

David Goodway, ed. *Herbert Read Reassessed*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; dist. by ISBS, Portland, Ore. 1998. Pp. vii, 328. \$45.95. ISBN 0-85323-862-6.

In recent years there has been a renewal of interest in the British poet, critic, and anarchist Sir Herbert Read (1893–1968). Read's diverse activities as a writer, editor, and translator led to the publication of over ninety books during his lifetime in fields ranging from poetry, fiction, literary and art criticism to philosophy, education, politics, and industrial design. A first wave of critical studies and appreciations appeared shortly after Read's death in 1968. Now, clustering loosely around the centenary of his birth, a second wave of publications has followed, texts which have attempted to reevaluate the legacy of Read's intellectual accomplishments and their current scholarly value; Read's place within twentieth-century criticism and intellectual history; and the applicability of his insights in praxis to contemporary British social and cultural life. *Herbert Read Reassessed* is such a volume, the most recent and comprehensive study of Read's achievements to date.

Edited and introduced by David Goodway, the book consists of sixteen critical essays and a very useful chronological bibliography of Read's published writings. Two early pieces by Hugh Cecil and Peter Abbs provide foundational insights into the ways in which formative life experiences directly shaped the philosophical positions that Read would later adopt. Cecil's vivid account of "Herbert Read and the Great War" traces the ways in which Read's heroism on the battlefield and his first-hand witnessing of massive wartime destruction established the bases for his distrust of established government and for his profound belief in organicism and human cooperation. Similarly, Peter Abbs observes that much of Read's writing is autobiographical in nature, informed by a circular narrative trajectory of opposing themes. As Abbs puts it, "the verbal abstractions of Herbert Read carry an invisible autobiographical trauma which, in turn, carries an archetypal schema: Innocence/Experience, Vision/Corruption, Unity/Alienation" (p. 98). After tracing this schema, Abbs perceptively qualifies Read's critical approach by noting that good autobiography does not necessarily make for good philosophy, and that powerful myths must be openly acknowledged as such.

Several essays in this volume examine various dimensions of Read's aesthetic project. Bob Barker points out that Read's only published novel, *The Green Child*, was written in Hampstead in 1934 in the company of several modernist artists, including Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, and Barbara Hepworth. While Barker observes that formal parallels can be discerned between Hepworth's sculpture, Nicholson's painting, and the crystalline ideal of pure mathematical form described in Read's novel, the specific nature of these comparisons could be more fully explored. For example, Hepworth's ovoid marble carving *Three Forms* (1935, illustrated on page 117) draws on precisely the same contradictory relations between organicism and artifice, between generative fertility and gnostic sterility, that thread throughout Read's novel. In turn, this thematic conversancy raises the larger question of why this type of synthetic aesthetic paradox would hold a shared appeal among Read's self-described "nest of gentle artists" at this historical juncture. Similar questions can be applied to Paul Street's analysis of *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (1959). In this text Read characterizes modern art as a series of interrelated metaphysical and discursive formations. While today such generalizations may pose an easy target for methodological deconstruction, the issue remains as to how to account for the enduring popularity of a book that not only is still in print but, as Street points out, is "one of [Thames and Hudson's] best sellers in the World of Art series" (p. 249).

David Thistlewood addresses some of these questions in his discussion of “Herbert Read’s Organic Aesthetic.” In two successive essays Thistlewood presents a comprehensive overview of Read’s long-standing preoccupation with the leitmotif of organicism. Of particular interest is a diagram by Hepworth (reproduced on page 224) in which she outlines how artists can mediate between abstraction and recognizable symbolic forms within a unified conceptual schema, one sufficiently flexible that it can move forward linearly *and* loop back on itself in a continuous eidetic flow. As Thistlewood points out, this conception of creativity proved to be highly influential in shaping Read’s own developing notion of an organic aesthetic, an ideal which the critic saw as fully realized in Henry Moore’s sculpture.

Other essays in this volume consider Read’s engagement with nationalism, politics, education, and industrial design. David Goodway provides a nuanced account of Read’s commitment to romantic anarchism, specifically the ways in which his political beliefs shaped his theories of education, his social philosophy, his publishing activities, and even his personal life. Similarly, Kevin Davey identifies the various ways in which Read’s construction of Englishness underpinned a desire to reform existing conceptions of national identity. In a sophisticated and rigorously argued essay, Davey shows how Read strategically co-opted contemporary developments in European culture in order to frame British culture as “anticipatory and universal” (p. 276), thus establishing a transcendent position that served to reinscribe English cultural greatness. Davey also suggestively observes that Read’s advocacy of romanticism constituted “a critique of what he considered an archetypical English masculinity, a gendered form of accommodation to the national culture” (p. 271).

The strengths of Davey’s essay point up some of the limitations of the book in general. While various writers touch on the issue, one wishes that more sustained attention had been devoted to the conflicted construction of gender in Read’s oeuvre, as for example in his promoting the paradoxical conception of a desexualized libido. A similarly contradictory approach to the imagery of the sexual body seems to be apparent in the conclusion of Read’s novel *The Green Child*, where the final union of the two main characters suggests the eroticism of their perpetually touching flesh *and* a peculiar form of sublimation as their bodies become petrified into crystalline structures, and hence, into an eternal state of formal integrity. In addition, Read’s engagement with Freud, as opposed to his interactions with Jung, seems to have received disproportionate attention. This becomes apparent in John R. Doheny’s contributions to this study, which include an incisive discussion of Read’s literary criticism followed by a separate essay on “Herbert Read’s Use of Sigmund Freud.” While Doheny’s analysis of Read’s misreading of Freud is provocative, its presence raises the obvious question of why an essay was not included that specifically addressed “Herbert Read’s Use of Carl Gustav Jung.” Along these lines, it would have been instructive if one of the authors had examined the relations that Read forged between Jungian notions of collective psychic existence and the constellation of ideas that Read borrowed from an earlier generation of German theorists, such as Lipps’s theory of empathy, Worringer’s notions of abstraction and Expressionism, and Riegl’s conception of *kunstwollen*, or a will to form. While Davey argues that Read adapted Worringer’s ideas to support a British national aesthetic, and conversely, Andrew Causey identifies the ways in which Read allied British art with Northern European art in general as part of a shared romantic tradition, it would have been useful if one of the writers had considered how Read was able to maintain his Germanic convictions at a time when it would have been politically difficult for him to do so. Finally, it would have been interesting if one of the authors had considered how, beginning in 1936, Read formulated an interpretation of Surrealism that was distinct from

Andre Breton's position, one in which Surrealism was conceived as an extension of the romantic tradition, a form of artistic creativity stemming directly from psychological and political derepression. These questions aside, *Herbert Read Reassessed* is an impressive volume, particularly so in the way that it manages to present a unified but not totalizing portrait of one of England's most distinguished twentieth-century critics.

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Thomas J. Schaeper and Kathleen Schaeper. *Cowboys into Gentlemen: Rhodes Scholars, Oxford, and the Creation of an American Elite*. New York: Berghahn Books. 1998. Pp. xiii, 406. \$29.95. ISBN 1-57181-116-8.

In a conversation with his friend, the editor W. T. Stead in January 1895, Cecil Rhodes informed Stead of his plans for the establishment and endowment of Rhodes Scholarships in his seventh (1893) will. He told Stead (whom he appointed a trustee of the will) that the idea of scholarships for promising young men from the various British colonies and dependencies to attend "a residential English university"—Oxford—occurred to him during 1893. Over four years later, in July 1899, a few months before the onset of the Second Anglo-Boer War, Rhodes revoked his previous will and, with the trustees (including Stead), drafted his last will. In their several discussions on the revision of the will to give it a scope "primarily educational," Stead was unable to persuade Rhodes to establish the scholarships at Cambridge University as well as at Oxford and to include women in the scholarship scheme. However, Stead was successful in securing Rhodes' assent to extend the scholarships to include the United States in accord with Rhodes's advocacy of the unity of the English-speaking peoples in the world and the promotion of Anglo-American amity. In this direction it is interesting to note that in assenting to the proviso including Americans in the Rhodes Scholarship program, Rhodes declared that he hoped the scholarships would strengthen the Rhodes Scholars "attachment to the country from which they have sprung, but without. . . withdrawing them or their sympathies from the land of their adoption or birth. . ." (W. T. Stead, "Mr Rhodes's Will and its Genesis: A Hitherto Unpublished Chapter of Recent History," *Review of Reviews* 25 [May 1902]: 482). Two years later, in 1901, as a result of Stead's unrelenting opposition to the Boer War, Rhodes added a codicil to his 1899 will removing Stead as a trustee. (*Ibid.*, p. 479). This aspect of the origin of the Rhodes Scholarship program for Americans is not mentioned in the Schaeper's excellent story of the American role in the program and how it was implemented after Rhodes's demise in 1902. But their work is also, as the Schaeper's aver, "In many ways. . . a comparative history of British and American education and society over the past century" (p. xii).

Oddly enough, the "genesis" of this study, which replaces four previous accounts of the Rhodes Scholarship program, was Bill Clinton's election to the Presidency in 1992 and the publication in the Anglo-American press of many (some absurd) stories of his residence and work as a Rhodes Scholar and of the several Rhodes Scholar alumni serving in his administration. (Indeed, the Schaeper's include a lengthy chapter on the experiences and foibles of "Bill Clinton and His Friends" in Oxford during the late 1960s.) But this is only a minor part of a fascinating study based on numerous interviews with former Rhodes Scholars and British and American administrators of the program, and on the memoirs and autobiographies of "Rhodie" alumni. All chapters well reflect the following basic premises