
*Arts & Letters***REVISIONS: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy**

edited by Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas
 Notre Dame, 1983
 320 pp. \$19.50 cloth,
 \$9.95 paper

All 13 contributors to this excellent collection address the philosophical gap introduced by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century: "the *unbridgeable* separation," as Stuart Hampshire describes it, "between moral judgements and factual judgements." Believing that the Kantian "separation" has turned moral reasoning into a subjectivist muddle, Hampshire, Iris Murdoch, Peter Berger, Simone Weil, and others variously attempt to restore those arguments that undergirded earlier moral traditions (such as those of classical antiquity and medieval Christendom). Many arguments are frankly theological: Murdoch, for example, defining God as a "single perfect transcendent nonrepresentational and necessarily real object of attention," proceeds to attack those delusional forms of ethics (e.g., existentialism) that rely on the self as the determining judge. All such ethics, she argues, result in a "tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one." Though many of these essays have long been in print, they still provide a tonic in a field dominated by dry analytical arguments.

LITERARY THEORY: An Introduction

by Terry Eagleton
 Minnesota, 1983
 244 pp. \$29.50 cloth,
 \$9.95 paper

Literary studies in America have recently fallen in thrall to a host of esoteric European critical theories. Bearing such names as semiotics, structuralism, and deconstruction, these approaches have progressively stripped literary works of their connections with history, society, and even with the authors themselves. How did the study of literature come to this? Eagleton, an Oxford professor of English, traces its development from the 19th-century British workingmen's colleges, where English (the "poor man's Classics") was considered to be an ideal form of moral uplift. But Matthew Arnold's notion of the "civilizing" role of literature gave way during the 1940s and '50s to the New Criticism. Deeming the author's intentions irrelevant, American New Critics (e.g., Cleanth Brooks, Robert

Penn Warren) considered literary works in terms of their "tensions," "paradoxes," and overarching "unity." Thus, the ground was laid for the most recent theories, which try to make the criticism into a kind of neutral, "scientific" analysis. A good explainer, Eagleton points out connections between European literary theories and other intellectual currents and disciplines (e.g., existentialism, linguistics). Structuralism and semiotics, for example, borrow techniques from formal linguistics and treat a poem or story as a system of signs in which "meaning exists only contextually, governed by sets of similarities and oppositions." Eagleton, a Marxist, faults formalistic approaches for dismissing questions of readers' and authors' beliefs and of ideology. One can agree with his conclusion that literary criticism should be seen as a value-laden activity. But only Eagleton's fellow Marxists will agree with him that all real critical values are tied to class conflict.

**MONTAIGNE'S
TRAVEL JOURNAL**
by Michel de Montaigne
translated by Donald Frame
North Point, 1983
208 pp. \$10.50

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) may not have invented the essay, but his short prose pieces have become models of the form. Shortly after publishing the first two books of his *Essais* in 1580, Montaigne set off from Bordeaux on a journey to Rome, a city he already knew from Seneca, Juvenal, and other Roman authors. The journey took 17 months; as he reminded his impatient travel companions, "he was not going anywhere except where he happened to be." Travel, like the essay form, was a prod to his powers of observation and self-examination. In his journals, among notes on food and lodging, are comments on theology, Jewish ceremonies, local sights and manners, and, always, the effects of baths and waters on his kidney stones, whose painful presence often led to more general reflections upon suffering, illness, and death. Little of Montaigne's skepticism emerges directly in his accounts of his meeting with Pope Gregory XIII or other churchmen. But everywhere his comments recall the religious and political turmoil of the 16th century. (His copy of his *Essais* was seized in