

The Discovery

by David Hallman

***The Southern Vision of Andrew Lytle* by Mark Lucas, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.**

The old saw tells us that all things come to those who wait. And what a joy it is to find Andrew Lytle, in his vigorous 80's, receiving his just due, however late. The Richard Weaver Award by The Ingersoll Foundation, a generous grant by the Lyndhurst Foundation for his contribution to his Southern culture, honorary degrees from colleges hither and yon, and the recent appreciation of the Southern Agrarian Movement, with all its literary and social implications, all testify to his stature as a man and a writer. A full literary biography is in the making, his books are being gradually republished, and now we have at last the first complete critical appreciation of Lytle's contribution to American writing.

Mark Lucas' *The Southern Vision of Andrew Lytle* is, I believe, only the second book devoted exclusively to Lytle as an artist in his own right rather than as a member of a now-celebrated group of writers. There have been bibliographies, scattered essays, and a fine collection of criticisms edited by M.E. Bradford, all of which attest to his standing in the world of letters. As novelist, critic, and editor, Lytle has enjoyed a career spanning over 60 years. If the appreciation is late in coming, if he has sometimes labored in the shadows of his friends and cohorts—John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren—then the belated celebration is all the more welcome.

Lucas' title, however, *The Southern Vision*, is somewhat misleading. Lytle's family background is Tennessean; he was an intimate with the Vanderbilt Fugitives and one of the most aggressive of the Agrarians; his art almost always deals explicitly with the South of his experience, but Lytle is

first and always an artist, and like Faulkner, Wolfe, and Warren, his work transcends his regional topicality. If his "vision" has a Southern accent, it also has a universal appeal. Few writers have been so sophisticated in their knowledge and application of the craft of writing. His devotion to that "craft"—one of Lytle's favorite words—is the subject of Lucas' study.

The Southern Vision does the obvious. Mixing criticism with useful biographical information, Lucas works chronologically through the Lytle oeuvre from his biography of Confederate cavalry general Nathan Bedford Forrest through selected essays developing his Agrarian and Southern sympathies, short stories, and his four novels which best show the breadth and depth of Lytle's art. *The Long Night* is as bloody a tale of vengeance as our literature can come up with. *At the Moon's End*, on the other hand, increasingly my personal favorite but long out of print, recounts the trek of Hernando de Soto through the 16th-century Southern wilderness. The invasion of the Spanish conquistadors—nominally in the name of Christendom and civilization, but actually in a quest for elusive gold—is a great allegory of corruption and hubris. And *A Name for Evil* has often been called a Southern version of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*. It is probably Lytle's least satisfactory work, but Lucas discusses it interestingly in the context of Lytle's attempt to restore an old and isolated country home for his family during the 1940's. Lytle considers *The Velvet Horn* his masterpiece, and this underappreciated novel which Caroline Gordon called "a landmark in American fiction, unique in its greatness and originality" is treated with due respect here. (But the best, and really incomparable, study of this novel is Lytle's own account of its writing. "The Working Novelist and the Myth-making Process" is as fascinating and frightening an account of the creative process as has ever been offered by an author on his own work.)

If I might suggest a novel way to read Lucas' admirable study—and a different way to approach Lytle himself—the last chapter makes a good beginning. Under the heading of "Coda," Lucas discusses Lytle's late family memoir *A Wake for the Living*.

BOOKS IN BRIEF—LITERARY

***Dara* by Patrick Bresson, New York: Franklin Watts; \$15.95. Translated from French by Nicole Irving.** Winner of the Grand Prix du Roman of the Académie Française for 1985, this story of post-World War II Europe cannot escape the flippant Gallicism of its author. Bresson, who published eight novels before he was 28, writes of what he could have learned only by hearsay, though he does it well, taking care not to garble too many South Slav names and events.

***Winter in Moscow* by Malcolm Muggeridge, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.** This reprint of the 1934 classic tale of Stalin's Moscow, seen through Western eyes, is a welcome reminder that many things change, but the gullibility, ignorance, superficiality, and venality of Western journalists do not.

***Divertimento 1889* by Guido Morselli, New York: E.P. Dutton; \$15.95. Translated from Italian by Hugh Shankland.** Fifteen years after his suicide as an unknown novelist in 1973, Guido Morselli is the literary *cause célèbre* of Italy. His novel, unjustly compared to Nabokov (why must critics think in similes?), is an accomplishment by a gentleman who knew and loved his world.

***Between the Woods and the Water* by Patrick Leigh Fermor, New York: Viking; \$18.95.** There are still travelers (as opposed to tourists), though not too many like Mr. Fermor. His wonderful journey through 1933 Europe—its past, present, and future, its peoples, and himself—is one of those rare, unclassifiable books destined, unfortunately, to languish in the "Travel" sections of public libraries.

***Partings* by Leonid Borodin, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; \$15.95.** This novel by a former Soviet prisoner of conscience tells it as it is—a survival game in a large glasnost zoo, hardly different from what Muggeridge has seen, back in the 30's.

***New Writers of the South: A Fiction Anthology*, edited by Charles East, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press; \$12.95.** A very good atlas of a very important literary region, with some gems, notably Madison Smartt Bell's *Monkey Park*, Louise Shivers' *Here to Get My Baby Out of Jail*, Donald Hays's *The Dixie Association*, and others.

***American Journals* by Albert Camus, New York: Paragon House; \$15.95. Translated by Hugh Levick.** In a true, unliterary journal, Camus jotted his impressions of America in 1946.

Lytle writes that the book was intended to "tell his daughters who they are and where they come from." A veritable gold mine of anecdotes and tall tales, Lytle's book is a marvelous introduction to the writer whom Robert Penn Warren has called the "best story teller in America." In his *The Southern Vision of Andrew Lytle* Lucas leads us to a writer who is finally receiving the wide appreciation he has always deserved.

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Humanism as a Fine Art

by Carl C. Curtis

Paul Elmer More: Literary Criticism as the History of Ideas by Stephen L. Tanner, Albany: State University of New York Press; \$19.50.

It is a common fact of our century — appreciated most by George Orwell — that men who lust after power will distort words to gain their own ends. In 1933, a significant distortion took place. A group of men, John Dewey among them, drafted and published a now famous document, the *Humanist Manifesto I*, in which they declared their allegiance to a world free of "any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values." Steadily, this creed has come to define the humanist (or secular humanist) in our day, to the point that "humanism" has become a byword to conservatives, especially conservative Christians.

It was not always so. In the decades immediately preceding the 1933 manifesto, the term "humanist" had been associated with a few isolated scholars, for the most part acting independently of one another, who had developed rather traditional ideas about education, letters, and man's place in the universe. Their ideas, however diverse the application, were based on the premise that "supernatural or cosmic guarantees" had a great deal to do with "human values." One of the main figures to emerge from this circle of scholars was Paul Elmer More, whose thought is the subject of a new book by

Stephen L. Tanner.

In one sense, More had something in common with the men who drafted the *Humanist Manifesto I*. Like all men who claim the title of humanist, he asserted the dignity of human life, the responsibility of the individual, and the importance of free will. Yet More has never ceased to be treated with contempt by the post-*Manifesto* humanists, because he saw clearly that humanism, in order to survive as a distinct philosophy, had to rest on something more than itself. "Will not the humanist," he said, "unless he adds to his creed the faith and the hope of religion, find himself at the last, despite his protests, dragged back into the camp of the naturalist?" This attitude applied even to More's allies, men such as Irving Babbitt. For More, it was necessary to harness humanism to a body of ideas and beliefs totally alien to the modern *ethos*. Specifically, these ideas and beliefs were Platonism and Christianity. Hence, the split with modern humanists.

To avoid falling into the error he criticized, More set himself the task of investigating, in Tanner's words, "the fundamental questions of what is the nature of man and how should he believe and act." These are old questions based on a view of man which fewer and fewer of the intellectuals of the day were able to accept. Asking them was a result of More's fascination with two forces at work in the history of modern ideas, humanism and naturalism.

Humanism, according to More, primarily meant accepting a dualistic view of man. Man is simultaneously a natural and supernatural being. To ignore either aspect of the soul leads to cultural and political dangers that have become familiar to us all: the loss of the special position of man in Creation and the lowering of man to a cog in a statist machine. Naturalism, in other words. More saw in the tendency toward naturalism (what we now mistakenly call humanism) the chief heresy in the West from the Renaissance to our day, manifesting itself in a variety of forms and creeds — rationalism, scientism, romanticism, humanitarianism — all carrying the basic message that man was, one way or another, in control of his own destiny and not responsible to either any transcendent

Being or code.

The decline of true humanism and the rise of naturalism in the thinking of Western men became More's great theme. He made it his objective to analyze the conflict of these two creeds in the literature of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and, as Tanner puts it, "to cultivate within himself the historic sense and thus trace the history of the human spirit."

It is no surprise, then, that More chose to dedicate himself to the calling (indeed, he considered it a very high calling) of literary criticism. But it was literary criticism of a kind unknown to those of us who have been schooled in the New Criticism or in Deconstructionism. More's writing was moral, philosophical, and historical in its emphasis. Focusing on individual writers and periods, More attempted to isolate the central ideas behind each artist and place them within the context of an intellectual and historical movement. In his *Shelburne Essays*, he chose to measure the worth of his subjects primarily in terms of where they fell in the humanist-naturalist debate. The method has its limits, as Tanner is quick to point out. More tends to ignore the formal and stylistic side of some of the greatest writers. But the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. The disciple of the New Criticism who reads a poem as an isolated event may come away with a very good understanding of the work, but not much else. The humanist is much more likely to leave his reading with a sense of moral and spiritual enrichment. He may also be better prepared to do battle with a few Philistines.

Stephen Tanner has done an excellent job of discussing More's achievement. Like More's criticism, Tanner's study has its limits, as, indeed, the author is ready to confess. But it stands as a superb introduction to a man whom most conservatives hear of now and again (mostly in the writings of Russell Kirk) but never bother to read. We could spend a profitable week in slowly digesting this book. But the true dividend will be realized only if we then turn to the works of More himself.

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