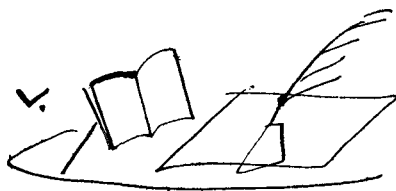


sionally made familiar through brass beds, worn Bibles, mockingbird whistles, and patchwork quilts.

Although nostalgia far outweighs literary merit, a few selections are extremely engaging. Lynn Rosmer's "The Furnished Room," a stylistically and emotionally provocative story about the decadent relationship between a vain, insensitive landlady and a fanatically religious and impotent boarder, suggests that within the book's covers there may be some one writer like neighboring Georgia's dearly missed Flannery O'Connor in the making. But not, I suspect, more than one.

Christopher R. Reaske, who teaches English at the University of Michigan, is co-editor of the recently published "Student Voices/One."



VICTORIAN NOVELISTS AND THEIR ILLUSTRATORS

by J. R. Harvey

New York, 240 pp., \$13.50

THE GERM:

A Pre-Raphaelite Little Magazine

edited by Robert Stahr Hosmon

Miami, 278 pp., \$7.95

Reviewed by Robert Halsband

■ *Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators* seems too expansive a title for a book that deals almost entirely with Dickens and Thackeray from the 1830s to the 1850s. After all, the good Queen who gave her name to that era ruled more than sixty years, and such novelists as the Brontës, George Eliot, Trollope, and Meredith are hardly negligible. Yet there is some justification, for Dickens and Thackeray are the most important novelists of the time who regarded their work as an intimate collaboration with their illustrators. In fact, Thackeray, who had been trained as an artist, collaborated with himself by illustrating most of his own novels. The materials J. R. Harvey has gathered, including almost eighty drawings, are rich and fascinating, and his commentary is intelligent and lucid. He could have made more of it all if only he had organized and welded it into more shapely form.

The rise and success of illustrated

fiction came about through the peculiar system of publishing during those decades when novels were issued "in parts," generally once a month. Each installment of a novel was enhanced by pictures, which shop-owners could then display in their windows as advertising for the new number. Previously there had been great artists—Hogarth, Rowlandson, Gillray—whose engravings by themselves tell richly elaborate stories, but the integration of the visual and the verbal was achieved in the years when the novels of Dickens and Thackeray appeared. There is ample proof in Dickens's letters of how he instructed his illustrators and even, though less frequently, of how he accepted suggestions from them. The benefit was mutual.

The artist treated in greatest detail here is H. K. Browne ("Phiz"), who illustrated ten of Dickens's fifteen novels as they appeared. "The points for illustration, and the enormous care required, make me excessively anxious," Dickens writes to him; and, on his side, Browne was also frequently anxious. As an artist, he is generally disparaged, particularly when compared with George Cruikshank, but he deserves a higher reputation when judged by his brilliant early work. Instead of asking us to take this assertion on faith Mr. Harvey proves it by a detailed analysis. Like Cruikshank, Browne made a contribution to Dickens's novels that is difficult to disentangle from the works it delineated.

This kind of book illustration, like other styles, went out of fashion in the 1850s. The new illustrators were men formally trained in draftsmanship and painting. Among them were members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group of artists who worked on books but whose activities and aspirations needed more scope than that.

The P.R.B., as they called themselves, were a *pléiade* of high-minded young spirits who believed that painting should return to the naturalness, purity, and simplicity that had prevailed before Raphael, and that poetry should strive for these same qualities. To set forth their doctrine and to exemplify it by their works, they published (in 1850) a "little magazine" called *The Germ* (in the hope that it would germinate). After they lost money on the first two issues the printer took it over, changed its title to *Art and Poetry* (less provocative but more descriptive), and lost money on the next two numbers; whereupon it ceased. Each issue contained an etching (unrelated to any text), poetry, essays, and a long book review. The three Rossettis—Christina, Dante Gabriel, and William Michael—contributed about half the contents, of which

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the best-known piece is the early version of Dante Gabriel's "The Blessed Damozel."

How viable is the magazine 120 years later? Of historical interest, of course, but hardly more. The P.R.B.'s attempt to fuse painting and poetry did not succeed: its painting is too poetic and its poetry too painterly, and both are too sentimental for our taste today. For whatever reason, it failed to satisfy the taste of its own day, since it could not find even a small sustaining readership. The poems contributed by the Rossettis need no defence, but what can a modern reader think of this stanza (by Thomas Woolner) from the first poem in the first issue of the magazine?

This is why I thought weeds were beautiful;—

Because one day I saw my lady pull
Some weeds up near a little
brook,
Which home most carefully she
took,
Then shut them in a book.

Perhaps the magazine failed because most of the Brotherhood were painters, and handled pens more clumsily than brushes.

Although *The Germ* has been reprinted before, it is not easily come by; hence this edition will be useful. Robert Stahr Hosmon's brief introduction is less felicitous than the preface to the 1898 reprint (by James Ashcroft Noble), which Mr. Hosmon generously adds in an appendix.

Robert Halsband, who has collected English art, including the pre-Raphaelites, has also lectured on English literature.

Sophisticated Professors

Continued from page 26

'counter-culture' with the industrialization of the art" of rock) and on the columnist Ralph J. Gleason. These are people (and there are many more) who *do* find some connection between the frenzy at Altamont and the murder of young Meredith Hunter. If Mr. Poirier utterly denies this, his involved and indirect way of writing by way of taking down other people does not establish any definite convictions of his own.

One murder is too many, but should a murder be used as a focus by which the accidental violence occurring in the same vicinity becomes evidence of some larger social, cultural, or political decadence? Perhaps. But I would suppose that the good citizens of Dallas or Memphis or Los Angeles, for example, might well give some thought to this question whenever they feel urged, because of a murder at a rock festival, to condemn the rock scene or the Rolling Stones, who are among the radical heroes of it, or the young.

We all know of the murders that have occurred in Dallas, Memphis, Los Angeles, but is this complicated way of saying to the "good citizens" there, "You're another!" an answer to the disaster at Altamont? And what does it mean to say that "'Let It Bleed' is a wholly unembarrassed illustration of the outmoded esthetics which governed the participants, spectators, and reporters"?

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Wild Prayer

Continued from page 33

of a supernatural eternal to a world "unsponsored," as Wallace Stevens says in "Sunday Morning," by any sort of anthropomorphic divinity. For us, eternity is now, and we long to discover a dimension of the sacred in the quotidian. "The inchoate yearning that seems to have captured many of the most sensitive people of our age, if given a theological formulation, might be said to be a yearning to behold the world as once again a truly sacramental economy." Throughout the book this theme engages us in the best sense that a refrain does, increasing in meaningfulness and authority with repetition. A sacramental view of reality holds that the world is responsive, reciprocal; that it possesses what Hopkins called "inscape"; that it is a radiant presence; that it is not dead, but is numinous, a threshold constantly beckoning us toward participation in the wonder and mystery of its own being.

Scott's range of reference is wide, but his two major texts are Martin Heidegger, "the last great genius of philosophy in our period," and Roethke. Heidegger's inquiries into the subject of Being, argues Scott, point the direction that sacramentalism in our time must take. For Heidegger, Being is not a thing, nor is it a nugatory Nothing, but is "that which gives every being the warrant to be." Being is the radical mystery of a vastness that enables all things to be themselves. Being is the presence of all things, but more, and Heidegger realizes that the universe is not to be attacked as though it were a thing whose secrets were to be empirically known, but that we must surrender ourselves if we are to participate. We must acquiesce, must have the courage and good sense to be silent—not passive, but silent and receptive—if Being is to touch us and move us toward a profound joy.

There is much more here, of course, than my few words can hope to surround. In a sense, in fact, Heidegger realized this about the entire body of his own work, and declared that philosophy must finally give way to poetry for the expression of ultimate realities. Roethke, who early knew that he lacked a "dancing-master," came to conceive of the world in sacramental terms, hailed it and was hailed by it, heard the inner songs of snail, continent, and self, and in his poems kept coming constantly near to a Being at ease with itself.

William Heyen is the editor of the recently published book "A Profile of Theodore Roethke."

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Playing Safe

THE AURA of success that surrounds *Plaza Suite* is almost overwhelming. Neil Simon, monetarily the world's most successful playwright, has done his own adaptation of his endlessly running triparted play. The direction is by Arthur Hiller, who piloted that worldwide phenomenon known as *Love Story*. Paramount, which released that picture, is also releasing this one. The film's major star—playing all three male roles—is the ascendant Walter Matthau, and he is buttressed by three of the most interesting American actresses of the moment, Maureen Stapleton, Barbara Harris, and Lee Grant. Could anything go wrong? Nothing has, and *Plaza Suite* turns out to be a professional, capable, audience-pleasing job of studio film-making.

It is even slightly more and better than that, and this is largely due to the work of the actors, which also means that Mr. Hiller has done his work well. Maureen Stapleton as Karen Nash, a woman facing her twenty-fourth anni-

versary (or is it her twenty-third?) and her forty-eighth year (or is it her forty-ninth?—she's not quite sure) is predictably pathetic, covering up pain with flippancy as she leaves Suite 709 at the Plaza, where she'd hoped to revive her husband's youthful ardor. Barbara Harris has a brief, silly fling with a former boyfriend, now a Hollywood producer, in the same suite. And Lee Grant is funny and touching as a mother trying to get her daughter out of the suite's bathroom, where the girl has locked herself, unwilling to perform in the \$7,000 marriage ceremony rigged up by her father. What could have seemed entirely mechanical and contrived is saved by these comical, but human, performances.

Thus, *Plaza Suite* is a cut above the ordinary, just as Neil Simon's writing somehow manages to rise somewhat above the typical Broadway craft level. All his people are types, true enough, but they have an element of recognition, and the laughter evoked has a rueful note. One suspects that hiding somewhere in Mr. Simon is a satirist,

but he's too gentle to let the fellow out, and, besides, he's expected to make hits. I don't want to sound hard on Simon. What he does is rather admirable. He amuses in a way that makes you unashamed to laugh. Neil Simon glitters with success. You don't quarrel with success; maybe that's why *Plaza Suite* seems limited and safe.

The limitations extend to the film's construction. The three-story, three-act play form is maintained. We are given a filmed play, but transitions are made without strain, and there is just enough widening out to make it *seem* like a movie. When Maureen Stapleton looks out a window, she sees a real Central Park. That wedding party waiting downstairs is shown to us. When Barbara Harris drives in from Tenafly, New Jersey, we get a remarkable helicopter zoom shot of her driving across the George Washington Bridge in her station wagon. But beyond that, there is little or no monkeying with the play. It worked before. It will continue to work on thousands of screens.

It's justifiable to say, then, that everyone involved gives us his expensive money's worth. Matthau is a fine actor with three good, safe, foolproof roles. He switches from one to the other with remarkable ease. Hiller removes what might have been a claustrophobic feeling from the one basic set by closing in on faces, by fluid tracking, by impeccable cutting. Hollywood has fashioned for that supposedly dwindling movie audience a hit. In a way, to know that it can still be done is heartening. For Hollywood, that is.

They know how to play it safe in France, too. Claude Lelouch, he of *A Man and a Woman*, *Live for Life*, and others, has moved from romance into the crime field with *The Crook*, and with Europe's premier star of the moment, Jean Louis Trintignant. The film is clever, light, and amusing, and so safely calculated, morally speaking, that it would easily have gotten by the Production Code of the old days. The crook of the title (*Le Voyou*, in France) isn't a bad guy, really. He's hard, dedicated to his work, but not inclined to hurt anyone unduly. Even when he arranges the kidnaping of a child, it's done so gently that the boy thinks he's been with pleasant adults all along.

The gimmick is to kidnap the son of a bank clerk in so sensational a way that the bank will pay a million-dollar ransom, in the interest of public relations. Lelouch, who co-wrote the script, tells the story in an intriguing, convoluted manner, and allows Trintignant to think of every detail in advance, except, of course, that last one that trips him up. For those who go to the movies to see a movie, well, here's a movie. Do I spot a trend?

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