

among the human faculties." One way or another, all the major poets of his time shared this ambition. It passed on to the creative minds of the mid-century, and with Dickens, more than with anyone else, passed from a mainly "poetic" realm to the rough-and-tumble of business, society, public life, the big city and the crowd. But at bottom the effort was unchanged. It was, to resist the all-conquering but seemingly all-deadening impact of what Meredith once called "the army of unalterable law" and thought formidable enough to terrify the Devil himself: the cosmic Bentham-Gradgrindism of pseudo-progress and fake rationality. Dickens' resistance to this spirit (it dwarfs our feeble resistances to the same things today) took the form of a great imaginative enlistment of the

permutatory freedom of the Word-world, until the point was reached in which what the dullard calls "plain truth" stands out as ponderous lie. No wonder that, ironically, Dickens had called those hanging gardens, with their explosive weeds, part of "the day's unrealities." Gradgrind-unreality is Manalive's reality. Experience does not have to be looked at fancifully for orthodoxy's patterns to be turned into exuberant jumble. It has to be looked at straight. "Building up" detail, stylistic "devices," simile and the rest are instruments of—of what? The words "human insight instead of climatology," which I used some time back, may give the clue. They are instruments in the war which the best Victorian minds waged against the dehumanisation of their time.

The New Irony & the Augustans

By Paul Fussell

IT IS A COMMONPLACE by now that the literature of the past has no static identity. It alters constantly, and sometimes drastically, as we use it to satisfy our cravings. John Wain properly advises the aspirant to criticism [ENCOUNTER, November 1969]: "Since the backward look modifies the object, it is not a question of combing the field of literary history to find some neglected topic that 'hasn't been done.' Things simply don't stay 'done.' . . ."

One thing that has not stayed "done" is the scheme of "the 18th century" received a generation ago. The English 18th century used to be thought a well-lighted (if not particularly clean) place accessible through a little social history and a handful of easy epithets like *moderate*, *rational*, and *unenthusiastic*. It was imagined that this "Place of Rest and Refreshment," as Saintsbury called it, would disclose its dimensions almost as readily to the biblio-

grapher, the furniture connoisseur, and the wine snob as to the literary theorist. If we wanted paradox, we were directed to the 17th century; if we wanted profundity and warmth, to the 19th. Those were the days when in most university Departments of English the course in 18th-century writing was the recognised property of the saddest local sack, the teacher farthest gone in sentimentality and critical doltishness. Thirty years ago people used to *apologise* for the *Dunciad*.

What has changed this state of affairs? Simply, I think, that we have recovered a capacity to delight in the quality most characteristic of 18th-century writing: irony. In fact, we now want irony so much that we find it in texts—*The Vicar of Wakefield* is an example—where no one suspected it before. And we have become irony hounds because we have been instructed by the events of our own time. We are the first generation to experience how wholesome, progressive ideas have a way of ending as motor accidents and traffic jams, stinking rivers and state trials, bureaucracies and soul-shrivelling architecture. Having got rid of Fleet Ditch and the workhouse, we get carbon monoxide and the new Knightsbridge Barracks. The inventor of the telephone kiosk could not have conceived that some day when you opened the door, urine would run out. We are in a unique position to see how Romantic conceptions of human personality and destiny (the operative words are *creative* and *transcen-*

PAUL FUSSELL, who is at present living in London, is Professor of English at Rutgers University. Among his books are "Poetic Meter and Poetic Form" (1965) and "The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke" (Oxford University Press, 1965; recently re-issued in paperback). His previous contributions to ENCOUNTER include "Egyptian Notebook" (May 1970), "Penrod (Revised)" (April 1970), and "Mr. Boswell" (May 1967).

dent) have a way of producing potheads, squatters, "folksingers," and envious dullards. Lessoned by our age, we are awakening to a freshened perception of the depth and ubiquity of human folly; one needn't even go all apocalyptic and point to what Dachau and Dresden have taught us. And it is this perception that has prompted us to take a new look at a body of texts which operate very largely on the assumption that being alive is an ironic business beginning in comedies of Shandean houghmagandie and ending in a foreknown but inadmissible disaster. All very funny and ghastly. Kurt Vonnegut has not become our spokesman for nothing.

THE REHABILITATION OF IRONY has meant, of course, the rehabilitation of Swift. It tells us a lot about how we now see things to realise that he has attracted more serious intellectual attention since World War II than ever before. The recovery of Swift has required the exposure of a number of calumnies—he hated women, he was neurotically dirty-minded, he was mad—used in the 19th century to hustle him into a dark corner where his ridicule would be unlikely to discredit schemes of industrial and political "progress." It was mainly to clear away such calumnies that Irvin Ehrenpreis wrote *The Personality of Jonathan Swift* in 1958, now re-issued.¹ It is still a very good book. And Mr. Ehrenpreis has now added an appendix sensibly adjusting his former excessively "rational" interpretation of the end of *Gulliver's Travels*:

If...the Houyhnhnms represent an ideal, why does the author joke at their expense? I suppose the comprehensive answer is that Swift was a joker.

Yes. Literature is not geometry.

ONE OF THE MANY SIGNS of the new interest in 18th-century writing has been the editions which have been appearing since the War. We now have texts of Pope and Swift and Goldsmith and the *Spectator* executed with the kind of seriousness that used to be thought appropriate only to classical, medieval, and Renaissance performances. Indeed, the modern awareness that has led to all this careful editing, the awareness that from printing to printing texts inevitably degenerate, is an accompaniment of our new appreciation of irony: we easily recognise now that perfectly responsible and well-educated people are dramatically cap-

¹ *The Personality of Jonathan Swift*. By IRVIN EHRENPREIS. Methuen (London), 60s; Barnes & Noble (New York), \$6.00.

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able of inattention, laziness, and disingenuousness, and that texts prepared when rosier views of human nature were presiding need to be scrutinised with a special scepticism.

Among the 18th-century editions in progress (Dryden, Fielding, Boswell, Horace Walpole) one of the most important is the Yale edition of Samuel Johnson, which began appearing in 1958. Eight volumes have been published, including, now, three volumes of *The Rambler*.² In his introduction W. J. Bate recognises Johnson's status as a moral thinker of a 17th-century cast ("I grow older and not better"—Johnson? No, Donne) and suggests that one would have to proceed in the direction of Montaigne and Bacon to find his like. But he also perceives—and such a perception would have been impossible fifty years ago—that Johnson is no mere holder and articulator of improving "views" but rather a profound humane ironist so conscious of his own complicity in back-sliding and self-destructive folly that for all his endowment as a putative satirist, his satiric thrusts abort or even recoil on him while he's delivering them. It is this that makes him so interesting to us. Of Johnson's disabilities as a straight satirist or one-dimensional moralist Mr. Bate says:

Johnson was unable merely to observe, but had to participate and share;... his own participation sets a bar to satire. The result... is that we have anger, protest, even ridicule, always in the process of turning into something else.

It is this process that makes humane devices like *but, yet, and however* the crucial pivots of the typical *Rambler* essay. Behaving *ad hoc* as always, Johnson complicates his positions while he writes. He does not set down pre-concocted lay-sermons; rather, he wrestles with powerful antithetic possibilities. But fewer than half the 208 *Ramblers* are moral essays of even so problematic and tentative a kind. Most are complex satiric portraits and narratives, and there are many critical essays. To the student of human complication and the attendant complexities of rhetoric and its occasions, it is instructive to see Johnson, the well-known despiser of pastoral poetry, writing about it in *Ramblers* 36 and 37 with no denigration whatever.

Fielding's formal criticism lacks the Johnsonian sort of strenuous self-awareness and self-exposure. He was insufficiently intellectual to perform as a great expository critic, and no book

accumulating his critical writings³ can be expected to have much of an impact, especially when its editor defines "criticism" so loosely as to include conventional diatribes against Grub Street, arch reprehensions of Colley Cibber, and chapters excised from their rightful contexts in the novels. When Fielding sets himself to "thinking about literature" his limits as a discursive critic are apparent immediately. Talking about the letter as a literary form, especially the letters of the Great, he writes:

These have always been esteemed as the most valuable parts of history, as they are not only the most authentic memorials of facts, but as they serve greatly to illustrate the true character of the writer....

With this namby-pamby sentiment compare what Johnson has to say about letters as evidence of character. After really thinking about the *données* of human nature and their relation to the facts of writing, he deals with the matter this way:

Of [Pope's] social qualities, if an estimate be made from his letters, an opinion too favourable cannot easily be formed; they exhibit a perpetual and unclouded effulgence of general benevolence and particular fondness. There is nothing but liberality, gratitude, constancy, and tenderness. It has been so long said as to be commonly believed, that the true characters of men may be found in their letters....

But actually,

Very few can boast of hearts which they dare lay open to themselves, and of which, by whatever accident exposed, they do not shun a distinct and continued view; and certainly, what we hide from ourselves we do not show to our friends.

The conclusion is inescapable:

There is, indeed, no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication [he means lying] than epistolary intercourse.

So much for Fielding's powers of analysis. But if Fielding lacks the toughness of mind to be a satisfying theorist, his talent for mimicry and his sense of decency make him a superb practical critic. He can spot a phoney miles off, and his critical instinct is never more impressive than when in *Shamela* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies* he exposes incompetent or fraudulent writing through parody. *The Tragedy of Tragedies*,⁴ his three-act farce satirising 42 plays of high contemporary repute, exemplifies exactly that "energy of inventiveness" which John Chalker reminds us is so typical of 18th-century writing. How frantic, how wry and offbeat, in a way how mad, the great works are: *A Tale of a Tub*, the *Dunciad*, *Tristram Shandy*, *A*

² Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*. Edited by W. J. BATE and ALBRECHT B. STRAUSS. 3 vols. Yale University Press, \$35.00, £15 15s. od.

³ *The Criticism of Henry Fielding*. Edited by IOAN WILLIAMS. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 84s.

⁴ *Tom Thumb and The Tragedy of Tragedies*. Edited by J. L. MORRISSEY. Oliver & Boyd, 15s.

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Song to David, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, even *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage* ("I wrote forty-eight of the printed octavo pages... at a sitting; but then I sat up all night").

Consider Fielding in the act of making this exquisite theatrical burlesque, first reading stacks of bombastic heroic plays and collecting on slips of paper hundreds of fatuities—silly psychological clichés, pretentious metaphors, cant phrases; then writing his own play in such a way as to work in the maximum number of idiot stolen lines; and finally issuing it all with a mock-scholarly preface and apparatus satirising the whole activity of source-hunting and parallel-passage-finding. Consider the taste, energy, and "enthusiasm" it would require today to conduct a madly patient mock-solemn study of some forty plays by Maxwell Anderson, Irwin Shaw, Christopher Fry, Arthur Laurents, William Inge, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Peter Shaffer, to take down all their sociological and psychological solemnities, and then to weave their boyisms coherently into a plot which itself would parody our upper-middlebrow "issue" melodrama. If we can further imagine the result—completed straightfaced with parody introduction and notes—so funny that people would still be laughing out loud at it in the year 2210, we'll be in a position to appreciate Fielding's frenzied enterprise and its continuing force as criticism.

In his latest book⁵ Professor Bate reminds us of the conditions governing Fielding's use of his genius this way. The burden of the past he speaks of is the intimidating proximity to the 18th century of Shakespeare and Milton, who had all too recently shown how little more was to be done in tragedy and epic, whatever opportunities remained in Fielding's kind of mock-tragedy and Pope's kind of mock-epic. Which is to say that the greater genres appeared, if not hopelessly perfected, at least efficiently pre-empted. Thus a writer valuing novelty and energy naturally went to veins that had not been worked out—ode, satire, poetic epistle, and, pre-eminently, Georgic.

"THE ROMAN POEM that ran deepest in the bloodstream of Pope's age," says Maynard Mack, "was Virgil's *Georgics*." In his sensible, well-planned, unpretentious book John Chalker

shows why.⁶ Celebrating the painfully earned Augustan settlement while at the same time alert to its precariousness, the *Georgics* recommended itself to a generation equally aware of "the fragility of political order." Structurally as well as thematically the poem recommended itself, providing a sanction for the empirical 18th-century instinct for not organising a piece of writing very tightly, for going on or stopping pretty much as one felt like it. It recommended itself stylistically as well, offering an example of that half-serious, half-whimsical collocation of opposed styles—heroic, mock-heroic, sentimental—which the 18th-century ironists delighted in. The *Georgics* thus enabled the writer overwhelmed by the pressure of Miltonic idiom—and it was impossible either to forget it or to pretend that one hadn't heard it—to put it to use domestically, to enlist it in local description instead of heroic narration and to exploit it for a whole spectrum of effects ranging from Square to Camp. There is something in the very disjunction between matter and manner in Virgil that attracts an audience brought up to listen to styles and to relish above all effects of slight ironic stylistic surprise. As Addison says of Virgil, "He delivers the meanest of his precepts with a kind of grandeur; he breaks the clods and tosses the dung about with an air of gracefulness." No wonder everyone was using "verse Miltonian" to provide what the age demanded, tricky-tricksy versions of "lofty Maro."

Mr. Chalker measures the degree and kind of Virgilian presence in a number of poems, from John Philips' *Cider* and John Dyer's *The Fleece* to Pope's *Windsor Forest* and Thomson's *Seasons*, and he deals also with the complications of the mock-Georgic, as in Gay's *Trivia* and Swift's *A Description of a City Shower*. Visible in all, he finds, is a "fondness for the exploration of multiple viewpoints," and he relates this fondness to the 18th-century instinct for effects of fructose antithesis and counterpoise. What this body of pseudo-Georgic poetry does, we finally see, is to enact and celebrate the new counterpoise of forces established in 1689. That is, the harmony of oppositions which is the poems' subject becomes a way of suggesting that constitutional monarchy is as divinely sanctioned—the local word would be "natural"—as the old kind. Pope hints as much in *Windsor Forest*:

Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,
Here earth and water seem to strive again,
Not Chaos-like together crushed and bruised,
But as the world, harmoniously confused.

AS A POEM about the harmony of oppositions, Thomson's *Seasons* is undeniably in-

⁵ *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. By W. JACKSON BATE. Harvard University Press, \$5.95; shortly to be published by Oxford University Press at 56s.

⁶ *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form*. By JOHN CHALKER. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 35s.

teresting intellectually, but I can't agree with Mr. Ralph Cohen that it is admirable artistically. Mr. Cohen has always been saddened by his more ironic colleagues' inability to work up much excitement over it. In *The Art of Discrimination* (1964) he devoted 529 pages to analysing hundreds of critics' reactions to *The Seasons*, trying to understand what they were doing when they blamed or praised it. Now he comes forth with 331 more pages designed to make us share his own high regard for the poem. In *The Unfolding of "The Seasons"*⁷ Mr. Cohen implies by his earnest paraphrases and analyses that we haven't understood the poem, and he assumes that we will value it if only we know enough about its motives and contexts. He concludes:

In this study I have sought to provide an interpretation and evaluation of *The Seasons*, urging its reconsideration as a major Augustan poem. I have argued that Thomson's unity, diction, and thought are entwined with a conception of man, nature, and God poetically tenable and distinctive.

Poetically tenable and distinctive, yes; but not good enough. What Mr. Cohen seems deaf to is the appalling effect of Thomson's language, his insufficiently ironic use of the idiom last heard in Milton's depiction of moral heroism to chronicle the small beer of weather, flora and fauna, and similar perfectly observable commonplaces. Mr. Cohen hears nothing wrong in an idiom like this:

*Nor only through the lenient air this change,
Delicious, breathes; the penetrative sun,
His force deep-darting to the dark retreat
Of vegetation, sets the steaming power
At large, to wander o'er the vernant [sic] earth,
In various hues; but chiefly thee, gay Green!
Thou smiling nature's universal robel!*

All this needs for criticism is Doodle's speech at the beginning of *The Tragedy of Tragedies*:

*Sure, such a day as this was never seen!
The sun himself, on this auspicious day,
Shines like a beau in a new Birth-day suit:
This down the seams embroidered, that the
beams.
All nature wears one universal grin.*

"The language of [*The Seasons*]," Mr. Cohen says, "is unmistakably directed toward expressing Thomson's thought and feeling." I couldn't agree more. I sympathise with Mr. Cohen's sincerity and respect his learning, but I deplore his ear.⁸ Nothing he says persuades me that I

⁷ *The Unfolding of "The Seasons."* By RALPH COHEN. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 60s.

⁸ It is astonishing, by the way, how insensitive to idiom people can be and still have the temerity to involve themselves seriously with literature. For

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should stop regarding *The Seasons* and its erstwhile popularity as sad, or perhaps comic, moments in the history of taste.

IF THE PRACTITIONERS of the new irony have found little to excite them in Thomson, they have rediscovered in Pope the major moral poet his contemporaries knew him to be. In *The Garden and the City*⁹ Maynard Mack shows in Pope the workings of "the mythopoeic imagination, a faculty that when I was a young man growing up Pope and his fellow artists of the 18th century were not usually allowed to have." Mr. Mack demonstrates how Pope, by means of his Twickenham villa, garden, and grotto, constructed "an enabling myth for himself and his work," how he developed and inhabited there what is almost a dream environment within which a moral art of permanent relevance could appropriately take place. The "statement" Pope was making by electing to live in a certain place in a certain way—it is like the statement Yeats made by living in his tower—is this: "Here beside the Thames is an Egerian grot that is still unspoiled; its springs are pure, its gems and metals are innocent, its Muse is in residence, its grove is not for sale." To Pope's actual grotto

Actual great men came..., actual impassioned conversations about the commonweal were evidently held there; but all that happened there was apparently translated by the poetic imagination... out of history into dream.

From this dream domain of garden and sacred spring Pope propelled to London, the city in the grip of Walpole, his diagnoses of its sickness. The ironies are superb: it was really Pope, the dwarf hunchback with the terrible head-

example, Donald "Ebor," chairman of the committee responsible for the *New English Bible* (a literary project if there ever was one), while telling us in his Preface that the new translation speaks "a contemporary idiom," indicates that he himself cannot be trusted to know what that idiom is supposed to sound like. He writes: "Apprehending, however, that sound scholarship does not necessarily carry with it a delicate sense of English style, the Committee appointed a... panel of trusted literary advisers." They weren't literary enough. For *apprehending* read *knowing*.

Again: "Discussion went on until [the translators] reached a common mind." Read *agreed*. "The resultant draft was now remitted to the panel of literary advisers." *Resulting; sent*.

⁹*The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743*. By MAYNARD MACK. University of Toronto Press, \$10.00; Oxford University Press, 84s.

aches, who was the sick one; Walpole was in robust health, and so was trade. What was ailing was "virtue," as defined by ancient and Renaissance literature and—to be sure—by a landed class horrified by the new credit economy and the inevitable cynicisms of the new party system. Pope's satiric delineation of Timon's villa in the *Epistle to Burlington* (1731) marks the opening of his hostilities with the Walpole world. At first he conducted the war with the most delicate innuendo: as Mr. Mack perceives, "Pope...made yet shrewder thrusts at king and minister than has been supposed." But finally, in the late Horatian satires and the fourth book of the *Dunciad*, he removed the gloves entirely. Anybody can oppose Walpole, but it takes a Pope to exploit myths of garden and "useful" architecture as a means of elevating politics to ethics, and ethics, finally, to art.

Mr. Mack's is a beautiful book. It is conceived beautifully and written beautifully. The typography is distinguished, and the 55 plates, accompanied by full notes on provenance and meaning, are brilliantly selected, sited, and reproduced. The book is a memorable contribution to the history of art as well as to the history of poetry.

People become like what they study. Mr. Mack no less than Pope has learned to interfuse the moral and the artistic without abandoning a very Popian ironic sense of the ridiculous:

All this is comical enough now, as the politics of a past age is always comical if it escapes being tragic. Pope and his Muse in the role of Egeria, well-head of inspiration to a ["counter-cultural"] political movement that was no more disinterested than such movements always are, presents a hilarious picture of naïveté all around.

And yet—

Yet the conviction that the pursuits of every day should be shot through with the idealism and detachment of poetry, the arts of government lit by the imagination, intuition, and the grace of heaven which we represent in the poet's Muse: there is nothing absurd in that. If we have come to think so, it is because we have lost the confidence that widely disparate areas of experience and instruments of knowing may interpenetrate to their mutual advantage.

But they are not interpenetrating today any more than they were in Pope's time. Politics is graceless, art powerless.

What Mr. Mack finally does is to make the local confrontation between Pope and Walpole ("mighty opposites") symbolic of the universal modern confrontation between art and show-business, idealism and accommodation, contemplation and activity, eloquence and Newspeak. Pope and Thoreau, he perceives, are brothers under the skin. It is a brilliant, moving, and important demonstration.

Uses of Literacy

By Martin Dodsworth

ROBBE-GRILLET, Duchamp, Beckett, Godard, Cage...one has no doubt, scanning the pages of Susan Sontag's new book,¹ that one has entered the world of American high culture, committed to a passionate, angst-ridden love-affair with the most distinguished minds in Europe. Miss Sontag is formidably well-informed and up-to-date; no one can expound better the break-up of forms within modernist art and the necessity for it. Yet to do so, she has to use the traditional form of the essay.

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Perhaps this paradox does not seem very startling; in the context of Miss Sontag's thought it is. The art-forms that she admires are "radical" in their attempts to embody some spiritually pure concept, to shake free of the various impurities of language and meaning, or of the historically-conditioned nature of thought. But her expositions of all this naturally belong to the world of conditioned thought; they tend, merely by expounding, to reintroduce the elements of impurity which her admired artists seek to purge. The form of the essay itself obliges her to this, and her choice of the form is a significant reminder of the fact that she won't or can't go all the way with the artists she admires:

What is voiced by the Futurists, some of the Dada artists, and Burroughs as a harsh despair

¹ *Styles of Radical Will*. By SUSAN SONTAG. Secker & Warburg, 50s.