If you were not confused by a few flicks of gold, you might never have made the stupid statements you have made these last few years.

—GWP

Dear Mr. Plunkitt:

Ever since I became California's junior

senator I have brought my office to the people. The people like this, for the government should be brought to the people every now and again. After all, think of what government brings from the people? A government that asks not what of the people merely escalates human misery and compassion.

Those who make change improbable make impossible changes irreplaceable. In the distance I see all of God's citizens close to government and me close to them.

As part of my dream to bring people closer to government and to me I would like to get on the Johnny Carson Show. Could you advise me as to how I can fulfill my dream?

Cordially,
Senator John Tunney

Dear Senator Tunney:

You startle me. I am a political adviser not a magician, nevertheless I have set my agents to this task. They tell me that we might be able to get you on stage as a guest, but after extensive consultations with the Carson staff, there is no chance of getting you into the audience. According to a spokesman for the Carson staff, the Carson Show must maintain its standards. Though you are a veritable fountain of foolishness, ever to be counted on for a nonsensical statement or a silly gesture, putting you in the audience would be simply too risky. You are not the kind of person to be put in an audience. Perhaps you are too intellectual. Try the Dick Cavett show.

—GWP

the same vein, "is that it leaves nothing to the imagination; the Muse has bared her flabby bosom like a too-obliging harlot — there is no veiled promise, no mystery, nothing to divine.") — must in itself be ranked a minor masterpiece.

Indeed, *Metaphors of Self* is really a prolegomenon to that vaster undertaking which is yet to be written and impossible to write: an account of the *poetics of process* or history of the human imagination — that basic (perhaps tragic) human impulse to frame metaphors (be they poetic flights of "as if" or ponderous tomes of systematic philosophy) as a way of probing the mystery around us, as a means, in the words of Paul Weiss, of securing a "static image" or "temporarily arrested sample" or an "ongoing dynamic process." The abiding message of *Metaphors of Self* is, I think, that before the challenge of a universe in process — a universe of tragic uncertainty and bleak prospect — both aesthetics and poetics are jointly confronted by a new mode of literature whose task is not simply "to discover truth and to present it, but to pursue and to create it, and not to create it outside the pursuit but within it. And in his re-creation, the reader, in effect, becomes the pursuit, the pondering, the process, the poem."

Alan Weinblatt

WEAVER

(continued from page 4)

himself. As the vanguard becomes more extreme, it does not reject the earlier "reformist" elements of its case, since these remain an effective means of drawing people to the movement. At this point, a new set of critics enter. They often accept a reformist definition of the problem, but vehemently attack its revolutionary and nihilist redefinitions, the spirit of reaction which intends them, and the movement as a whole, which is now defined by them. The critics are themselves attacked in turn for creating straw men, for ignoring the diversity of the movement, and for being indifferent to real injustices and problems. Eventually, once the movement is dead and gone, the critics are rehabilitated and celebrated for their courageous defense of human values against radical extremism, nihilism, and totalitarianism.

Today we live in an age of movements, and perhaps there is no need to illustrate the foregoing observations. Certainly the above phenomena are within the recent experience of us all. But for the skeptics, evidence comes to hand in the form of a recent series of reviews of two brilliant critics of modern intellectual movements. One of these is George Orwell, who in the 1940s inveighed so lucidly against the totalitarian aspects of

Stalinism and whose recent treatment in the review media exemplifies the case of the celebrated critic of the extinct and discredited movement. The other is Midge Decter, author of *The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Womens Liberation*, whose notices conform precisely to the pattern postulated for the critic of the movement at the height of its influence and zeal.

Midge Decter's book is quite simply one of the very best works of social and political criticism to be published in this country in the past dozen years. It is a single long essay whose purpose is to locate, through textual analysis, the essential position of women's liberation as expressed by the movement's leaders and ideologists. The book's brilliance lies in the seriousness and sobriety with which it is written, and the complexity and care of Decter's exegesis of women's liberation doctrine, and above all in the extraordinary lucidity and comprehensiveness of the understanding she conveys. It is not, contrary to some reviewers' implication, a polemic. It is solidly in the genre of serious criticism.

Midge Decter argues that, as the movement's leaders have defined their cause, women's liberation in its current form represents a desire to escape from freedom, opportunity, maturity, and biology. As such, it is in Decter's view regressive or reactionary rather than