Ronald Huebert. *John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist*. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977. Pp. xvii, 248. \$18.50.

The title, *John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist*, and the splendid reproduction of Bernini's *The Rape of Persephone* on the cover prepare the reader for the central thesis of Dr. Huebert's book: that the critical vocabulary that has evolved in order to describe the development of Continental art during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be applied to English literature in general and to the drama of John Ford in particular.

The general argument is attacked in the first chapter. Dr. Huebert describes the qualities generally considered to be characteristic of Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque art, and draws a series of parallels between these qualities and analogous developments in English Literature. Three chapters then follow, dealing specifically with Ford's plays, and approaching them respectively from the point of view of theme (ch. ii), structure (ch. iii), and style (ch. iv). The unity Ford achieves through theme is likened to the Baroque artist's technique of "fusing" the dependent parts of his painting, subordinating them to the whole; the themes discussed are those which all readers of Ford will recognize — the erotic energy and sweetness that Ford finds in death, madness as "an extreme form of crossing the rational frontier into new emotional depths" (p. 59), and the intensity with which illusion is pursued, even "at the expense of reality" (p. 68). Structure in Ford's plays is seen as analogous to the "open" form by which the Baroque artist extended the implication of his work of art beyond its apparent boundaries. By using Northrop Frye's distinction between the "binary" form of tragedy and the "three-stage" structure of romance, Dr. Huebert argues that Baroque tragedy moves towards romance as the tragic heroes are exalted in their death: "soaring visual movement in Baroque painting creates open form, and soaring psychological movement in Baroque tragedy has a comparable effect" (p. 79). Ford's verbal style is seen as Baroque by analogy with the "painterly" style of Baroque art (as distinct from the "linear" style of Renaissance art). The painterly style, in which colours and shapes blend rather than being clearly differentiated, is seen as being the result of a change "from a logically based technique to a psychologically based technique" (pp. 130-131); in the verbal medium this change is seen as a shift in emphasis towards language calculated to appeal more to the emotions than to the reason.

Dr. Huebert is well aware of the difficulties he faces in developing his argument, based as it is on a critical vocabulary taken from a non-verbal medium. Adopting a position very similar to that of the Wylie Sypher (*Four Stages of Renaissance Style*), he defends his critical approach cogently and energetically, suggesting in the process that those who adhere to a more traditional critical terminology have something to learn from the historians of art:

The Caroline dramatists, the cavalier poets, and the recusant prose writers all stand in need of rescue from their cumbersome labels. The term "Baroque," firmly linked as it is to the cultural climate of the seventeenth century, would be a decided improvement. By the same token, the term "mannerism" is more descriptive of the artistic tone of the early seventeenth century than phrases like "Jacobean drama," "metaphysical poetry," or "Senecan prose." Terms borrowed from art history may never be purified of all ambiguities, but at least they are anchored in the broad cultural phases of Europe, not simply tied to the lives and deaths of the English kings and queens. (pp. 31-32).

In a different context, however, Dr. Huebert provides an equally cogent warning of the dangers inherent in a transfer of critical theory; while in the process of arguing against those critics of Ford who concentrate solely on verbal analysis, he makes the effective point that this approach is more appropriate for lyric poetry than for prose or drama, and remarks that "a critical theory begins to perpetrate its own fallacies when it imports the criteria of one genre into the examination of another" (p. 210). If this is sometimes true of the transfer of critical theory between one genre and another, we may expect it to be a constant danger when the transfer is made between media as different in technique as drama and the visual arts.

The main problem faced by the critic who wishes to transfer the insight he has gained in one medium to his understanding of another is that he is usually forced into what is in effect an extended argument by analogy. At best, the analogy will provide an illuminating metaphor, or, as a figure of rhetoric, will persuade the reader of the effectiveness of a particular approach, but by its very nature it cannot provide concrete demonstration of an interpretation in the way another critic might call upon (for example) semantic or historical evidence to support a particular point. The argument by analogy is rendered even more distant from the text when, as is often the case particularly in the criticism of non-verbal media, the critical theory is itself expressed in metaphorical language, thus creating in effect an analogy within an analogy. It is worth remembering that the words "Renaissance" and "Baroque" are themselves metaphors (though champions of Baroque art are perhaps willing to allow the metaphor to remain dead, since it implies that their pearls are flawed). A more specific example can be found in the second paragraph of Dr. Huebert's book, where he is summarizing the classic distinctions made by Heinrich Wölfflin (*Principles of Art History*), between Renaissance and Baroque art: "Unity, in Renaissance art, is a matter of harmony among multiple, discrete, independent parts; in Baroque art one dominant theme or motif creates unity by fusing the dependent parts, by subordinating them to the whole" (Huebert, p. 2). In order to describe differing styles in the plastic arts, metaphors are drawn from music and chemistry; the metaphorical distinction thus generated is extended by analogy in Dr. Huebert's discussion of Ford's technique of creating thematic unity within his plays.

In France, closer to the mainstream of Continental thought, critics have discovered an apparently endless source of controversy in the application to literature of such concepts as the Mannerist and the Baroque. Dr. Huebert mentions this debate in passing (pp. 19-20 and fn. 46, p. 220), but he is nonetheless prepared to simplify an exceedingly complex issue by referring to "the Mannerist doubts of Montaigne" (p. 19) without qualification. The volatility of this whole discussion can be seen in the various papers collected in *Renaissance, maniérisme, baroque*. One is struck by the sense the various critics have of the ambiguity and complexity of the concepts they are employing; in particular, they are aware of the way in which the terms interpenetrate in meaning, with the result that even a single work will be described as combining elements of different styles. There is also a keen awareness that major authors transcend categorization.

The problems will be no less severe for the critic of English literature, particularly since, as Dr. Huebert notes with regret, it is difficult to illustrate changes of style in terms of "native English painting" (p. 130). The lack of appropriate English

Mannerist and Baroque painters and architects (Dr. Huebert does not try to fit Inigo Jones or Wren into his scheme of things) should serve as an additional warning, reminding us of the way in which Continental ideas, myths and fashions were modified by the time they reached England. It is no accident, therefore, that Dr. Huebert is constrained to illustrate the nature of Baroque drama by referring to the French dramatist Jean de Rotrou, without attempting to establish any direct connection between Rotrou and English drama (see pp. 18-19). The student of English literature, unlikely to be familiar with Rotrou's drama, is not informed of the date of *Saint Genest* (1645, after the closure of the English theatres), and could be forgiven for assuming that there is more in common between Ford and Rotrou than the similarity in emotional intensity that is the basis of the comparison.

Comparisons between art and literature, particularly in the period under discussion, can be justified in general terms because of shared traditions: "A painter and a poet, broadly speaking, share a common style, insofar as they adopt the same attitude towards their mythological heritage" (p. 3). It becomes clear, however, as one reads further in Dr. Huebert's book that he is concentrating on the broadest comparisons of theme, style and structure, rather than on shared mythologies. The well-known studies of Erwin Panofsky demonstrate how fruitful the comparison between poet and painter can be when the subject is a specific myth, and there are many literary studies in which a writer's use of mythology is illuminated by an iconographical tradition in the visual arts; Dr. Huebert's thesis, however, is the more general contention that Ford is best understood when the characteristics of his drama are seen to reflect analogous characteristics in Baroque art as a whole. We are asked to look at Ford against a background so general that virtually any writer or artist considered to be Baroque can be called upon for purposes of comparison — a critical technique which allows Dr. Huebert to discuss the stylistic symptoms of what he sees as Baroque in Ford's work, without having to pause to explore the causes.

The limitations imposed on the critic by this method can best be illustrated by a concrete example. Perhaps the most interesting and most transferrable of the concepts Dr. Huebert borrows from art history is the distinction Wölfflin makes between a typically "closed" structure associated with Renaissance art, and a more "open" form characteristic of the Baroque. The critical exercise involves at least two dimensions of comparison; in addition to the transfer between art and literature, Wölfflin's distinction is stated in terms of a comparison between two periods, Renaissance and Baroque. Dr. Huebert makes this second comparison in three stages, with Mannerism included as an intermediate phase. Thus Renaissance drama is exemplified by *Dr. Faustus* (pp. 29, 77), *Romeo and Juliet* (pp. 79-90), *Richard III* (p. 106), *Mucedorus* (pp. 107-08), and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (p. 115), the endings of which are seen as closed, with the death or marriage of the protagonists, and with an equivalent stability and order established in their society. Mannerist drama (Tourneur, Jonson, Webster, Middleton) "may offer some official restoration of order, but the authority figure in these plays is either too weak to face any further eruption of evil, or else so unredeemably despicable that his rise to power amounts to a dark parody of a genuine return to order" (p. 77). Ford's Baroque drama is to be seen as contrastingly open, however, because in tragedy the hero achieves "apotheosis after the conflict has been resolved. . . he is not content to die as a scape-goat, for he insists on the higher calling of martyrdom" (p. 78). In tragicomedy the ending produces the tradi-

tional marriages; these, however, are not so much a resolution of the conflicts explored in the play, but are rather "the first step towards resolving the continuing problems of the psychology of love" (p. 108).

This thesis must be examined at several points. Dr. Huebert is careful to leave arguments about art to art historians. There remains, however, the possibility that art critics may themselves call their critical terminology in question; in his recent book *High Renaissance*, Michael Levey argues that the concept of Mannerism as a distinct stylistic entity has led to a "process of fossilization" in our understanding of art in the high Renaissance:

Either mannerism must be pushed right back to the beginning of the sixteenth century and recognized as the century's basic style, created actively by Leonardo, Michaelangelo and Raphael. . . or, if it is to be defined in such a limited way that it excludes the great trio, . . . then it seems not so much a true style as a limited trend. (pp. 50-51.)

Whichever art historians decide in this debate (and no such decision is ever final), Michael Levey points to the dangers involved in an argument based on *a priori* assumptions about style; there is a temptation both to select works which conform to the assumption, and to develop ingenious (rather than enlightening) arguments to explain how works which do not obviously conform can be seen to do so.

It is, for example, easy to see *Dr. Faustus* as having a closed ending, for whatever view one takes of the play, the conclusion is crushingly final. The ending of *The Jew of Malta*, however, is more ambiguous. Barabas dies, certainly, but the society which remains is scarcely to be seen as demonstrating "the victory of ordered nature" (p. 77); Ferneze has triumphed only because he has been more successfully Machiavellian than anyone else, and the future is fraught with the inevitability of further struggle with the Turks. Are we to see in this the "parody of a genuine return to order" (p. 77) which Dr. Huebert associates with Mannerism, appearing on the scene a little early? There appears also to be an element of selection in the plays of Shakespeare with which Ford's are compared. If *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (despite Valentine's curious behaviour) is closed in form (p. 115), what are we to make of that most open of comedies, where "Jack hath not Jill," *Love's Labour's Lost*? Similarly, it seems that *Richard III* is chosen for comparison with *Perkin Warbeck* (p. 106; and p. 228, n. 20) not merely because they both to some degree concern Henry VII, but because *Richard III* is arguably the most formally closed of Shakespeare's history plays, coming as it does at the end of a cycle. Even so it ends with a political statement that reaches beyond its conclusion, looking forward not only to the optimistic future apparently faced by the new house of Tudor, but also to the possibility of renewed bloodshed at the hands of those "that would reduce these bloody days again / And make poor England weep in streams of blood" (V. v. 36-37). Other examples of open form in Dr. Huebert's "Renaissance" period come readily to mind. I think particularly of the plays of John Lyly, where *Sapho and Phao* and *Endimion* are consciously and emphatically left open at their conclusions, as the lovers remain faithful to a love which can never be consummated, and where *The Woman in the Moon* concludes with a frozen tableau of frustration and rage.

More disturbing than the process of selection required to illustrate the thesis is the way in which earlier works are made to fit the pattern, often becoming distorted

in the process. Writers described as Mannerist seem to suffer particularly, perhaps because Mannerism itself is to be characterized by distortion (see p. 15). Dr. Huebert argues (p. 19) that dramatic genres break down in the mannerist phase, as "the distinction between tragedy and comedy erodes." (Were they so very distinct in the earlier period?) The result is that Mannerist tragedy (Tourneur, Middleton) brings "even the bloodiest scenes to the brink of laughter," and Mannerist comedy (Jonson) becomes "almost tragic." Both tragedy and comedy, thus, are seen to "lie precariously near to the domain of satire," a choice of words which suggests that satire is something to be avoided, although it has always been considered appropriate at least in comedy.

There are many such occasions when earlier works are presented as somehow deficient in order to make the characteristics of the Baroque seem more attractive. One striking example occurs when Donne's poem "The Extasie" is described as Mannerist: Donne "cannot resist the temptation to use harsh, nervous and intellectual images," with the result that the poem is "hardly calculated to please a lady" (p. 15). Shades of Dr. Johnson: few readers are likely to make the same assumptions about the temptations a poet should resist, the extent to which they should write to please ladies, or, indeed, the nature of the ladies they write for. With similar severity, Dr. Huebert fits Shakespeare into the procrustean bed of the Renaissance style, with the result that he is led to make a number of judgments on Shakespeare's works that do little to make the overall thesis convincing. Few will agree, for example, that Shakespeare can be as easily schematized as this: "Shakespeare's fundamental sympathy with orthodox Renaissance values allows and indeed demands that he depict each love relationship as a point on the well-defined scale between ideal love (seeing Cupid) and corrupting lust (blind Cupid)" (p. 46); such a statement is just neither to the subtlety of the mythological tradition, as explored by Panofsky, nor to the complexity of Shakespeare's characters. What are the co-ordinates on this one-dimensional graph for the impatient young love of Romeo and Juliet, let alone the mature love-lust of Antony and Cleopatra?

If the first stages of Dr. Huebert's argument raise serious doubts, as he attempts to transfer critical terms from art to literature, and as he seeks to establish comparable periods in the development of English style in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the final stage is more successful as he discusses the specific characteristics of Ford's drama. Here we are no longer dealing with the general or the highly selective, and it is possible for Dr. Huebert to bring to bear the more direct critical tools evidenced by his detailed and often insightful reading of the text. Whether earlier drama is or is not typically closed in structure, Ford's tragedies certainly tend to end in such a way that they reverberate beyond the closing lines. As I have already suggested, I do not find this so new a characteristic as does Dr. Huebert — a tragic apotheosis of the protagonist must surely be seen as clearly in *Lear* or *Antony and Cleopatra* as in Ford's tragedies — but the approach does allow Dr. Huebert to develop a strong argument around the self-sustaining psychology of Ford's heroes and heroines, so obsessed by their personal vision, of love or of honour, that they "experience triumph through death" (p. 90), rather than having death triumph over them. In tragicomedy the open form is obtained through an emphasis on the psychology of the characters. Since, for example, the initial problems in *The Lover's Melancholy* which prevent the various lovers from achieving happiness are psycholo-

gical rather than mechanical, the conclusion is "artificially neat," and it is clear that "only part of the problem has reached solution" (p. 110). To couple these two rather different forms of open ending — the tragic and the (tragi-) comic — together, in order to establish an apparently consistent baroque characteristic in Ford's drama, is surely somewhat artificially neat in itself. Nonetheless, it is the virtue of Dr. Huebert's approach that he is able to see the strengths in a play which might otherwise be simply condemned; earlier plays also criticized for endings which impose a mechanical neatness on the psychological complexity of their characters perhaps deserve an approach as tolerant: one thinks of Shakespeare's "problem" comedies, or of a play like Marston's *The Malcontent*.

It is also a strength of Dr. Huebert's approach that it gives him an opportunity to argue with some conviction against the traditional charge of "decadence" when Ford's plays are discussed. As Baroque art is simply different from Renaissance art, and should not be judged by the same criteria, so Ford's drama should be seen as different in kind from that of his predecessors. In particular, the quest for moral order which we find in so much earlier drama has become irrelevant in Ford, where the portrayal of an individual's obsessive psychology has become the main concern. It is unfortunate, once again, that in defending Ford Dr. Huebert has allowed himself to pass unnecessarily adverse judgments on the writers he sees as Mannerist, suggesting that they are guilty of "shocking moral ambiguity" (p. 178) — a phrase which, if inappropriate for Ford, is inappropriate for Webster and Middleton.

At best, Dr. Huebert's comparative approach allows him to discuss Ford's plays from a fresh perspective, so that his detailed readings are often illuminating; at worst, it tempts him into reductive and facile criticism of other writers. It is, unfortunately, the dominant thesis of the book that seduces him into making distracting judgments of this kind. Readers of English drama will be unlikely to relinquish the more local critical vocabulary they have become used to, though it is indeed "simply tied to the lives and deaths of English kings and queens" (p. 32). There are persuasive and useful analogies to be drawn between the development of the visual arts from the Renaissance to the Baroque and the development of the English drama from the Tudor to the Caroline, and there is no doubt that our understanding of the literature is enriched by a wider awareness of cultural movements; but the critical terms "Elizabethan" and "Jacobean" need not be seen as parochial. At the very least they have the merit of neutrality, since they imply no judgment on the literature they describe. More positively, we should remember that the courts of Elizabeth, James I and Charles I each imparted a particular and identifiable quality to the cultural life of their reigns; the near-mythological status of Elizabeth is well known, and Dr. Huebert himself acknowledges the influence of Charles I in forming the taste of his time (pp. 32-33). The critic who limits himself to the established chronology of the English kings and queens is not merely avoiding the game of analogies implicit in the adoption of terms from the history of art, he is using a vocabulary closer to the period itself. As the debate continues, it may be possible to develop a critical framework in which Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque styles in English literature can usefully be distinguished without imposing a system of rigid classification; Dr. Huebert's book will be useful for the student of Ford's drama, but it contributes little to the more general critical issues with which it deals.

This review has dealt almost exclusively with the chapter on dramatic structure in Ford's plays, because it is the strongest, but the reader will find similar strengths and weaknesses throughout the book. In addition to his detailed analysis of theme, dramatic structure and style in Ford's works, there are two further chapters: one deals with other dramatists who to a greater or lesser extent might be classified as Baroque (Massinger, Fletcher, Shirley and Otway). The other is a history of criticism of Ford's plays.

There is an index which will be helpful to the student who wishes to concentrate on a single play; Dr. Huebert's approach is such that each play is discussed on many different occasions as Ford's various characteristics are examined separately. It is less useful, however, when one seeks references in the notes, gathered at the end of the book: some critics have only the references to them in the text recorded (Panofsky, Wölfflin); some have both references in the text and notes recorded, though not always completely (Sypher); some authors who are mentioned only in the notes are recorded (Ralph Berry, whose *The Art of John Webster* is dismissed rather too cavalierly in a single footnote); and some mentioned only in the notes do not appear in the index at all (Imbrie Buffum [see p. 217, fn. 3], whose *Studies in the Baroque from Montaigne to Rotrou* Dr. Huebert follows in his comments on Rotrou). The book is beautifully printed and bound, and there is a generous collection of twenty black and white illustrations of Renaissance and Baroque art.

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