

the world of Chinese fiction. He has a sympathetic understanding for the prevailing social and psychological situation and an unusual perceptiveness of the problems of literary creativity. With great skill general trends in literature and the fate of individual writers have been interwoven into an integrated whole and thus he has written a book which reads like a great and moving tragedy of Greek dimensions.

Reviewed by HELLMUT WILHELM

Aspects of a Novelist's Art

E. M. Forster: *The Perils of Humanism*, by Frederick C. Crews. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962. 187 pp. \$4.00.

PERHAPS A FULL LENGTH study of a novelist is most valuable when he has been for some time well-received, for we may have come to regard him as so familiar a part of our surroundings as to overlook a good deal about his true nature. This new book on Forster does make us look again, with real attention, at the known object. Frederick C. Crews, in his discussions of the novels and in his examination of the formative influ-

ences on Forster's intellectual life, turns up a good deal that should make all of us think again about our interpretations of his novels, as well as about some of the current and past opinions of his stature.

As might be expected from the title, the author has a thesis and, though he never rides it, we should perhaps get it out into the open at the very beginning. "We shall" he says in his Introduction, "repeatedly be faced with the inference that Forster's artistic growth runs parallel to his progressive embracing of the ironies and disappointments inherent in humanism." The design of the book follows logically from this: the first three chapters are devoted to a careful consideration of Forster's intellectual *milieu* and to defining as closely as possible what forces—philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic—shaped his development as thinker and artist. There follows a chapter devoted to *The Longest Journey* (which Crews sees as mirroring the philosophical positions Forster himself took as he matured), another on "the Italian novels," *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room With a View* (which are seen as essentially social comedy), and a chapter on the connections between these and the forms developed by Austen, Meredith and Butler. From this carefully structured first half of the book until the end there are chapters on Forster's ideas and the problems which concern him interspersed with separate chapters on *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*.

Such an apparatus, while it may have its dangers, is effective in that it allows Crews to look both ways: he can buttress some of the points in his close reading of the novels themselves with evidence of other kinds—Forster's own statements in such diverse works as *Aspects of the Novel*, *Pharos and Pharillon*, *The Hill of Devi*, and the short stories, or from Forster's connections with the cultural history of an era. And he can

come by a logical road to his final conclusion, which is that Forster's fiction is flawed in various ways but that there is a steady progression in excellence until, in *A Passage to India* ". . . Forster turns over his art, for the first and apparently the last time, to a single controlling vision, which, though it eclipses his humanism, finally produces a novel with something of the power and wholeness of a myth itself. Such an art, in Nietzsche's words, 'may transform these horrible reflections on the terror and absurdity of existence into representations with which man may live.'"

The dangers of this kind of approach may be apparent already. Too frequently the real spirit of Forster's novels seems to escape, evanescent, through the heavy critical machinery, and at times what is moving and human comes out dehydrated. Is it true to the spirit of the book, for instance, to say that "In *Howards End* the entire plot seems to be an intellectual contrivance for the illustration of a theme"? As we come to know people like Fielding and Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*, should our response to them be a realization that "these characters are victims of Forster's intensified doubts about the usefulness of that undignified organ, the human mind"? For the purposes of Crews' sustained argument, and in his contexts, such statements are meaningful: he is trying to get behind the surface of the novels in order to reveal Forster's progressive mental attitudes, and usually he does so accurately. But they may account for a persistent image that comes to *my* mind after finishing the book—that of butterflies moving serenely about bulldozers. This is perhaps only to say that the world of fiction and the world of Crews' criticism are different, but it may point out as well that the best criticism tends to reveal to us the excellences of the particular object, to explore effect and the means used to achieve

effect, to get at the "peculiar qualities" of the made thing itself.

It would be unfair to imply, however, either that Crews is an insensitive reader or that his accomplishment in this book is small. What emerges is that this is an important study of E. M. Forster, one that throws a special kind of light on the man and the man's work.

Reviewed by PERRIN H. LOWREY

The Transformation of Semantics

The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology, by Kenneth Burke. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961. 316 pp. \$6.95.

SEMANTICISTS HAVE for the most part been hard on religion and theology. It is not only the popularizers of semantics who have played the game of reading "blah" for all general or abstract religious terms, on the grounds that they have no concrete referents and are therefore meaningless. The result is, of course, that what the semanticists have to say is often irrelevant to anyone interested in religion.

Now Kenneth Burke has performed a brilliant transformation of the semantic enterprise. What will we find if, instead of asking, "Do words like *God* and *Trinity* and *sin* and *grace* have any positive reference?" we ask ourselves, "What can be said about religious language whether it