

are laws which characterize society alone. Once literature and art arise from society, they too have laws of their own to obey. In other words, there is an autonomous realm to art and literature however firmly they may be rooted in society and psychology. Marx and Engels knew how to pour out their scorn on crude reductionists who refused to see that everything had certain laws pertaining to it alone and that new levels have some self-sufficiency.

Mr. Crews does not seem to allow for any autonomy to literature. All literature is ideological for him. True, but everything is also made up of electrons and protons. There is a difference between things which arise at higher levels. Without some autonomy to new levels there can be nothing differentiated at all. Literature has a social and psychological matrix out of which it has come, and it has social implications, often of the most important sort, but it is not just its own origin—nor its effects. In short, it has its own *ἀρετή*.

If there is some autonomy in the study of literature, if literature has its own structures and rules independent of the matrix out of which it comes, should we not as students of literature stand up for them? What advantage shall we gain in leading the way to the destruction of our subject matter as an autonomous study? If we won't support our subject, who will? It is not enough as human beings to stand for literary values alone, but we must stand for them as well as for human values. Not all human values are political and social. Furthermore, many literary values are human too. They are human because they stress the importance of reason and thought, because they recognize the tragic and comic aspects of the human condition, because they know that formal perfection increases the memorability of human perfection, because wisdom has always been one of their main goals, and finally because they respect accuracy and honesty. Formal aspects should be admired insofar as they help us to attain these ends.

The best is the enemy of the good. In the apocalyptic atmosphere of our time, to repeat this proverb is to guarantee the shutting of ears. We are now in a heady period of pushing for Utopia in a rapid drive, and reminders not to lose what we have in the desire to get to something better are not very welcome. This turmoil is no doubt useful. We have grown intellectually complacent and need to be reminded of our shortcomings. But we are not going to be helped toward our goals by creating tyranny in the name of liberty or by destroying what values we have in the name of higher values. Of course, we must drive on, and Mr. Crews is right to urge us to do so. The MLA must take a part in the changes of our time and would be derelict in its duty if it did not stress that questions other than those of irony and symbolism can be asked of literature. The new art forms related to literature are part of our sub-

ject. The social implications of our work need to be explored. The relations of English to other disciplines should be studied. But the danger is that we destroy ourselves. Between the antinomies of action and thought, sensitivity and intellect, anarchy and inquisition, there is a whole range of positions which are worthy of occupying a man's life for good and which unify existence. No account of the failures to reach these ideals should destroy our faith in them. If we must go underground we will go underground, but the torch of humanism should not be allowed to lose its light in a universal holocaust by our throwing more fuel on the fire. We may have to take to the barricades, but before we go, let us at least tell men that there is a better alternative.

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To the Editor:

In his article "Do Literary Studies Have an Ideology?" (May 1970, 423–28), Frederick Crews casts such a wide net in his attempt to attack monopoly capitalism, the cold war, objective scholarship, as well as current trends in literary criticism, that a one-page rebuttal can discuss only one point. I confine my remarks, therefore, to Professor Crews's plea that our criticism and scholarship should not transmute the real passions of the masters into "formal patterns," but should instead "reject such escapism and demand that works be understood, not as transcendent icons and refuges from the world, but as contingent, imperfect expressions of social and mental forces" (p. 428).

Despite Professor Crews's modish attempt to link formal analyses with "the values of capitalism in its monopoly phase," his argument is similar to that of the didactic critics, or the Christian humanists as Douglas Bush would call them, who for over twenty years have been attacking what were then the New Critics for robbing literature of its moral significance. Of course Professor Crews and his friends on the New Left would find a different significance in the masters than would Douglas Bush and his friends on the Old Right. But both groups would agree that literature is not primarily an art, like music or painting, but primarily expressions ("imperfect" to Professor Crews, but sublime to Douglas Bush) of "social and mental forces." And both left- and right-wing moralists blame formalist criticism for transmuting the moral passion of the writer (whether it be "savagely indignation" or Christian humility) into formal patterns of irony and paradox.

One answer to these charges, in brief, is that it is not the critics who have divorced literature from the passions of life, both personal and social, but the artists themselves. For whatever art may be, it is not simply an expression of what we feel in life. Something

must happen to the writer's feelings and ideas; he must transcend his personal feelings, his opinions and beliefs, so that they become available to readers with very different feelings and beliefs. In Yeats's words "all art . . . exhausts personal emotion in action or desire so completely that something impersonal, something that has nothing to do with action or desire, suddenly starts into its place . . ." (*Autobiography*, Garden City, New York, 1958, p. 222). Keats's concept of "negative capability" and Eliot's concept of impersonality and escaping from emotions are too well known to require quotation.

What the formalist or contextualist critics are trying to do is simply to help the reader distinguish this aspect of literature, to become aware of feelings that are brought into existence by the poem or the novel, to see, in Eliot's words, "what was *not* in existence before the poem was completed." And in doing so, formal analysis must disappoint those readers who come to literature for the original emotion or the moral fervor itself.

I sympathize with this disappointment. It is difficult for a young man who comes into the profession in the hope that here he can exercise his moral commitments without being bound by the dogma of a political party to accept the fact that the literary experience goes beyond (or beneath, as a psychological critic might say) any political category. And as a result of this disappointment, some of these morally committed people are leaving the profession; others are willing to throw out the traditional syllabus of great masters in favor of "relevant" or propagandistic literature. But the more interesting (if mistaken) program belongs to those who, like Frederick Crews, want to maintain both their moral and their esthetic commitments.

The attempt to be faithful to both commitments cannot succeed, however, if as Crews argues, critics try to "accommodate their sense of esthetic complexity to their politics." (None of the critics mentioned by Crews in this context did so. They were scornful of Communist critics who did so, as they were of Fascists like Ezra Pound who, in a way, accommodated his politics to his esthetic beliefs.) The only way to be faithful to our moral beliefs as well as to our literary responses is to recognize that they are separate.

By not asking of literature to do what it cannot do, we will find that literature can give us its own value. Each reader will describe this value differently, but if the value is a genuinely literary value, and not superimposed by our political or religious beliefs, then that value or significance must be intrinsic to the work—it must be an extension of the qualities that make literature a work of art. Consequently, if the literary work is a result of the writer's ability to exhaust his personal experience, to go beyond desire and action, then perhaps the significance of literature lies in its ability to

make the reader do the same thing. Instead of lamenting the fact that literature—as it is interpreted by formalists—removes us from the "savage indignation," or the Christian piety, that the writer experienced in his life, let us be glad that through the power of a literary experience, we too can go beyond our personal feelings and ideas.

It is important, of course, to be involved in the real world, and to march behind banners and posters with three-word solutions for our problems. I have marched under such banners and will continue to do so. But it is also necessary, if life is to go beyond one dimension, to step back (in our *minds*—not on the battlefield or in the polling booths), and experience life in a deeper sense, a sense that goes beyond our categories of good and evil. And it is only in art that this kind of experience, impersonal, outside of the flux of ongoing events, can take place. Does not this kind of experience have a value? I submit that it does, and even if it is less important than a moral commitment, such an experience fills a basic need for all men, even, perhaps I should say particularly, for those who are in danger of becoming completely dominated by politics.

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To the Editor:

Frederick Crews surely gets one involved in researching the "ideology in literary studies" of the American scene! He has done the world of critics a great service in making them "sit up and take notice" about the meaning of objectivity as it has been accepted for the past half century (or more?). The conclusion he draws, viz., that the separation from political activity is a surface attitude, a mask, for the actual involvement in support of the American system (economic *and* political), could be valid for any period of literary criticism, in any particular country, in the literary history of man.

Objectivity is truly a controversial word. In Mr. Crews's efforts to be objective about *his* criticism he has definitely supported the enemies of the American system.

Let us look at the origin of this and any ideology which has formed a prosperous and culturally influential nation among men to see whether the activity or the ideology came first. We may ask ourselves whether the downfall of the system was due to any inherent defect or to the defective heart of man, which, of course, is revealed in his literature at all times and is therefore worthy of consideration.

When man began to work on this earth, in order to exist, he followed a pattern of action which has continued to the present day. He found that the more effort he spent on labor, as well as on thought, the more he could enjoy the fruits of his activity. In addi-