

that *London Transformed* is a gravely flawed or negligible book. For the most part, Byrd is a good critic and a good writer. His study is more intricate and more subtle than my observations might indicate; and his insights, buttressed by an expert knowledge of the eighteenth century, always require our close attention, even though in the end we may not always be fully persuaded by what he says. We must admit that Byrd, in exploring the rich legend of London, has nevertheless made a useful contribution to the study of urban literature in general.

Reviewed by JOHN H. JOHNSTON

The Constant Model

Journal of Rehearsals: A Memoir, by Wallace Fowlie, *Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1977. xi + 219 pp. \$12.75.*

FEW MEMOIRS by literary men become part of literature or are, beyond the time of their publication and the importance of their writer, of much use to later criticism and biography. Posterity determines the place of a man of letters not according to his memory of a life and work—which may be faulty, or partial, or even misunderstood—but on the basis of his *oeuvre* and the details of his life and times that he and others have been ready to provide. At the time of writing a memoir, a man may be preoccupied with relatively small matters—the clearing up of a forgotten quarrel, the “facts” of an early experience—and he may miss or ignore the larger questions. And of course his powers of composition may long since have been exhausted, and the memoir itself have “little to add.”

Professor Wallace Fowlie's *Journal of Rehearsals* is a candid and quietly experimental book. As autobiography, it is daringly selective; as memoir, conscious of a distinguished career, it is modest in its claims and un-

opinionated. As a journal of “rehearsals,” of rôles played and of the little and big moments of life prepared for, it has many virtues: an attentive mind; cultivated tastes; stylistic non-chalance and unobtrusive harmony. The reader is free to begin where he will—the chapters have old-fashioned headings and the index is copious—but everything adheres: people, places, the things of this world. To read of Fowlie's meetings with André Gide and St.-John Perse and Jean Cocteau, or to share his intimate memory of Henry Miller and T. S. Eliot, is to know a little more about distant men. To feel the difficult balance between the life of art, particularly French culture, and the pesky details of a Yankee scholar's lot—action and redaction, rendered without strain—is to understand better the modern literary experiment.

A key to the book's art and to Fowlie's nature are the “open rehearsals” between nature and art, where the doubts and certainties of a true believer are played out as if for the first time.

Throughout my life I have been mildly indifferent to nature. But after [Irving] Babbitt's lessons, I felt morally wrong to look at any part of nature. When walking along the street, I trained my eyes to watch the asphalt under me in order not to look at a tree! I avoided gardens and parks and never went into the country. My teacher had taught me, as Plato had of old, that even if I spoke to the mountains and the rivers and the flowers, they would not answer me. Only man could answer me. The city, protective of the works of man, was a more suitable setting than the countryside. So I became, temporarily at least, a kind of “humanist” whose principal discipline was the relegation of nature to a place of no importance.

This may be true, it may be lately methodized, but it is altogether integral. Many years later, in the country, the mature man thinks of Nice:

A walk through a city park is more of an adventure, more of a stimulation for me, than a walk in the countryside. The vagaries of mankind have to impinge upon nature for me to find it interesting or even attractive.

. . .

In Paris for the first time, at the age of nineteen, Fowlie remembers that

The parapets along the Seine and the gray buildings on either side represented some of the achievements of a city and what we call civilization. But for me on those warm afternoons they were not separate from the land of France, from the soil itself and the cultivation of the plains and the hillsides that lay just beyond Paris and extended in all directions. The men who had designed the buildings, those who had constructed them and those who now inhabited them, had all come into the city from the country and had brought with them a knowledge of the earth and the seasons, of labor and the symmetry of furrows. France itself was the common heritage, and it was everywhere. . . .

Late in the book, recalling the same time, he tells of a lunch at the home of Albert Mockel in Rueil, outside Paris.

Nature was constantly called upon to illustrate whatever abstractions were under discussion. Or it was used simply to provide interludes in the conversation. The Mockels' and Mme. Merrill's knowledge of the symbolist movement and French literary figures did not surprise me, but their familiarity with nature did. The ease with which they introduced comments on the cherry trees in the garden, and the ripening pears along the espalier wall where each pear was carefully encased in a paper bag, and the habits of a pair of swallows who had made a nest under one of the eaves, impressed me. The history of poetry and the art of gardening were so naturally fused that I began to believe this one of the signs of the very old culture I was observing for the first time. The entire scene involving the swallows, a beautiful black cat, a bowl of brilliant anemones, and forays with sentences from which those participating always emerged triumphant, was organically French. . . .

The act of writing has changed these memories into "what they really were for the writer and therefore into what they may signify for a possible reader," but they would signify little if the

writer hadn't made them "organically French"—doesn't this last "entire scene" approximate a *fauve* Matisse?—and if Fowlie hadn't found in his pastoral "the contrast between the idyll (man in nature) and the actual world."

Fowlie's portrait of Austin Warren in the '30's and '40's is the most complete in the *Journal*, and his meeting with Cocteau in 1960 the best detailed and sustained. Perhaps no two men would be considered less alike—and nearly three decades separate the beginning of a life-long friendship with Warren and the brief encounter with Cocteau—but the reader will discover in both accounts an essential candor and independence of mind without which notebook entries seem gossipy or at best anecdotal. Cocteau was—and Warren is—"one of a kind." It is Fowlie's special gift to reveal their uniqueness and so to animate their presence in his life that the reader feels at once both the harmony and tension of crossed cultural lines. If "teaching, at its best, is harmonization between the instructor and the instructed," *Journal of Rehearsals* offers very good teaching indeed.

The reader of Fowlie's books about French literature will not find much in the *Journal* concerning the actual labor that went into the production of seven monographs, twelve volumes of literary history, and thirteen of translation. The "rehearsals" are there, along with many happy *recherches*, but the sheer drudgery and political realities of an academic life are missing. I think that above all Fowlie did not want to write a book about writing books. At the same time, the *Journal* is not, for all its cross-chronological sense, an autobiography: too many chapters are unwritten, and a great number of minor details are developed out of proportion to what a reader would imagine to be life's big moments. To be sure, few lives are "eventful"; knowing the size and strength of Wallace Fowlie's literary labors, some readers may not be content with the book's sincere but over-attentive delicacy.

Fowlie says, "I have always resented my attraction to society and to worldliness in its various forms, and yet I am fascinated by them," and he cites Gide's *L'Immoraliste* as

central to the diagnosis of modern man's alienation from natural instincts. This is a persistent theme of the *Rehearsals*, perhaps more implied than stated. Although he acknowledges his debt to Gide's *Journal* (1939-49), "the most constant model of a man devoted to literature," Fowlie is so candid in the admission of "Yankee" limitations and so able a dramatist of the *mise en scène*—the selective prognosis of "motifs and effects" from childhood and young manhood is his deepest concern—that a comparison with Gide would seem forced and obtuse. Nonetheless, the book is a model of tact, and as prose has the rapid and innate rhythm of a *chef-d'oeuvre*. A minor reservation to such sanguine charm: the word "vast" is used too many times to be believed.

Reviewed by ROBERT KENT