

Humanities

The American Farm

Two hundred years ago, Thomas Jefferson and his contemporaries based their democratic ideals on the independence and self-sufficiency of the yeoman farmer. Nine out of ten people worked the land and there was a general distrust of commerce and cities.

From a nation of cultivators absorbed in the continuous flow of seasonal tasks, we have become what Jefferson feared—a nation of people "piled upon one another in large cities." But we mourn the loss of our past in thousands of tiny ways. We fill our urban windows with green plants. We check product labels for "natural" ingredients. We buy herbal shampoos for our hair and earth shoes for our feet.

We fantasize a return to the land, but fewer than five percent of us are employed in the highly technical and mechanized industry that farming has become. And only a handful of people are family farmers in the Jeffersonian tradition. What happened to the farm and what has its disappearance meant to us?

Writer Maisie Conrat and photographer Richard Conrat are former urbanites who now share a forty-acre homestead with another family in Northern California. They spent several years collecting and studying thousands of photographs showing farm life as it was, as it changed, and as it is. They believe that the story of the American farm is the story of America, and their labor of love has resulted in both a book and a traveling photographic exhibition. For all our talk of the past, no one has ever bothered to track down the photographic record, and the Conrat work is our first comprehensive visual history of farming.

Nearly two hundred photographs document our changing relationship to the land with the majority of photographers being presented for the first time. Sponsored by the California Historical Society and funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, *THE AMERICAN FARM* exhibition is circulating nationally, and the book has been co-published with Houghton-Mifflin Company.

Premiere openings in early 1977 at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry and at the Oakland Museum brought high praise from reviewers. Writing for the *Chicago Daily News*, David Elliot described the exhibition as one of the most movingly human shows he'd ever seen. Wrote Elliot, "*THE AMERICAN FARM* is tough-minded, terrible, and beautiful. . . . The beauty of the show is in its truth." California writer F.M. Hink-

house described the exhibition as a haunting experience that forces the viewer to think. He called it "a brilliant overview of the life, the land, the existence of the prairie, the plains, the valley and the clearing."

The story begins with the independent farm family which not only supplied its own food, but drew on its own resourcefulness to transform leftovers and scraps into the material necessities of life. Surplus produce was used as trade for the few articles which the family could not provide for itself. Access to markets was severely limited, and only a very few farmers grew surplus crops as a business.

By the end of the nineteenth century everything was changed. Farming had become more a way of making money than a way of life. The plantations of the South had set the precedent, and the invention of machinery to speed production made the race for wealth all-consuming. Land was abundant, and nobody bothered to maintain the fertility of the soil. When one farm wore out, people simply moved farther West. By 1870, the slow movement westward turned stampede, and the



Sowing grain, Maine, 1885



Farm woman, Virginia



Threshing wheat, 1908



Wagons for Oklahoma landrun

railroads and speculators grabbed all the land they could get their hands on.

The simple virtues of family farming were replaced by the excitement and promise of bonanza farming. Thousands of small farmers risked everything to keep pace, and survival often rested precariously on the success or failure of one crop. In the years that followed the rich got richer but the poor got poorer.

The collapse in prices following the boom years of World War I, the deterioration of the land itself, and the severe droughts of the 1930s brought the small farm to an end. Former landowners became tenants or sharecroppers, but even this tie to the land was tenuous as new machinery made hand labor obsolete. There was still a need for human help, but the need was seasonal. The migrant system that developed in California spread Eastward along with the large, industrialized farm.

The few small farms that survived have been constantly threatened by the technology and expansion of the last three decades. In 1950 there were about 5.5 million farms, but by 1975 half of these had been consolidated out of existence. What we have today is agribusiness, not agriculture.

THE AMERICAN FARM tells this complex tale in stark and spartan photographs of men, women, and children struggling with the land. The work of well-known photographers like Dorothea Lange and Lewis Hine stand side by side with the work of lesser known and even amateur photographers whose long-forgotten snapshots lay hidden in the backrooms and attics of the many small museums and private homes visited by the Conrats.

In eight dramatic sections of the exhibition we follow the farm from the ox-drawn plow lumbering through a stony New England field to the planting of sweet potatoes by slaves on a South Carolina plantation. From the triumph of an abundant North Dakota wheat harvest we move to the defeat of an abandoned Texas farmhouse. We trail westward past the homesteads in Nebraska to witness the Oklahoma land runs of the late 1800s. We see farm communities grow more urban as the farms themselves begin to industrialize. We see the sons and daughters of sharecroppers struggle with heavy bags of cotton, and we see the overworked and parched soil swept aloft into dark clouds during the droughts of the 1930s. Chinese migrants tend grapes, Filipinos cut lettuce, Mexicans pick peas in California while Italians harvest cranberries in New Jersey. Finally we see a high-rise henhouse with its 34,000 caged egg-layers and the gleaming machinery of today.

THE AMERICAN FARM is as rich in language as it is in image. Fifty-four text panels are quotations from people who actually lived the experience. The Conrats did not intend their documentary as an academic exercise or as an excursion into nostalgia. It is a commanding invitation to contemplate what we have been and what we have become.

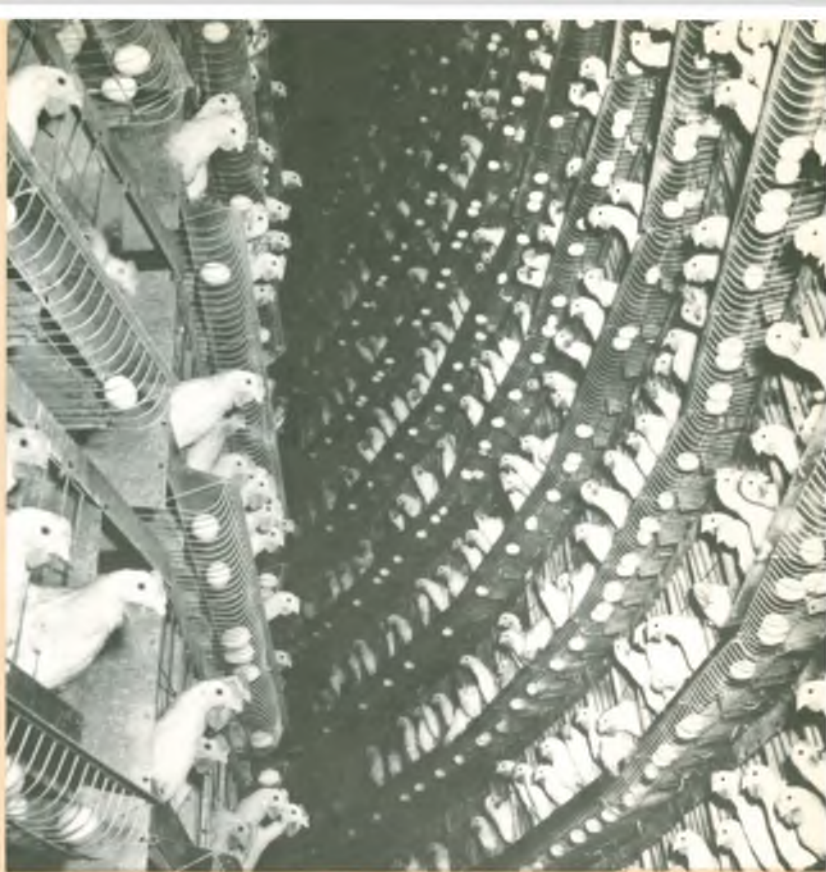
Today, 73 percent of us live on only two percent of our land, and *THE AMERICAN FARM* raises many

questions about this imbalance, questions that not everyone wants asked. Dr. J. S. Holliday, executive director of the California Historical Society, faced considerable opposition as he tried to make the exhibition and book a reality. He invested enormous energy and commitment in bringing to public attention this reappraisal of our transformation from a rural to an urban society.

THE AMERICAN FARM exhibition is available to exhibitors able to provide about 1000 linear feet for its display and to pay incoming transportation costs. Mounted on lightweight aluminum alloy sheets and circulating in duplicate sets, the exhibition can be seen this year in Des Moines, Dallas, Seattle, Grand Forks, and San Jose. Bookings for 1979 include a special presentation at the Library of Congress. A current NEH planning grant to the California Historical Society and the National Farmers Union is being used to find ways of getting the exhibition before rural audiences as part of a national education program re-evaluating the family farm.

F. M. Hinkhouse summarized its impact when he wrote, "If the exhibition or book comes within range of you, look it over, savor it, learn from it, but above all enjoy it. Your roots and mine are likely to be there."

—Pamela Brooke



Chicken house, New Mexico, 1970

Tractored out tenant farm, 1938 by Dorothea Lange





This reading list was prepared by the following members of Purdue University's Medieval Studies Committee: Thomas H. Ohlgren (Chairman), English; Thomas E. Kelly (Secretary), French; John J. Contreni, History; David Parrish, Art History; Ben Lawton, Italian and French; Charles Ross, English; T. K. Scott, Philosophy; and Jan Wojcik, English.

The Subject

Within the last decade some fifty Medieval Studies programs have emerged on the college and university scene. Once called "The Dark Ages," the Medieval Period, spanning the millennium from the fifth to the fifteenth century, was, in fact, more enlightened than most people realize. Although the Middle Ages suffered the miseries of plague, war, and poverty, it also experienced great art, deep spirituality, meticulous craftsmanship, and high ideals. Medieval Europe's artistic works, literary texts, architectural monuments, political institutions, philosophical schools, and religious systems are important both in themselves and for what they can tell us of the people who created a civilization which in large measure formed our own. Medieval Studies takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of disciplines, which in the Middle Ages were closely related. By comparing medieval with modern culture, we come to understand who we are.

Good Reading *All books are available in paperback*

MEDIEVAL EUROPE: A SHORT HISTORY. C. Warren Hollister. *Third edition.* New York, London, Sydney, and Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1974. 393 pages.

Successful interdisciplinary studies require a common base. Hollister's survey of European history from the fall of Rome to the Renaissance is a clear, readable account of the period. It records the shifting boundaries of Rome and Byzantium, the routes of the Germanic invasions and Islamic conquests, the divisions of the Holy Roman Empire, as well as the Crusader states in the Holy Land. He gives the reader a sense of continuity with the past by tracing, from chapter to chapter, the separation of church and state, the establishment of parliamentary rights, the origins of balances of power, breakthroughs in martial and agricultural technology, and the first glimmerings of the scientific method.

A Reading List on Medieval Studies

THE PORTABLE MEDIEVAL READER. James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds. New York: The Viking Press, 1949, rpr. 1975. 704 pages.

The Portable Medieval Reader organizes over one hundred selections, written in Europe from A.D. 1050-1500, into five groups. "The Body Social" presents the religious orders (the soul of the body politic) and the lives of noble knights and peasants (the hands and feet). In "The Christian Commonwealth," eyewitnesses recount the elections of popes and the deaths of kings such as Richard the Lion-Hearted. "The House of Fame" records the fascinating lives of Heloise and Abelard, saintly King Louis of France, Dante, Petrarch, Giotto, and others. "The World Picture" ranges from the customs of Ireland to accounts of Ghengis Khan. The fifth section, entitled "The Noble Castle," discusses music, medicine, and the arts. The anthology includes a revised and annotated bibliography and a chronological table of political, social, and cultural events.

THE LOVE OF LEARNING AND DESIRE FOR GOD: A STUDY OF MONASTIC CULTURE. Jean Leclercq, O.S.B. Translated by Catharine Misrahi. *Revised edition.* New York: Fordham University Press, 1977. 397 pages.

We usually think of the monks of the Middle Ages as kindly souls who fled the world for the security of the monastery's walls. The image of the monk from the sixth through the twelfth centuries that Jean Leclercq offers is quite different. The ideal of monastic life as laid down by Benedict of Nursia and Gregory the Great was an activist ideal. Monks were to pursue holiness and to seek God through meditation and contemplation. They desired to experience God rather than to know Him. Among the fruits of monastic culture was the definition of sacred learning, a new role for the liberal arts in Christian learning, and the development of a mystical theology.

WESTERN LANGUAGES—A.D. 100-1500. Philippe Wolff. Translated from the French by Frances Partridge. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. 256 pages. 13 maps. 15 colored and 38 black-and-white illustrations.

In this introductory survey, Wolff focuses specifically on the Romance and Germanic languages and territories. Following a brief introduction to linguistics, he examines the rise and development of Latin as a local language; then as the official language of the

Empire; and, last, as the "catholic" language of the Church and the tool of international scholars. Wolff also studies the evolution of Latin through the Middle Ages and its ultimate replacement by the European vernaculars. The individual languages are all examined as social phenomena, and the changing role of Latin is seen in relation to the rise and spread of Christianity, which gave language a new social function—that of convincing and moving the masses, thereby creating a kind of popular rhetoric.

THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIEVAL THOUGHT. David Knowles. *New York: Vintage Books, 1962. 356 pages.*

During the Middle Ages philosophy was conceived much more broadly than it is today. It was the most comprehensive discipline and included most of what we would regard as natural science, logic, linguistics, political theory and psychology, as well as philosophy proper. Since philosophy was a strictly rational activity, attitudes toward it were bound to vary in an age dominated by the Christian faith. Some churchmen esteemed philosophy as the handmaid of theology, while others condemned it as a threat to spiritual life. But no matter how it was viewed, it was at the center of medieval intellectual life. David Knowles' history of medieval philosophy is an excellent introduction to the field.

THE ALLEGORY OF LOVE. C. S. Lewis. *London: Oxford University Press, 1936, rpr. 1972. 378 pages.*

The allegorical form of medieval love poetry has lost its appeal to most modern readers more familiar with psychological descriptions of passion. But the ideas expressed by this love poetry still linger today in romantic conceptions of love, the idealization of marriage, and social etiquette that, though weakening, gives precedence to women. C. S. Lewis establishes the traditional interdependence of romantic love and poetic form as he introduces study topics in medieval learning: the influence of Roman classical writers; the early Church poets; the poets and philosophers of Chartres; the 15th-century Chaucerians; and the great writers of Italian romance-epic.

EARLY MEDIEVAL ART. Ernst Kitzinger. *London: British Museum, 1940. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966. 114 pages. 48 photographic plates.*

Since its publication in 1940, Kitzinger's *Early Medieval Art* has become a standard work on the art of the early Middle Ages, a period the author defines as lasting from the Carolingian Empire of the 9th century to the Romanesque period of the 12th century. While focusing attention on the development of European Christian art in this period, Kitzinger traces the sources of the medieval style in the art of Late Antiquity, which, while still pagan, formulated an abstract mode of expression that was to influence later Christian artists. In taking this broad view and showing the continuity of the Western artistic tradition from Late Roman times to the brink of the Gothic Age, Kitzinger explains the origins and historical significance of early medieval art.

MONT-SAINT-MICHEL AND CHARTRES. Henry Adams. *Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1905. 455 pages.*

For Adams, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres em-

body the cultural spirit of medieval Europe during the Romanesque period of the 11th century and the Gothic age of the 12th and early 13th centuries. With a poet's imagination and a scholar's learning, the author brings each monument to life, describes its history and appearance, and relates its style and content to contemporary literature and culture. Each building has a distinct personality. Mont-Saint-Michel is the sturdy abbey of masculine character, dramatically poised upon an island, and reflecting all the heroic daring and military prowess of Norman France and the *Chanson de Roland*. Chartres Cathedral, by contrast, represents feminine grace, reflected in its light and radiant form and in the cult of the Virgin Mary that was celebrated there.

DANTE: THE DIVINE COMEDY. Dante Alighieri. Translated by H. R. Huse. *New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962. 492 pages.*

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is undoubtedly the greatest of Christian allegories. Written between the poet's exile from Florence in 1302 and his death in 1321, the work, like so many medieval texts, has multiple levels of meaning. On the literal level, it tells the story of Dante's odyssey through hell, purgatory, and paradise. He is accompanied by Virgil, the author of the *Aeneid* and symbol of human reason, Beatrice, the mistress of his heart and symbol of divine reason, and Bernard of Clairvaux, the foremost exponent of the cult of the Virgin and symbol of contemplation. Allegorically, we find a description of a guilty soul saved through penance and saintly intercession.

THE CANTERBURY TALES. Geoffrey Chaucer. Translated by R. M. Lumiansky. *New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1948, rpr. 1963. 482 pages.*

Composed between 1386 and Chaucer's death in 1400, the twenty-four tales exhibit many types of medieval literature: romance, fabliau, Breton lai, beast fable, classical legend, saint's life, exemplum, miracle of the virgin, tragedy, and sermon. The *Canterbury Tales*, however, is more than a collection of stories framed by a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. The tales portray humanity as it is and as it should be, and the discrepancy between the two makes for Chaucer's unique ironic vision of the human comedy. Lumiansky's modern English prose edition contains a short introduction and select bibliography.

Suggestions for Discussion

1. How did Europe move from a weak and fragmented part of the former Roman Empire in A.D. 500 to a world power in A.D. 1500?

2. What modern institutions and social conventions have their roots in the Middle Ages?

3. Why is the term "Dark Ages," originally coined to describe a millennium of darkness and deep sleep, no longer held valid?

4. How did the struggle between reason and faith influence medieval thought and culture?

5. In what ways does medieval art, literature, and philosophy reflect the tension between divine love and human love?

Bibliographic Zeal...

"Shortly after I accepted my present position as a professor of literature in a medical college . . . I wandered into the Gross Anatomy Lab and there encountered a first-year student over his cadaver. He demonstrated its dissection, speaking of it—his attitude did not include the pronoun 'her'—with detached interest. Finally he stopped himself in mid-sentence and proclaimed what he called his 'schizophrenic' relationship to the body before him and, by extension, to his own body. He was coming to view each in two uncomfortably separated ways, first, as an object of detailed scientific importance with no concomitant spiritual or emotional value, and second, as a component of something he called human. And he feared that this attitude would carry over to his treatment of living patients."

The moment of truth here transcribed is by Dr. Joanne Trautmann, who teaches in the Humanities Department of the Pennsylvania State College of Medicine at Hershey. The encounter had creative

consequences. Writing in *The D. H. Lawrence Review*, she goes on to tell of holding forth—"right there, in the midst of all those dead bodies"—on Lawrence's knowledge and celebration of the body. "I have seldom seen Lawrence so well received," she remembers.

Here was the impetus for the seminar Prof. Trautmann now teaches, called "The Body Electric." It is devoted (as the college catalogue puts it) to "the artistic, as opposed to the scientific, study of the body," seeking to establish "an aesthetic of the body to complement our medical knowledge of it." Walt Whitman and Lawrence are the main figures in the course, which considers also the work of Donne, Gide, Robert Graves, and William Carlos Williams—and Richard Wagner, Picasso, and Martha Graham. The aim, often if not always realized, is to restore to students that awe of the whole human body with which most of them entered on their medical studies.

It was five years ago that Joanne Trautmann, then 30, took the plunge of joining the fledgling Humanities program at Hershey. In that time the department has developed some 20 new courses—in literature, philosophy, ethics, history, and religious studies—an experimental effort unprecedented in medical education. (After early funding by NEH—see *Humanities* for December 1974—the department is now fully supported by the university.) Trautmann recalls that "colleagues from my deserted ivory tower thought I was going into a wilderness." In fact, the interaction of humanistic and medical sensibilities has proved both challenging and personally rewarding.

Others of her courses have also been successful; they include "Images of Aging," "Vox Femina," and "Major Medical Novels" (*The Magic Mountain*, *The Plague*, *Middlemarch*). Admittedly another course—"The Copulative Verb: A Grammar of Literary Sexuality"—failed, "although not without some magnificence," in the classroom. Meanwhile, in a three-year project with a research colleague, Carol Pollard, she completed an enormously ambitious bibliography: *Literature and Medicine: Topics, Titles, and Notes*. The work, funded by the Endowment, has been published by the Society for Health and Human Values in Philadelphia.

The ambition of *Literature and Medicine* is worthy of note, on two grounds.

First is the presumption of its interest to medical people and/or literary humanists. It will succeed, perhaps, as much or little as C. P. Snow's thesis that there should be a literature component throughout medical education, together with a growing dialogue between medical and literary disciplines. The bibliography is "an attempted definition of a new discipline, not medicine through literature but something of a parallel to medical history or medical ethics," and

A teacher and his medical students: Woodcut vignette from title page of *Hortus Sanitatis* published by Meydenbach, Mainz, Germany, 1491.

National Library of Medicine



has taken its place as a new resource for humanities instruction in medical and premedical training.

The second presumption is in adumbrating the presence and treatment of medical themes in Western literature, ancient and modern.

"Backbreaking" is Trautmann's word for the task; the 219-page volume is the size of a telephone book. Full bibliographic information and a brief summary/interpretation is given for 1,312 literary works—poems, plays, essays, novels, stories, literary fragments, and Biblical references. These entries fill 151 pages, one-third from Classical, Medieval, Renaissance, and 18th Century periods, the remainder divided equally between the 19th and 20th Centuries, presented alphabetically by author.

The bibliography is thus quickly accessible for readers who have a particular author's work in mind and want a cue to its relationship to medical concerns—or who wish to check on whether Montaigne or Emerson, for example, dealt with medical matters.

A supplementary apparatus is a Topic List, a sort of index listing authors and works in 39 subject categories: Abortion, Death, Sexuality, and Suffering, to name a few. Thus under Madness one encounters not just Shakespeare (*King Lear* and eight other titles), but Aeschylus, Coleridge, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Melville,



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A doctor instructs his students at bedside: Etching, *Une Clinique*, from a series entitled *France Pittoresque*, Alexandre Lacauchie, circa 1840.

Plath, Sade and so on—altogether 208 works. Sexuality and Death each include even more entries. There is a By Doctors category memorializing the works of the Biblical Luke, Rabelais, Keats, Holmes, Smollett, Chekhov, Maugham, and William Carlos Williams, among others.

Literature and Medicine has its lacunae. Beginning →

...Pathometric Lore

Scratch a doctor and you touch a "poor, bare, forked animal" who is subject to intellectual and emotional storms, in kind if not in degree like King Lear's. Why then not offer medical students the chance to study Lear—and much else in Shakespeare that treats of human frailty?

So reasons Dr. Frank N. Miller, Jr., a senior professor of pathology at the George Washington University School of Medicine. For 11 years now he has offered a seminar on "Medicine in Shakespeare." An elective course, it draws 10 to 30 students who work from an extensive syllabus and research materials developed by Dr. Miller. Shakespeare's inspirations are pinioned in extraordinary knowledge of how individual destinies and great events are shaped by corruptions of body and mind. Nine physicians appear in his plays, and some 1,400 medical references occur there and in his poetry; in *Hamlet* alone there are close to a hundred such.

Dr. Miller is amply busy teaching pathology and updating new editions of his authoritative textbook in that discipline. But two other interests have always moved him: an addiction to literature, and a concern that medical students not lose touch with the humanities. The Shakespeare course grew out of his observations in teaching legal medicine, which so often deals with the problems faced by coroners and medical examiners, such as stabbings, drownings, and suicides. He began extracting classic descriptions of

such events, which he found superior to medical texts in their presentation of the surrounding affective drama. Examples: the stabbing of Julius Caesar, and the coroner's inquest on Ophelia's death. This led him into a broader examination of how madness, contagions, deformities, disease, and health are treated by Shakespeare—and in literature generally.

So it is that Dr. Miller also teaches (since 1970) a second seminar, "Medicine in Literature," in which students are invited to report on works by Dickens, Eliot, Camus, Hardy, and O'Neill, among many other suggested authors. Uniquely, he has thus anticipated the kind of development espoused by Joanne Trautmann in her bibliography, "Literature and Medicine" (see adjoining article). Pleased to hear another voice crying in the wilderness, Dr. Miller says the bibliography has enlivened his interest in such writers as Conan Doyle and Joyce Carol Oates, while reinforcing the philosophical rationale of his work.

Refreshingly, Frank Miller exemplifies the force of the humanities as an avocation—given the priceless resource of individual initiative. He has had "no particular encouragement" from his clinical colleagues. Although his approach is scholarly, he has no degrees in literature, no grants from NEH. But his enthusiasm is unlikely to flag. The next sabbatical, he muses, may well be spent in virtual residence across town—at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

—Patrick O'Sheel

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ZEAL (Continued from page 17)

with "Western Literature" on a blank slate the bibliographers had to scour far-flung libraries and old-book stores for hundreds of uncommon texts. Trautmann is haunted by the inevitable oversights in selection, for example Graham Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case*. The Topics List involved problems: Abortion overlaps with Pregnancy; Madness and Grief are often intertwined; and concerning Children and Age, Trautmann observes that "we are children whenever we are seen in relation to our parents and we begin some part of the aging process as soon as we are aware of it."

Literature and Medicine pays the price of its long interdisciplinary reach. It is looser—less "rigorous"—than conventional bibliographies. But it is provocatively suggestive, raising such questions as the nature of objectivity in medicine as compared to art. And the device of annotating each entry in accordance with the Topic List brings out often-unsuspected associations. Thus William Blake's *London* is keyed for Poverty and Health, Sexuality, and V.D.; Mann's *The Magic Mountain* treats of nine medical themes; Orwell's *How the Poor Die*, ten.

Response to the book has been limited, but encouraging. The Society for Health and Human Values has sent out 1,800 copies to editors, educators, and its own members, generating a public sale of 500 copies. Trautmann has received a lot of mail, most of it generous. An example is a letter from Prof. Herbert

Lukashok of Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine, who found the work "brilliant, a valuable reference, and fascinating reading"—and useful in planning a new literature and medicine course. This is good news for the Society, which reports that 29 (of 119) medical schools now offer some humanities instruction, up from 20 three years ago.

The Society has also supported Dr. Trautmann in a further venture, again with NEH help. This is a dialogue-group discussion among ten leading writers, professors of literature, and physicians (a number of whom are also writers) on "The Healing Arts," from which a book will emerge. She is pleased with the backing she has had from her department chairman, Prof. Vastyan, which gives her the freedom to continue her own research and editing. She is co-editor (with Nigel Nicolson) of *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, of which three volumes have so far been published.

Virginia Woolf of course appears in the bibliography. She is quoted, in the summary of her essay *On Being Ill*, on how writers who take up "the daily drama of the body" must have "the courage of a lion tamer; a robust philosophy; a reason rooted in the bowels of the earth." Because such attributes are also necessary to medical students, physicians, and nurses, Joanne Trautmann is encouraged to believe that literature and medicine will increasingly compare notes on the human adventure.

—Patrick O'Sheel

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