Howard F. Dossor (ed.), *Colin Wilson: The Bicameral Critic. Selected Shorter Writings* (Salem, NH: Salem House, 1985); iv, 271 pp,; ISBN: 0-88162-047-5; paperback; AUD $20.95.

As editor Howard F. Dossor notes, Colin Wilson is a multi-faceted cultural figure. Different people identify him as a "science fiction writer," or "a writer on the psychology of murder," and others as "the authority on the occult" (p. 1). There are other Wilsons; he has written on music, published assessments of twentieth-century psychologists including Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) and Carl G. Jung (1875-1961), and was a pundit on sexuality, film, and youth culture. His first book, *The Outsider* (1956), set him up as a member of the group known as the "angry young men," working class writers who challenged the class system of the United Kingdom (others included *belle lettrist* Stuart Holroyd and playwright John Osborne). Wilson and his peers were equally lauded for their insights and rejected as autodidacts; when he and Holroyd began publishing on the occult and the paranormal their lack of formal university qualifications and attraction to fringe subject matter relegated them to the "cranks" category (though Wilson continued to trumpet his genius in the more than one hundred books he produced).

This collection of sixteen short essays is carefully selected by Dossor, such that Wilson appears well-informed, offering interesting perspectives, and reiterating a fairly consistent perspective on the need for people to self-actualise and participate equally in freedom and responsibility, creating "a society with a high level of co-operation and creative sympathy between its members" (p. 11). Wilson has a fondness for obscure or little-regarded novels and cultural products – which is a form of boastfulness as the reader is unlikely to know the works in question – but he makes solid points, like "[t]he real problem of civilisation is its non-stop *distraction*" (p. 17) and "intelligent human beings *need* self-actualising activity as urgently as they need food or sex" (p. 21). Humans are animals with animal needs, but also have needs for peak experiences and higher consciousness. Wilson is existentialist and phenomenologist; his authorities include Albert Camus, Edmund Husserl, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Love and sex are staple topics of the angry young men, but the pull of art is always stronger. Wilson combines art and religion in a powerful image; "[t]o imagine that state of mind of the priests when they looked at the finally completed temple is to realise that the human will to achieve is a force that makes glaciers and volcanoes and earthquakes seem modest and feeble" (pp. 69-70). Love like art should magnify potentiality for both partners. The essay "Spinoza – The Outsider" is a clearly written account of the life and ideas of Baruch Spinoza, linking to him to earlier figures like Plato and Descartes, and to later thinkers like Nietzsche. Spinoza's Jewishness made him an outsider, just as Christopher Isherwood's homosexuality did for him.

A range of other writers including W. B. Yeats, Robert Graves, Valeri Briussov, Daniel Defoe, George Bernard Shaw, Emily Bronte, and the poet Ronald Duncan, whom Wilson thinks of much as Dossor does of him; "a religious mystic … a scientist … a lover … a farmer and countryman … an extremely shrewd psychologist [and] an excellent literary craftsman" (p. 196). Other essays delve into UFOs and violent crime, and the last two contributions are memoirs of Wilson's time on a literary tout of the United States, and of his life in Britain in the 1950s as a

roving self-styled intellectual and literary man at large. This collection of essays is an excellent introduction to the work of Colin Wilson, while erring on the side of caution and stressing his more academic outputs. It is recommended to all interested in twentieth century British literary culture, and in social shifts that created opportunities for working class young men and women to buck the system in the 1950s. This flowered in the 1960s, with the dominance of the Beatles and other working class and lower-middle class creatives, who made significant inroads into disrupting the aristocracy and the dominance of public school education and Oxbridge as paths to power and influence. Recommended.

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