
effects of competition. In the new community, the patient was led to recognize that his desires were unhealthy, infected by the pursuit of harmful goals. He was guided toward a state of release from every kind of attachment and from domination by the common emotions—anger, worry, love, and the fear of death. The passions, the emotions, had to go—or at least be strongly tempered. With imperturbability would come *eudaimonia*, or “human flourishing.”

For all her admiration of this argument, Nussbaum cannot help wondering about the price one pays for denying emotion. Does extirpation of the passions surrender some essential component of one’s humanity as well? Does freedom from pain and disturbance keep people from commitment to anything outside their own virtue? What is left to link a person to fellow human beings? In the end, Nussbaum cannot accept the arguments for radical emotional surgery or envisage a community that is both self-respecting and entirely free from anger. Emotion and morality are as inseparable from each other as emotion and rationality.

The men who founded the three great schools were prolific writers, but very little of their work survives. We are greatly dependent for our knowledge of their doctrines on later sources, particularly the Roman writers Cicero, Lucretius, and Seneca. The incompleteness of the evidence can make argument tricky, particularly when poetry—Senecan drama or Lucretian epic—must provide the philosophical argument. Though Nussbaum is an ingenious reader, her conclusions sometimes seem willed as much as argued. Moreover, she may be too determined to put a contemporary face on the Hellenistic philosophies and to weight them too heavily with meaning for the late 20th century.

Yet in the cause of an enlightened dispassion, Nussbaum writes with an abiding passion, which her ancestor philosophers would have forgiven in spite of themselves. More important, she restores philosophy to its ministering function (long since assumed by religion). In these fervent pages, it is once again the mind’s balm, the heart’s release.

Arts & Letters

THE ART OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY. Ed. by Phillip Lopate. Anchor. 777 pp. \$30

There is no subject too quotidian or too delicate for the personal essayist. It may be a moth dying on Virginia Woolf’s window sill, or Seneca’s asthma, or Walter Benjamin’s experience of smoking hashish. “At the core of the personal essay,” explains Lopate in a spirited introduction to his anthology, “is the supposition that there is a certain unity to human experience.”

The personal essay’s fundamental departure from the more traditional formal essay is its familiarity. The author aims to connect intimately with the reader. When Montaigne (1533–92) ruminates about a severely deformed child, he is imploring the reader to join him in his personal confrontation with revulsion and prejudice. Beyond this unique qualification, the form of the personal essay is as fluid as its subject matter. Lu Hsun, one of the most famous modern Chinese writers (1881–1936), often slips into stream of consciousness reveries in a discussion of recovery from illness that ranges from elephants to blossoms and fruit. Samuel Johnson (1709–84) describes the boarders who have occupied his room chronologically and methodically: “The first tenant was a tailor. . . . The next was a young woman. . . . An elderly man of grave aspect, read the bill, and bargained for the room. . . . A short meagre man in a tarnish’d waistcoat, desired to see the garret. . . . At last [the landlady] took in two sisters. . . . Such, Mr. Rambler, are the changes which have happened in the narrow space where my present fortune has fixed my residence.”

Yet no matter the form, the goal is always to peel away artifice and reveal human complexity. Says Lopate, “The plot of a personal essay . . . consists in watching how far the essayist can drop past his or her psychic defenses toward deeper levels of honesty.” The essayist reflects a moment, showing us “how the world comes at another person, the irritations, jubiliations, aches and pains, humorous flashes.” In the end, the essayist dissolves, leaving readers alone to reconcile the reflection with their own reality. “The trick [for the personal essayist] is to realize

that one is not important, except insofar as one's example can serve to elucidate a more widespread human trait and make readers feel a little less lonely and freakish."

CAMP GROUNDS: Style and Homosexuality. Ed. by David Bergman. Univ. of Mass. 312 pp. \$45

"To talk about camp is to betray it," wrote Susan Sontag in 1964. Sontag then proceeded to betray it at length, defining camp as "a certain sort of aestheticism" that elevates objects "not in terms of Beauty, but in terms of degree of artifice, of stylization." Camp offers a chance to be serious about the frivolous (e.g., Tiffany lamps) and frivolous about the serious ("Swan Lake"). Even though "homosexuals . . . constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp," Sontag wrote, "Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste." As a purely aesthetic phenomenon, camp remains "disengaged, depoliticized, or at least, apolitical."

For nearly 30 years, academics considered Sontag's "Notes on Camp" the last word on the subject. But in today's world of cultural studies, gay studies, and women's studies, new interpretations of camp are emerging. Bergman, a professor of English at Towson State University, and most of the essayists he includes in *Camp Grounds*, believe Sontag failed to fully grasp the essential connection between camp and "homosexual culture." Far more than simply a type of aestheticism, camp has a subversive, or even emancipatory, potential: It represents a form of protest against conventional gender roles. Camp works by "drawing attention to the artifice of the gender system through exaggeration, parody, and juxtaposition," writes Bergman.

While the most obvious example of the politically subversive potential of camp remains the drag queen and his/her exaggerated feminine mannerisms, the essays here bring up far more ambiguous instances. Jack Babuscio invokes camp to explain why many gay moviegoers identify not with char-

acters *in* a movie but with the personal lives of the stars themselves: Gays and those who "camp" understand how nebulous are the apparently sharp boundaries between play-acting and "acting normal." Pamela Robertson, writing about Mae West, argues that "camp enabled [her fans] to view women's everyday roles as female impersonation."

Camp Grounds is a valuable corrective to the blinkered aestheticism that Sontag's essay encouraged. Not only has camp been a useful political tool for homosexuals, but, as Bergman notes, our culture's "natural" and normative heterosexuality has always been one of camp's central targets. Unfortunately, Bergman and many of his contributing essayists often press their claims too far, ascribing to camp a political simplemindedness that looks suspiciously like the moral (or moralistic) platform of a trendy academic of the '90s. Camp can make a political statement, but it is not merely a political statement. If camp serves as a reminder to the complacent that all chosen roles are, to some degree, theatrical, the lesson should apply as much to the role of serious academic as to any other.

THE OLD MODERNS: Essays on Literature and Theory. By Denis Donoghue. Knopf. 303 pp. \$27.50

To many contemporary literary critics, the modernist tradition, with its emphasis on subjectivity and the internalization of images and events, is not only elitist and reactionary but dead, replaced by the more open, accessible, and democratic playfulness of postmodernism. Donoghue, who teaches English and American literature at New York University, begs to differ. The "interiority" of modernist writers, he argues, is an authentic and enduring realm of imaginative freedom: "Thinking, feeling, reverie: the pleasures of these are self-evident, they don't have to be judged upon their results or upon their consequence as action in the world."

In *The Old Moderns*, which contains 17 elegant essays, some previously published, Donoghue defends literary subjectivity on another front as well. Today's critics impose upon literature their own political or philosophical beliefs, often purposefully stifling the voice of the author. In fact, literary theory has hardened into such dogma that there's not much one can do with it except force

