of a large, activist federal government, and rejection of the permanent things. For their part, the neoconservatives enjoy an uncomfortable relationship with Kirk, acknowledging the immense significance of his achievement while privately (and sometimes, not so privately) dismissing him as a wise eccentric who enjoyed being happy at home in Mecosta, Michigan, while the *real* work of conservative reform (they claim) was being carried out by aggressive political activists working in Washington, D.C., and appearing on Sunday-morning television talk-shows.

And yet, as McDonald correctly asserts,

> If Kirk were still alive, he would entertain no illusions about conservative prospects for the short term. "Yet cheerfulness will keep breaking through," he always maintained. It was never his nature to succumb to despair, cynicism, or bitterness. When things appear at their worst, there is always reason for hope. While the fabric of social order seems today irreparably frayed, there are those (the "Remnant," as Kirk liked to call them) "doing their best to stitch together once more the fragments of that serviceable old suit we variously call 'Christian civilization' or 'Western civilization' or 'the North Atlantic community' or 'the free world.' Not by force of arms are civilizations held together, but by the subtle threads of moral and intellectual principle."

One might dispute one or two minor matters of phrasing in *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*. In addition, in the above-mentioned introduction to *Literature and the American College*, Kirk expressed a concern he shared with T. S. Eliot, who "severely criticized Babbitt" in his University of Virginia lectures during the 1930s; Kirk proceeds to explain how Babbitt refused to move beyond "tradition" to the religious sources of tradition. Perhaps McDonald could have explored this area—or perhaps it is the thesis of an article or another book. For on the whole W. Wesley McDonald has served well the legacy of Russell Kirk, producing a work that will serve, for years to come, as a major scholarly resource for those who seek to understand Kirk's philosophy and its implications.

An Emersonian Bloom

Patrick J. Walsh

The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer Through Frost, selected and with Commentary by Harold Bloom, *New York: HarperCollins, 2004. 972 pp.*

Harold Bloom is to be congratulated for his courage in speaking up for literary standards in an age of intellectual decline. It is difficult to fault a man who called the *New York Times Book Review* "not very literate" and summed up Stephen King as an "immensely inadequate writer on a sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, book by book basis." In 2003, the noted Professor of Literature at Yale chided the National Book Foundation for "recognizing nothing but the commercial value" of books. To his credit, Bloom has also spoken out regarding the "menace" to reading, "from grade school through graduate school throughout the English speaking world." The menace is "a reading governed by ideological and social considerations."

Professor Bloom has been waging a heroic battle against levelers in academia, but he does this from an untenable position. As an unabashed gnostic, Bloom believes that his secular gnostic opinion is a kind of nonconformist view within academia. But in this he is mistaken. For

Patrick J. Walsh *writes from Quincy, Massachusetts.*

gnosticism, in varying degrees, is the underlying current behind the ideological confusions and presumptions of modernist theories—scientific, political, literary, all of which have lowered intelligent standards.

Bloom's preëminent hero is Ralph Waldo Emerson, the founder and still reigning patriarch of American gnosticism. Both Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville rejected the self-willed abstractions of Emerson's philosophy. Hawthorne saw Emerson as an "everlasting rejecter of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what." In his *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846), Hawthorne ridicules Emerson's followers as "bores of very intense water." This collection of stories confirms Hawthorne's more sensible attitude toward existence and one that recognizes the existence of evil. Melville suspected that Emerson suffered from a "defect about the heart." Another contemporary Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was also wary of transcendentalism. True poets abhor abstractions. This sometimes extends to their wives. Fanny Longfellow wrote of Emerson in 1849: "When I meet him he is like a ghost to me. I never feel he cares from his heart for any human being. They are merely singular phenomena, not brothers to him."

Southern writers also mistrusted Emerson. Bloom attributes this mistrust to the Civil War and to slavery, but it runs deeper. Robert Penn Warren said that Emerson "destroyed the possibilities for the tragic in American letters." Flannery O'Connor, who takes dead aim in her stories at abstract gnostics, nailed Emerson: "When Emerson decided, in 1832, that he could no longer celebrate the Lord's Supper unless the bread and wine were removed, an important step in the vaporization of religion in America was taken, and the spirit of that step has continued apace. When the physical fact is separated from the spiritual reality the dissolution of belief is eventually inevitable."

G.K.Chesterton has said that "whenever men really believe they can get to the spiritual, they always employ the material. When the purpose is good, it is the bread and the wine; when the purpose is evil, it is eye of newt and toe of frog." Emerson would have no dealings with the insistent reality of the material world. He sought escape from it. He does not transcend it. He turns inward into his own mind, celebrating the vague god of self. Bloom admires all who "celebrate the defiant self over and against any force that would confine or control it." Bloom calls this "the religion of literary genius," and a "knowledge that frees the creative mind from theology, from any divinity that is distinct from what is most imaginative in the self." The Professor would revoke rather than invoke the muse.

Gnosticism distrusts matter, nature, and the human senses from which we apprehend reality. It is somewhat akin to Puritanism in its fear of existence. These ideological preferences for theories and abstractions from reality has brought untold destruction in the past century, be it Communism, Fascism, or Consumerism. Flannery O'Connor, the Roman Catholic writer Bloom wrongly claims as a gnostic in his book *Genius* (2002), knew that "theories are worse than the furies." Recently, a Massachusetts judge transcended reality in Emersonian gnostic fashion by declaring that marriage (known to all previous civilizations as a bond between a man and woman to procreate and foster children) is really an "evolving paradigm"—subject to unnatural manipulations like the many unreal faces of Michael Jackson.

Bloom would treat this life as an essentially complete and self-contained experience, a view that tends to stimulate both self-glorification and ideology before it falls to despair. Reducing the complexity of existence merely to the biological plane or to what William Blake called a "vegetable world," brings about the

dumbing down of man—for these theories and techniques replace the human imagination and reduce it to mere formula. Our gnostic professor, while purportedly upholding higher literary standards, actually undermines them by his ideology.

Bloom's new anthology of English poetry is selected through a secular gnostic filter. Bloom, who preaches keeping politics and ideology out of literature, succumbs in a chapter on Emerson within his anthology to this: "In George Bush's America, Emerson would not be elected dogcatcher." After quoting a poem by Emerson, he goes on to equate the Mexican-American war with the September 2001 attack on America; Bloom states we "rushed into war with the Iraquis" and are "peering after the vanquished economy."

Blooms gnostic bias also gets the better of him when he elevates Emerson far beyond his talent as a poet. "After Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson," Bloom writes, Emerson is the "most considerable poet of the nineteenth century." Which leaves the reader to wonder idly: what happened to Longfellow and Poe?

In an introductory essay prefacing this anthology entitled, "The Art Of Reading Poetry," Bloom unfairly juxtaposes Poe's "Alone" to Emerson's piece *The Rhodora,* and then declares Poe a bad poet. But Poe, for all his faults, is recognized throughout the world as the better poet. The preachy puritanical Emerson has nothing to compare with Poe's "Ulalume," "To Helen," or even "El Dorado."

Longfellow, who is unquestionably the preëminent poet of nineteenth-century America, is poorly represented in Bloom's anthology. The Professor should look again at Longfellow's magnificent sonnets to Dante, but once again Bloom's gnosticism (which is antithetical to Christianity) gets the better of him. He falsifies Longfellow (one of the most Christian of poets) by calling his "Bells of St. Blas" "a defiant rejection of a Catholic plea for order." Longfellow's poetry abounds in Christian themes. And it was Longfellow's translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, along with the Dante Studies curriculum established at Harvard, that helped steer Eliot out of the wasteland of self into Christian orthodoxy. Longfellow knew of " a power to quiet/ The restless pulse of care/ Which comes like benedictions/ That follow after prayer."

Following in his master's anti-Christian footsteps, Bloom approvingly quotes Emerson ("as men's prayers are a disease of will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect"). He admits a "lifelong hostility to T.S. Eliot" whose Christian criticism, Bloom says, "shows at times a proto-fascism." Allen Tate, another notable Roman Catholic poet and critic, Bloom labels "dogmatic."

One of Bloom's other heroes is that great hypnotist of self Walt Whitman—"what I shall assume you shall assume." Whitman's poetry is full of "I's" but he never sees a thing. The professor says Whitman was a great influence on Eliot and calls "The Waste Land," "a revision of Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

Never were two poets more opposite than Whitman and Eliot: Eliot loathed subjectivity while Whitman sank in the very slough of self. Bloom's erroneous reading of "The Waste Land" is woefully inadequate. Predictably, he disparages Eliot's spiritual journey to Christ, interpreting "The Waste Land" as a poem of "mourning and melancholy founded on the premature fear that poetic creativity is waning in its author."

Besides being a journey toward faith and a "grouse" at modernity, "The Waste Land" is Eliot's struggle to escape the gnostic prison of self whose gnosis Flannnery O'Connor recognized as the "borders of one's own skull." Bloom relishes a philosophy Eliot likened to a "patient etherized upon a table." The paralytic J. Alfred Proofrock cannot see be-

yond self. His sings a sterile love song where the partners are the "you" and "I" of his own consciousness. In "The Waste Land," Eliot was searching for a key out of the prison of self ("each key confirms a prison") in order to open himself to a larger reality.

In this anthology, Anglo-Irish poet William Butler Yeats is described as "fiercely not a Christian." This is not true. Yeats is not a professed Christian, but he had a strong religious disposition. In his poem "The Second Coming," he brings new life to Christian imagery in a startling manner that is anything but celebratory of the post-Christian age now upon us. "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" Dorothy Wellesley, who befriended Yeats late in life, questioned him on life after death. Yeats affirmed his belief in an afterlife and a Purgatory for sinners. Wellesley said, "Well its seems you are hurrying us back into the great arms of the Roman Catholic Church? I was bold to ask him, but his only retort was his splendid laugh."

There are many delightful poems within this anthology. Bloom appreciates under-appreciated poets like Edwin Arlington Robinson and the tragic Hart Crane, who sensed a "bleeding eidolon" behind the veil of things, but destroyed himself by suicide. Other great twentieth-century poets like Roy Campbell and Patrick Kavanagh are left out because Bloom has restricted his selection to poets born before 1899. One suspects that they would not pass the Professor's secular gnostic criteria.

Bloom fails to see that his gnosticism is antithetical to poetry and to all mystery, for poets connect heaven and earth and recognize a mystery beyond our own consciousness. Wordsworth intuited what he called "spots of time." Eliot recognized these as the "intersection of the timeless with time;" both "still points" are intimations of eternity. The poet's job is to find that location and to approach it through things of the world. True poets do not abstract themselves from the reality of existence as Emerson and Bloom would have it. Rather, they surrender themselves to the things of existence and to a grace working within nature. They are dependent upon this grace. Their self-surrender is love; somehow akin, but not restricted to Christianity. Many modern writers and poets have recognized this truth. This is the "true religion of literary genius" and not Emerson and Bloom's gnostic nonsense.

Flannery O'Connor's fiction dramatizes the secular gnostic mindset identified above. In "The Violent Bear It Away" her character Rayber prefers to look at his retarded child Bishop as part of "a simple equation,...the general hideousness of fate." Yet, he finds himself at times overwhelmed by feelings of "horrifying love." "Anything he looked at for too long could bring it on.… It could be a stick or a stone, the line of a shadow, the absurd old man's walk of a starling crossing the sidewalk. If, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of love that terrified him—powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise.… The love that would overcome him was of a different order.… It was love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all demanding, the kind that would cause him to make a fool of himself in an instant."

Modern intellectuals refuse to recognize or to accept the possibility of love. Emerson was fearful of intimacy with creation. Melville correctly diagnosed Emerson's defect as one about the heart. Emerson refused to open his heart and senses to created things. Like Rayber, he feared love. He was a gnostic materialist who sought power over nature through the might of mind and never transcended to anything. Malcolm Muggeridge, who recognized this as the disease of moder-

nity, knew that the opposite to love is not hate but power. Humility is endless.

Analyzing the Literary Image

Aaron Urbanczyk

Christ and Apollo, by William Lynch, S.J., *Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2004. 275 pp.*

CHRIST AND APOLLO IS A provocative theoretical treatise on literary criticism boldly enlisting perennial Catholic theology and philosophy. It first appeared in 1960, but literary scholars stand in far greater need of its argument now than at the time of its original publication.

A cursory reader may find the book a philosophical and theological treatise merely enlisting imaginative literature as a springboard for lofty speculation, as if literature was merely philosophy and theology for beginners. Presuming so would be to misunderstand Father William Lynch's enterprise, however. The book is first and foremost a work of literary theory and criticism; analyzing the literary image is *Christ and Apollo*'s primary task. Literature is, above all, the making of images through language, and Father Lynch approaches the literary image from the perspective of a robustly theistic metaphysical realism.

The very fact that this book's theoretical groundings flatly contradict the predictable relativism and rhetoric of postmodernism makes its reappearance both timely and challenging. Indeed, *Christ and Apollo* rightly insists that the literary image is born of finite, concrete, creaturely, and limited being, and any aesthetic theory attempting to bypass a firm metaphysical account of the real (as understood by metaphysics and theology) ultimately fails to account for what literature *is*.

Lynch evokes the figures of Christ and Apollo as representing two diametrically opposed poles of the human imagination *vis-à-vis* the terrain of the real. He argues that "literary insight comes from the penetration of the finite and the definite concrete in all its interior dimensions and according to all its real lines." Thus, Apollo represents "a sort of infinite dream...[and a] fantasy beauty," while Christ stands for "the completely definite...who, in taking on our human nature...took on every inch of it...in all its density." Literature is thus broadly divided into two categories: Apollonian poetics infused with romantic escapist dreams indicative of hatred for real being, and the "narrow way" of Christic poetics, imagining man in his finite, creaturely mortality where salvation lies within time (not beyond it).

Christ and Apollo begins with grounding its literary theory in the definite (over the ideal or romantic) and proceeds to a thematic discussion of literary representations of time, tragedy as genre, and comedy as genre. Father Lynch chastises Proust, Eugene O'Neill, Baudelaire, and Poe for indulging the Apollonian imagination while praising Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and Cervantes for their fidelity to the definite. Yet the theoretical center of *Christ and Apollo* comes in the text's second half (chapters 5-8), where Father Lynch enlists the metaphysical doctrine of analogy, the traditional four-fold method of biblical exegesis, and Christology (the theology of the person of Christ) as paradigms for exploring the ontological dimensions of the literary imagination.

Drawing heavily from Parmenides and Plato, Lynch introduces the reader to the

AARON URBANCZYK *is Assistant Professor of Literature at Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida.*