Eliot’s poetry—an assumption that is now being questioned by an increasing number of post-modernist critics. Rajan, like most modernist critics, shows little awareness of the highly pertinent objections being made to Eliot’s poetry and criticism. The concluding chapter of the book, one meant to meet these new challenges, merely sidetracks the issues by engaging in only minor, often inconsequential, disputes. Harold Bloom, for instance, is not mentioned once.

Rajan’s contribution to the series of books on Eliot’s integrity provides interesting, incidental insights into several lines and stanzas of Eliot’s poems. It is also interesting for its attempt to prove that Eliot’s poetry often embodies an element of vacillation; in other words, it is poetry written with the full awareness of the corrupting power of day-to-day reality which can almost destroy the ideal. Rajan’s reading seeks to impart a dramatic dimension to Eliot’s poetry—to discover in Eliot a kind of Yeatsian intensity. Unfortunately, the argument is not convincing because it is not true of Eliot. It seems to me that Rajan knows what kind of a defence is needed to make Eliot acceptable as a great poet but his arguments are presented against the weight of evidence provided by Eliot’s poetry and criticism.

Like most previous Eliotan scholars Rajan begins with the premise that Eliot needs no evaluation but only elaboration and explanation. An underlying assumption of this viewpoint is that anyone who is critical of Eliot does not understand the poetry and therefore must be made to understand it. One unfortunate result of this endlessly repeated strategy is that each new author merely refines and makes more sophisticated the terms in which Eliot is sought to be explained and unfolded. Lately, the arguments have tended to be either too finely spun or opaque. In spite of Rajan’s elegant style, perhaps partly because of it, the prose is quite unreadable in places. The need today is for critics who are not ashamed to tackle basic questions about literary excellence and who do not refuse to answer simple questions. Rajan’s book, on the other hand, misleads and obscurcates critical inquiry.

Shyamal Bagchee


In view of the widely acknowledged fact that George Crabbe’s poetry has suffered from unjustified critical neglect, this fresh study by Ronald Hatch of the University of British Columbia is to be warmly welcomed. It invites immediate comparison with another 1976 study of the same corpus of poetry. Peter New’s book, prosaically entitled George Crabbe’s Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1976), is sometimes more provocative. New makes more use of little known and unpublished material, but he jumps from the significant to the unimportant and irrelevant in an irritating way. Hatch’s study is better written, its leading ideas being presented in a much more controlled and sophisticated way.

The first part of Hatch’s slightly ambiguous title, Crabbe’s Arabesque, is taken from Francis Jeffrey’s well known review; “the pattern of Crabbe’s Arabesque is so large, that there is no getting a fair specimen of it without taking in a good space”. Hatch uses the phrase as a justification for analyzing both the topics and style of Crabbe’s major poems at considerable length and with appropriate awareness of the poems’ complex similarity to intertwined scroll-work. The arabesque image, however, is not seriously developed. On the other hand, Hatch’s sub-title, is much more truly indicative of the nature of the critical approach used in the study. The word “drama” in the subtitle typifies Hatch’s excellent understanding of the dramatic conflicts aroused in the reader by Crabbe’s ambivalent handling of social questions and radical themes and by his preference for religious, as opposed to political, resolution of social problems. The word “drama” also underlines Hatch’s original analysis of Crabbe’s creation, especially in later works such as Tales of the Hall, of a dramatic structure which reflects the various
viewpoints of the poet himself, the poetic narrator and the characters in the poems on the nature of the social problems of the poor and underprivileged. Hatch neatly avoids the suggestion of previous critics that Crabbe shies away from the political implications of the problems he writes about by suggesting that the ambiguity of sympathies is a deliberate device on Crabbe’s part. He seems himself to have little sympathy with Crabbe’s religiosity. Hatch also successfully identifies Crabbe’s impatience with traditional eighteenth-century pastoral optimism and makes us very much aware of the effect that hard affliction’s school has had on Crabbe’s view of the realities of the problems which face the poor and the unsuccessful middle class. Hatch’s study is, in my view, the first study of Crabbe to recognize fully the deliberate nature of Crabbe’s use of a number of individual voices to give full expression of the poet’s awareness that the facts of life are an interaction of personality, education, morality, society and religion.

This important new study of Crabbe is pleasantly presented by McGill-Queen’s University Press with illustrative arabesques on the front cover and the title page. It is handsomely printed, and I have noted only two typographical errors. The word “destroying” has become “destroying” (p. 219) and the eminent Shakespearean critic, Geoffrey Bulloch has become “Geoffrey Bulloch” in the bibliography.

Robert Hay Carnie


Gnarowski prefaces this work with a thoughtful introduction that places Cohen and his critics in perspective. He connects the Cohen of the fifties with the transformative elements of literature, “an intense personalism, a growing affinity for Eastern mysticism, and the idea and practice of disaffiliation”. Gnarowski places Cohen at the third stage of Canadian modernism; the leaders of the first stage were A.J. M. Smith and F.R. Scott; and the Mont-real group of Sutherland, Layton and Dudek were the second stage leaders.

Gnarowski has collected some excellent reviews, articles and interviews useful to Cohen students. The work is divided into three sections. The 12 reviews in the first section range from short paragraphs to three pages, and some are written by fellow poets such as David Bromige and George Bowering. The second section of collected journalistic articles and interviews treat Cohen’s popular career. “Beautiful Creep” by Richard Goldstein, reprinted from The Village Voice, and an interview by Michael Harris from Saturday Night are two of the five selected articles providing critical evaluation of Cohen as pop artist. Academic studies that attempt to assess Cohen’s work are collected in the third section. Cohen as a literary phenomenon is examined by Desmond Pacey, Sandra Djwa, Stephen Scobie and Frank Davey, to name four of the seven.

Gnarowski has compiled a scholarly work and to complete the study he has included a bibliography of Cohen’s works and of selected articles and reviews (not included in the collection) and some related readings.

Karen L. Bruce


In his introduction Alex Lucas makes the definitive statement on Mowat when describing his favourite subjects. He says that “all are ‘outsiders’, either as brave men of action... or ‘natural men’ living... the so-called ‘simple-life’. All, too, represent a cause, whether directly demonstrating the nobility of their way of life, or indirectly revealing the limitations of a modern technological society. ... Mowat always delights in making a direct attack of some sort... on the Canadian ‘Establishment’.” This is Farley Mowat in a nutshell. It is his rebel nature and his willingness to stand up for those who are endangered (human and animal) which make him a popular success, and the best part of this book is the chapter on Mowat as crusader. He is discussed under three other headings: historian, mariner, and creative writer. The historian label is not quite accurate for in Ordeal by Ice