

entirety. He captures the peculiarly shimmering, many-hued, often lurid lustre of the *fin de siècle* in England; but beyond this he gives us a love story between two men, André Raffalovich and John Gray, the distinguishing

characteristic of which is *caritas*, "dearness." He thus writes, ultimately, a kind of hagiography, with two good friends going to heaven in tandem.

Nathan Cervo

Chris Brooks. *Signs for the Times. Symbolic Realism in the Mid-Victorian World*. London and Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1984. Pp. 202. 43 black and white plates. \$29.95

Chris Brooks has written a penetrating little book about the "deep structure" of mid-Victorian art and literature, a structure he chooses to call "symbolic realism." Epistemologically, symbolic realism is the immediate bridging of human feelings and reflections and the given qualities of solid objects and natural forces and phenomena. Symbolic realism gives Victorian prose, as in Carlyle and Ruskin, a strong tendency to persuade, to make authoritative declarations, because of its synthesis of fact and value. In Pre-Raphaelite painting and Gothic Revival architecture a certain whimsicality and irregularity or structure may be seen as part of a larger grid of symbolism. And in the fiction of Dickens a remarkable series of imaginative "strategies" emerge, which develop character in relation to an increasingly symbol-laden cityscape.

Differences of genre or medium of expression do not affect the underlying epistemology. Nonetheless, carefully analysis of each case prevents the "real" and the "symbolic," the inner and the outer, from becoming tautologically one, at which point symbolic realism would stand in for solipsism, the pathetic fallacy, or a meaningless array of mimetic details in painting or architecture—all that the epistemology seeks to overcome. Like the much overworked term "typology," symbolic realism attempts to account for a pervasive mid-Victorian effort to establish certainty (or at least hide uncertainty) by overcoming romantic self-absorption and the

bewildering dislocations brought on by industrialism.

As a philosophical system, symbolic realism has a lot of flaws, as Brooks is the first to admit throughout the book. Often the Victorian effort to equate certainty of opinion with something "real," something objectified, goes astray. The terminology of symbolic realism is capable of very little logico-semantic development. The best parts of the book might be described as close rhetorical analysis; symbolic realism is less some ontological or epistemological truth unique to the Victorians than a certain category of figurative language often achieved by trial and error.

When, for example, Carlyle, in *Sartor Resartus*, extends the idea of clothing to mean a general form of symbolism, all material reality being clothing for some higher spiritual idea, the analogy is too weak to bear much interpretive scrutiny. The clothing idea tries to give all the "stuff of the physical world" an emblematic value. But Brooks quickly points out that Carlyle's use of "symbol," "garment," even "God," are "semantically elusive" (11). The same might be said of *The French Revolution*. The extensive use of the "whirlwind" figure to describe the force of the revolution alludes to the Biblical narrative of the flight from Egypt, and so attempts to invest a moment of liberation with the authority of the divine. Again, however, the analogy is too strained. Despite the intense "verbal pressure" of Carlyle's rhetoric, the realist and symbolist terms remain merely "similetic" (22). Instead of persuading the reader with an immediate effect and a perfect rhetorical fusion of description and judg-