

candidates were defeated. This marks what is probably the high point of his entire book, for right-wing candidates have often been needlessly abrasive when confronting the voters and the author has performed a public service by reminding us of the need for more smoothness and polish on the part of conservative and libertarian candidates for public office. Yet, if we follow the advice proffered in this book too far we run the risk of eliminating any reason for the existence of a separate right-wing in American politics; for the features that Schiller regards as essential to conservatism, while they may seem controversial to intellectuals, are about as controversial to the masses as motherhood and are perfectly acceptable to most moderate liberals.

It would have been better if the author had separated the libertarian from the traditional conservative wing of right-wing thought instead of telescoping the two viewpoints together. Although, in the United States, the two are frequently and somewhat incongruously combined, some of the generalizations he makes apply much more to one wing than another. The most controversial issues separating the Right as a whole from the Left today probably pertain to the topics of social welfarism and American foreign policy. In addition, libertarians also diverge most strongly from the Left in their emphasis on *laissez faire* economics while traditional conservatives seem to arouse the most controversy when they advocate the inculcation of an aristocratic sense of selective excellence in the conduct of political, cultural, and educational activities. On certain issues, like *laissez faire* economics and the conduct of foreign policy, Schiller would downplay the differences. Concerning welfarism, he tells us that conservatives should stand "four-square against the *abuses* of the welfare state and four-square in favor of its *legitimate* practices." This is so vague as to be acceptable even to radicals. As for the aristocratic ethic, Schiller scarcely exhibits any awareness of its existence. The most salient differences between the Right and the other wings of American political thought are either soft-pedalled or ignored altogether. In the practical world of politics, it is often necessary to compromise

between principle and expediency in order to win. It seems to this reviewer that, if Schiller's proposals were to be adopted, expediency would prevail so strongly as to put into question the reasons for the existence of conservatism itself.

Reviewed by NORMAN R. PHILLIPS

¹See my new book, *The Quest for Excellence* (New York: Philosophical Library), chapters one, two, and six for the metaphysical foundations needed to explain the linkages between conservative traits and for the development of a conservative standard of values.

²See, for example, Philip C. Chapman, "The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism versus Political Philosophy," *Political Science Quarterly* 76 (March, 1960), 17-34, for a discussion of several such attempts.

Aesthetic Hooliganism

The Arts Betrayed, by John Smith, *New York: Universe Books, 1978. 256 pp.*

IN THE EARLY 1970's Duncan Williams published a lively if alarming little book, *Trousered Apes*, which J. M. Lalley reviewed at length in these pages. Williams argued that the *Zeitgeist* can reflect the literature of the time (it is usually thought to be the other way around), and that, as Mr. Lalley puts it, "our society, or certain elements of it, is now engaged in actualizing the neurotic fantasies of novelists and dramatists in a psychological climate that the deicidal clerics and relativistic moralists have done much to create." Williams exhibited many loathsome examples from contemporary literature of human bestiality and degradation, predictably excoriated romanticism as the source of this pestilence, but offered little consolation save that we can at least try to understand our cultural crisis and immunize ourselves from the hideous themes of modern art.

John Smith's new book traces more subtly the decline of all the major arts from the decadent-romantic geniuses of the 1890's

(Rilke, Rodin, Mahler) to the present absurdist, nihilist, or self-mocking enterprises of Beckett, Duchamp, Cage. "It also attempts," he says, "to throw into relief the increasing dilemma of the artist in a time of social, economic, religious, moral and artistic uncertainty." Despite its pugnacious title, the book is not a vigorous polemic like Williams's. The discreet Smith seldom asserts his underlying premise, preferring that we merely sense it in his fine critical analyses themselves. But his viewpoint is very like Williams's. Of Beckett he observes that his "work exhibits remarkably well the progress that so much art and literature has taken since the eighteenth century—which might be called a progress from public conscience to private neurosis." And Williams would surely applaud this, his single most explicit remark:

It is essential to realize that hooliganism is not confined to the physical aspects of society. . . . People are savaged by poems, paintings, films, novels, theories, symphonies as bloodily in their minds and sensibilities as by the knives of the marauders in the streets. When so-called "serious" artists betray "the muse" in this way then it is not surprising if that same "muse" turns and in revenge betrays mankind. . . . In the chaotic situation which prevails in Western civilization and which is mirrored in so much Western art in the second half of the twentieth century, [Plato] might well have considered it necessary to embrace in his ban artists of all callings.

But *The Arts Betrayed* is more substantial than *Trousered Apes*, which is already markedly dated. In the first place, Smith is a voluminous poet who has also furnished texts for musical scores and collects modern art; he thus speaks with sensitivity and precision on literature, painting, music, and sculpture. To be sure, a moderately-sized book undertaking to discuss some thirty artists can hardly avoid being cursory, and invites superficial treatment. The superficiality Smith altogether avoids (so far as I can determine), and he is unduly modest when, in his preface, he defers to the more specialized monographs on his

several subjects. For example, none of the many full-length studies of T. S. Eliot through which I have rummaged has been able to draw such valuable contrasts and comparisons between Eliot and artists in other fields as one can find in this book. Smith is a singularly adept *comparatist*, and the chapters comparing Yeats and Bartok; Stravinsky, Eliot, Picasso; Brecht and Hindemith seem to me particularly ingenious and illuminating.

An equally important difference from *Trousered Apes* is that Smith exposes more clearly the dilemma of late- and post-romantic artists who were attempting to escape the egregious religiosity, the second-hand grandiloquence, the florid sentimentality of much romanticism, and at the same time to fashion truly new but yet communicative styles. Where Williams quite properly stresses the damage inflicted on culture by nihilistic art, Smith studies rather the problems of the talented and original artist who has matured in a society already fragmented and drifting towards nihilism. The indignation of Williams is thus inevitably leavened with a certain amount of sympathy in Smith.

Although Smith denies it in his preface, he makes judgements all the time, and these are usually charitable but candid. Not every modern artist, he says, has betrayed the muse—at least not altogether or deliberately. Yeats and Bartok, Klee and Camus, Eliot and Stravinsky, Dylan Thomas, Patrick White have all contended against our intellectually dilapidated age, and they have produced works possessing integrity, faith, and hope. But others, Duchamp and Cage, Beckett and Giacometti, Schoenberg, have too often indulged a retreat into private neuroses or into highly abstract, speculative systems; in either case sundering art from real life. Smith is especially good on Pound, the only artist to whom he devotes an entire chapter (presumably because Pound really is incomparable). Like Schoenberg in music, Pound, he urges, was the first fully conscious, revolutionary *modern* in literature. Smith salutes his genius, his personal courage and generosity, but pillories the egotism, the incoherence and absurdity, worst of all the tedium, of *The Cantos*:

[I]f art is to speak to man, then Pound shares with Schoenberg the grave flaw of being . . . more inscrutable than God. This is one of the major crises in the development of art in our time. . . . Faced with the problem of which goddess to choose, Pound eschewed the blandishments of Venus. As far as we can follow him we are bound to pay homage, out of respect for his sheer learning . . . for his opening up of new territory. . . . But where, where, for pity's sake are the songs?

Minor quibbles might be raised. Smith ignores entirely figures like Peter Weiss or John Osborne, who occupy, however ignobly, so much space in *Trousered Apes*. No doubt he considered them second-raters and wished to spend his time on men of acknowledged, if sometimes perverted, genius. But it can be argued that the Osbornes and Weisses, caressed and puffed by the intelligentsia, have contributed as much to artistic hooliganism as a Cage or a Giacometti. Then, too, Lalley's chief criticism of Williams may be extended to Smith: he fails to consider the effects of mass education on the general taste. Much that is attributed to romanticism is the product, I increasingly suspect, of universal semi-literacy. Of course many readers will disagree on matters of interpretation. For instance, Smith finds in the sculptures of Henry Moore an invigorating belief-system and a revival of myth and ritual; but others may see only a degrading, or at best merely ingenious but arid primitivism. In an unusual lapse of ear, Smith implies that *mere* in Yeats's "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" means "nothing more than," the line thus proving that for Yeats "chaos was *trivial* [Smith's italics]." But surely the adjective in

context means "nothing *less* than," as in C.S. Lewis's title *Mere Christianity*. Of course, like Lewis, Yeats may have intended a sly pun, but the more somber resonance is surely dominant. Page numbers are omitted from the endnotes, but since the notes provide all other bibliographical information, this is a specious economy. I noticed only one typographical error, p. 209, line four. On the whole the book is well argued, briskly written, and attractively produced with useful illustrations.

Trousered Apes and *The Arts Betrayed* are complementary, the one stressing the corrosiveness of nihilistic art on society, the other studying the dilemma of the artist himself in a deracinated age. Smith is a more fastidious critic writing a more ambitious book, and he is notably more cheerful. Williams, on the other hand, is no mean pugilist, and there is much to be said for a bit of *saeva indignatio* on this subject. In fact, Smith and Williams are catering for rather different audiences, and there is much to be said for that, too. In neither case, I suspect, will their fine books bring them the accolades accorded a Roland Barthes or a George Lukács. They are both genuinely humanists, and at a time when our fashionable critics are becoming as esoteric and "self-consuming" (to drop into their jargon) as the art that intrigues them, this humanism is highly to be valued. We can do little, as individuals, to curb the excesses of aesthetic hooliganism, but in future we can choose the artists we patronize more carefully. We can also take a moment to thank critics like Duncan Williams and John Smith.

Reviewed by R. D. STOCK

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