

BOOKS

Rage or Raillery

by George P. Mayhew

Huntington Library \$6.50

Reviewed by J. Kent Clark
professor of English

This book is the happy result of several years' study on some 60 Jonathan Swift manuscripts held by the Huntington Library in San Marino. It is at once a first-rate job of literary detective work, a lively contribution to Swift biography, and a significant addition to Swift criticism and bibliography. Although written primarily for professional scholars and advanced students of Swift, the book reaches the vast army of Swift amateurs, which includes practically all literate readers of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Tale of a Tub*.

As a literary detective, George Mayhew, who is associate professor of English at Caltech, traces the provenance of the manuscripts and places the undated or controversial documents in their biographical context. He succeeds, for instance, in establishing the probable date at which Swift composed an important portion of *The Four Last Years of the Queen* and in showing where Swift got the information which the autograph manuscript contains. He establishes the approximate date of an early Swift will and demonstrates how the terms of the will were altered as a result of a fierce controversy. He shows how scratch notes and cryptic jottings reappear, years later, transformed into literary satire and comedy. These discoveries, along with many others, illuminate facets of Swift's life and also throw light upon his methods of composition.

The general effect of Dr. Mayhew's biographical contributions is to correct the romantic distortions of 19th-century biographers and the pseudo-psychology of 20th-century critics. By showing Swift at close range and keeping him firmly placed in his 18th-century milieu, Dr. Mayhew lets us see a day-to-day Swift, who is more believable, more complex, and more interesting than the grand caricatures which have often been palmed off on us. Particularly valuable is the account of Swift's recurrent deafness and giddiness. Dr. Mayhew describes the illness which harassed Swift throughout his adult life and explains its effects upon his activities and attitudes. He analyzes successive versions of Swift's poem "On His Deafness," showing how an orig-

inal mood of despair and self-pity is transmuted into stoic irony. Equally fascinating as biographical information is the discussion of Swift's "Letter to a Young Lady on Her Marriage." It describes the Dublin social background, identifies the actual cast of characters involved, and elucidates some of Swift's idiosyncratic views on women and marriage.

Among the many textual and critical problems treated in *Rage or Raillery*, perhaps the most interesting is the analysis of Swift's Anglo-Latin word games. Swift, who was a good Latinist and an inveterate punster, made his first bilingual pun at the age of six and continued throughout his life to make wild combinations of Latin and English. By the time of *Gulliver's Travels*, he had constructed three separate comic languages with which to confound and amuse his friends. These languages have often confounded and seldom amused his critics, who have largely ignored them or dismissed them as the bagatelles of a senescent Swift. Dr. Mayhew has explained the systems, decoded some flagrant specimens, and pointed out the relevance of Swift's word play to his more serious literary compositions. In the word games one often sees the germ of a powerful satiric idea, and one always finds the fascination with words, the restless creativity, and the discriminating ear that make Swift one of the great masters of the language.

As befits a student of Swift, Dr. Mayhew writes with clarity and without rhetorical ostentation. *Rage or Raillery*, besides being handsomely produced, carefully indexed, and well documented, is a pleasure to read. It is sure to consolidate Dr. Mayhew's already strong position among contemporary Swift scholars.

The Character of Physical Law

by Richard Feynman

The M.I.T. Press (paperback) \$2.45

Reviewed by Kip S. Thorne
research fellow in physics

Richard P. Feynman, Caltech's Richard Chace Tolman Professor of Theoretical Physics, presented seven lectures, in extempore style, at Cornell University in November 1964, on "The Character of Physical Law." The lectures were recorded for television by the BBC, and a transcription was prepared and printed "to serve as a guide

or memory aid for television viewers who may see the lectures and wish to have a permanent reminder to refer to." The transcription was an extremely lucid, self-contained account of Feynman's lectures, and, since you can't keep so good a manuscript hidden in the obscurity of BBC publications, The MIT Press has reprinted it in paperback form.

In the lectures Feynman concentrates on the general characteristics common to most of the laws of physics: on the role of mathematics in physics; on the great conservation principles; on the symmetries of physical law; on the distinction between past and future; on probability and uncertainty in physical law; and on the techniques by which physicists seek new laws. Feynman makes his discourse vivid and clear by frequent examples taken, largely, from the theory of gravitation and from quantum theory.

The lectures are directed primarily at the layman, and for this reason considerable attention is paid to a detailed development of the gravitational and quantum mechanical examples. However, the careful attention to simple examples should not fool the scientifically educated reader into believing there is nothing here for him. On the contrary, by skipping lightly over the examples and concentrating heavily on the fundamental ideas, physical scientists and engineers can gain new insight into the character of physical law. Of particular interest is Feynman's discussion of the relation of mathematics to physics (chap. 2) and his description of methods for seeking new scientific laws when old ones fail (chap. 7).

A quotation which illustrates the flavor of Feynman's lectures appears in his discussion of the role of mathematics in physics (page 54): "If you have a structure [of physical laws] that is only partly accurate, and something is going to fail, then if you write it with just the right axioms maybe only one axiom fails and the rest remain, you need only change one little thing. But if you write it with another set of axioms they may all collapse, because they all lean on that one thing that fails. We cannot tell ahead of time, without some intuition, which is the best way to write it so that we can find out the new situation. We must always keep all the alternative ways of looking at a thing in our heads; so physicists do Babylonian mathematics, and pay but little attention to the precise reasoning from fixed axioms."

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Books . . . continued

Gobble-Up Stories

by Oscar Mandel

Bruce Humphries Publishers \$4.95

Reviewed by John Crawford,
lecturer in English

Oscar Mandel, Caltech associate professor of English, again uses the form of the satiric fable in this, his fifth book. His dry, urbane, and gentle wit plays on themes of tradition, themes close to those of Aesop, and themes

that simply remind us of ourselves in our own time.

It is this sense of relevancy that Mandel exploits best: A cow from Carinthia decides that her enriched diet indicates she is being fattened for the kill, laments this fate ("We moo in the void."), and directs her path to India, where cows are sacred. But in the town she comes to, cows are resented, poorly fed, and frequently beaten by the hungry men and boys. Our philosophical cow is left at the end of the tale a perplexed and bovine Sartre, unsure whether to return to Carinthia, where she would exist, "So fat, but oh so brief."

Death seems to be the ultimate foe

in Mandel's satires. In "The Faithful Gardener," Death must wait while the old servant finishes smoothing his master's privet hedge. While Death waits, he muses over the stubborn desire of the gardener to complete his life's last task and over the fact that only man among created things is unresigned to Death. "The fire that goes out, the fern devoured, and the fawn torn by the lion understand me. Only man does not understand me."

The brevity of these fables makes them unpretentious. But within their briefness a point is both made and won; and physicists, executives, and libertines do not escape Mandel's quick rapier-thrusts.



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