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Book Review

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The Hieroglyph of Tradition: Freud, Benjamin, Gadamer, Novalis, Kant by Angelika Rauch. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2000. Pp. 249. $41.50 cloth.

In a world riven by discontinuities, one is somewhat taken aback when encountering a text devoted entirely to the cultivation of tradition. Yet the changes and uncertainties now faced by the West are, at least so far, moderate when compared with those of the early twentieth century as they were experienced by some of the major figures on whom this book draws, particularly Freud and Walter Benjamin. In its preoccupation with the retrieval of a meaningful history Rauch's work shares some concerns with another recent book, *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), by Peter Middleton and Tim Woods.

Of course, the cultivation of tradition takes many forms. The Shiite cult of the assassin, *hachichin,* or "suicide bomber" represents a defiance of change: it goes back in a direct line to the eleventh century. Little could Rimbaud have known how relevant for our time his words would be when he wrote, *"Voici le temps des ASSASSINS"* ("The time of the ASSASSINS is here"). For secular European philosophy, a more laborious effort is required than for a religious warrior to justify and maintain some form of continuity, but, in the end, its main enemy may also prove to be, not its rival, radical fundamentalism, but the conditions of modern postindustrial society. In other words, the suicide bomber and the philosopher struggling to preserve a link with tradition are both reacting, in their different ways, to the same threat: the loss of the past.

To extract a clear-cut thesis from this rich but uncompromisingly difficult work, *The Hieroglyph of Tradition,* is a challenge that one cannot be sure to have met successfully. Nevertheless, I will propose an approximation. The hieroglyph is, usually, a cluster of half-understood symbols, generally couched in images. Though those images are not as a rule verbal, their elucidation always has to be approached at a linguistic level. Because hieroglyphs resist reduction to abstractions, they retain an element of materiality, and are apprehended at least partially as objects, or, rather, as bodies; they are always "embodied." The hieroglyph is thought to arise when something too big for language has had to be expressed (215), although, paradoxically, as I have said, it must still be addressed in language.

It soon becomes apparent that a hieroglyph, in the terms of this study, may be one of a number of things. It can be past, present, possibly even future; in addition to its accepted meaning, it can be a literary work (such as the seventeenth-century German dramas of which Benjamin wrote), a work of art, a dream, perhaps even a metaphor. Its crucial feature is a quality of opacity that forces us to think; it must "tease us out of thought" (Keats).

The substantiality of the hieroglyph guarantees that it will not be dismissed or forgotten; it remains as a constant irritant; it creates discomfort, unsettling our usual ways of thinking (212). It is part of us, yet a part that we cannot account for entirely. Our necessarily incomplete efforts to decode it maintain in us a process of education, during which we revive forgotten elements of our past to match with features of the hieroglyph in our attempts to make sense of it, and create new ground in ourselves as we incorporate these sediments into our present situation. What we learn from the hieroglyph becomes part of the physical reality of our lives. (Rauch is less clear about the possibility that some of what we find in the confrontation with the hieroglyph may actually be new; in fact, there seems to be little room for the concept of novelty in this book, except as a re-working of the past).

The hieroglyph, as in its most obvious example, the Jewish Cabbalah (146, 204), is embodied tradition. It is not history (which Rauch takes to be, in its common sense, merely a recital of facts), but pastness is an essential element in it: we always recognize a certain historicity about it. At the same time, it assaults the present; it demands to be taken into account in the here and now. If we meet it fully, on its own terms, we may even experience a moment of wholeness in which past is presentness, a moment in which we are in the presence of, or even share in the nature of, an "Angelus Novus."

To re-word what I have said above (as the book itself often does): the constant education which an embodied tradition demands of us builds, through an always unsatisfied reading, a living activity of thought and adaptation that can carry us forward through life. (A Korean scroll on my study wall carries the same message in simplified form: "You have to understand the old in order to appreciate the new.") Now, although "reading" is obviously used in a broad and somewhat metaphoric sense by Rauch, the author recognizes that reading in the literal sense is also important, and she is clearly disquieted by the turn away from print in our time (216). The book ends before the need to grapple with this difficulty or to propose ways of overcoming it can be met in full.

The hieroglyph, as the carrier of a past that cannot be completely recovered, is always accompanied by a certain melancholy; its existence transpires beneath Nerval's "soleil *noir* de la Mélancolie." ("*black* sun of Melancholy.") This melancholy maintains the assurance of our mortality, but also the reassurance of our continuity. It calls upon us from the past to recognize what we are, and who we are, right now. But the touch of warning, the element of the *memento mori* that it carries, can never be overlooked. I will return to this topic later, in discussing the conclusion to the book.

Although Rauch's book deals with Kant, Novalis, Freud, Benjamin, and Gadamer, among others, I think that it draws its principal inspiration from Novalis. It also plays on the overlap between Novalis and Benjamin, pointing out areas in which Benjamin (who did not always stop to acknowledge his

sources) draws upon Novalis without mentioning him (133). In the course of expounding Novalis's ideas about some key problems in the book, whether the hieroglyph or the unconscious, Rauch also identifies seldom-noticed passages in Novalis that are of great intrinsic interest. Among the most striking of these are the ones about the alienation of self from self (130–31, 143), where Novalis formulates his own version of Rimbaud's later laconic utterance, "Je est un autre" ("'I' is somebody else." [Letter to Georges Izambard, May 13th, 1871.] For another relevant quotation from Novalis on the self as non-self see my *The Gaping Pig* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], 85).

In my view, the other area in which this book makes its most valuable contribution is in its exhaustive analysis of the deficiencies in Kant's "affectless" aesthetics, an analysis that runs to some fifty pages. (Thorough as it is, though, I find that Rauch's incautious acceptance of Kant's requirement that the aesthetic be associated with pleasure limits her critique). Rauch reminds us repeatedly that the body is the site of experience, not least of aesthetic experience: "the body is the place where the mind and 'physical' reality meet. . . . The body stores, so to speak, an unconscious knowledge that determines the body's reaction . . ." (79). Here, as in much of the book, I am reminded of another recent work, Alan Richardson's *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), which also argues in favor of recognizing the role that the body plays in the workings of the mind; more precisely, it argues for the impossibility of dissociating the two. Like Rauch, Richardson finds the development of such a doctrine in the period following Kant. For Rauch, the culmination of this movement is the work of Freud, and much of her enterprise is devoted to demonstrating the affinities of Freudian ideas with those of her other major subjects. For instance, whenever the "unconscious" comes up, it has to be anchored in the experience of the infant with the mother. I find this too general a notion to be useful in all situations. For instance, I take it as implicit (or partially explicit) in Novalis, and in Lacan (124), that, in order for natural speech to take place, consciousness must be abandoned as we surrender ourselves to the flow of language. We cannot be thinking while we wait for the pressure to move what is in the mind to build up, the current of desire to generate words, speech to ensue. But what is the "unconscious" into which we lapse at those moments? Is it sufficient to say that it is the desire for unity with the mother?

In a work as heavily theorized as this one, all the major intersections of literature, philosophy, and psychology are bound to appear and to be examined, one by one. Allegory is, of course, one of these; metaphor (though it does not come in for a treatment as extended as that of allegory) is another. I will comment only on the second, since it is not simply ubiquitous in the book, as the other is. In an interesting passage on page 95, the author asks the basic

question about metaphor: "why . . . would the subject, when perceiving separate things, indulge in a vision of their similarities?" The question is embedded in a long section on metaphor, citing Christian Wolff, Benjamin, Freud, and Kant, all of whom have, of course, something relevant to say. Rauch's own view is that affect must be considered the motor of metaphor. All the opinions cited, not least her own, are interesting and important. At the same time, there are recent observations on this problem, emerging from a different field, that one might choose to think about. What about people who are incapable of experiencing metaphor, not because of some emotional or philosophical deficiency, but for physical reasons? Apparently patients with right hemisphere damage, or, in some cases, with frontal lobe damage (Elkhonon Goldberg, *The Executive Brain: Frontal Lobes and the Civilized Mind* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 159–60) have difficulty in seeing the point in metaphors. I am not implying that philosophy or even Freudian psychology could have nothing to say about such conditions; on the contrary, I believe that our understanding of the metaphoric function would be deepened if we could incorporate them in a philosophical scheme. My point is that it would be advantageous to draw occasionally on bodies of knowledge and thought that fall outside the canonical circle of names and ideas represented in this book.

As I have intimated above, the book ends on a surprisingly sad and serious note. It may seem strange that I should say "surprisingly serious," given the fact that this book is nothing if not serious; in fact, it is an intensely serious book, and the depth of its commitment to its material is very satisfying. Most of what it is serious about, though, is theories: for a work that purports to be promoting the personal, the sensuous, and the individual, it is oddly content to remain within the circle of its philosophical vocabulary. This vocabulary is, in turn, derived from its subjects, as are the sets of ideas with which Rauch works, whether Freud's, Novalis's, or Benjamin's. In spite of this limitation, there is a powerful sense of the writer's presence about the book, but it does not express itself in formulations distinct from those offered by its sources. It is as though the author had poured all her individuality into the sluices of her authors' minds. It is for this reason that the end comes as a bit of a shock, and as a bit of a relief: although one can readily trace its language, once more, to Derrida and to Benjamin, the emotion in it seems to be extra-textual. As a modern poet (Ted Pelton) once put it, "Outside the poem it was raining."

Here Rauch speaks of the reader

> whose literacy . . . will enable him to recast names of the dead for naming and signing his own experience, his own life and thus share it with others.
>
> The form in which the reader recovers his experience is but a *persona* in language, a mask or dead face which humans can wear when

> they want to be what the dead were, a figure they may use to imagine and name their feelings and describe themselves to others. There exists then, finally, a dynamic relationship between the living and the dead; the living proceed to lend the dead their voice for an appearance, or rather an apparition . . ." (217).

The note of sorrow heard in this passage seems to go beyond its own language, so that one does, in fact, experience the text at this point as the "hieroglyph" which has been the author's goal and standard throughout the book.

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Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake by G. E. Bentley. Yale University Press, 2001. Pp. xxvii + 532. $39.95 cloth.

In *Stranger from Paradise,* G. E. Bentley shapes the elements of William Blake's life, poetry, and designs into an evolving counterpoint between the generosity of spirit that came of Blake's powerful conviction about his visions and his resistance to the truisms of the fashionable artists and their patrons at the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries. Blake emerges from a life of perpetual disappointments with the commercial world to attain the understanding that he, not his successful contemporaries, was the fortunate one: he communed with spirits who commanded that he "be an artist & nothing else. In this there is felicity," leading Blake to state, "I wish to do nothing for profit. I wish to live for art—I want nothing whatever. I am quite happy—" (413).

Meticulously culling material from earlier biographies, his own previously published works, and the letters and journals of Blake's contemporaries, Bentley deftly weaves the various strands of Blake's workaday world, his political context, and ultimately the myth-making that evolved through his poetry and art. We are given the most nuanced and intimate portrait yet of Blake at each phase of a life that would not compromise vision with marketability and was thus circumscribed by rejection and poverty, up through to his squalid final home on Fountain Street. The mass of information in this extensive biography, including vividly detailed descriptions of Blake's relationships with his contemporaries and the places he lived and in which he worked, the minutia of Blake's financial struggles, and the ecstatic visions that typically estranged him from his world but also won him a devoted following late in life, is made coherent largely through Bentley's use of vignettes, chapters divided into short sections, enhanced by 136 plates and their pithy commentary.

Dividing chapters into short sections allows the inclusion of a wide range of brief though detailed discussions of Blake's relationships with contemporaries, from students to patrons, some well known, others less so, many who became enemies and others who remained loyal friends. Blake's experiences with various patrons emerge as the most complex of his relationships. By contrast to Thomas Butts, the ideal patron who commissioned paintings, bought Blake's poetry, and remained a life-long friend, Blake's troubled relationship with the well-intentioned and avuncular William Hayley is traced in detail, from Hayley's attempt to rescue Blake from drudgery in London, bringing him to his cottage in Felpham while Blake worked on Hayley's commissions, through Blake's growing resentment of Hayley's power over him, culminating in Blake's well-known trial for sedition from which Hayley again rescued him.

Between these two extremes were numerous efforts of Blake's friends to introduce him to patrons, to send him abroad, and to include him among the well-established artists of his time. The diary of Charlotte Bury captures Blake's social awkwardness among the art world's elite, describing a party given by Lady Caroline Lamb that Blake attended; Bury, also a guest at the party, observes that Blake lacked "that worldly wisdom and that grace of manner which make a man gain an eminence in his profession, and succeed in society," while admiring "the goodness of heart and discrimination of talent" that made Lady Caroline Lamb "patronize this unknown artist" (350). In spite of such efforts as this, and that of John Hawkins, who proposed that Blake accompany him to Rome with the financial support of Hayley and Reverend Anthony Stephen Mathew, Bentley notes that "Blake never went more than sixty miles from London" (78). Most patrons disappointed Blake to varying degrees, from the admiring but unscrupulous Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, "gentleman-pupil of Fuseli, dilettante, essayist, and painter," about whom Bentley notes wryly, "Blake's skill in physiognomy was not sufficiently acute to tell him that the gay, the frolic Wainewright was paying him in 1826 with money derived from a forgery and that he would later poison several of his relatives in order to get their insurance," to those who left deeper scars (386, 388). Robert Hartley Cromek, the engraver-turned-picture-publisher, who approached Blake to publish engravings for Blair's *The Grave* and then the Canterbury Pilgrims, later betrayed Blake in both cases by commissioning Luigi Schiavonetti to engrave Blake's designs for the Blair commission and then giving the Canterbury commission to Thomas Stothard. Blake "erupted in fury," not only at the discovery of Cromek's betrayal, but at his "old friend Stothard," who made a design of "the same subject, style, and dimensions as his own which Cromek was publishing"; Blake memorialized his fury in a poem, dubbing Cromek and Stothard "Bob Screwmuch" and "Stewhard" respectively (300).

Blake was never so fully vindicated for the bitterness he felt towards the

art world—having begun early, with Joshua Reynolds's "well-meant criticism" at the Royal Academy—as he was late in life with the devotion of the circle of young artists known as the Ancients (52). This new connection marks a fascinating turn in Blake's relationship to patronage, as exemplified by Blake's friendship with John Linnell, one of the most loyal of the Ancients: because Blake was unable to repay Linnell for the money he had loaned Blake after the Job illustrations were paid for, Linnell commissioned the "sublimest designs from Dante," praised by Blake's disciples and Bentley himself as "Blake at his best" (421, 424). The biography too is at its best here, with such observations as Bentley's interpretation of the painting, "Dante Adoring Christ": "Notice the absence of Beatrice, his constant companion in the *Paradiso* representing the Church," Bentley writes; "at last Dante approaches Christ without mediation" (423).

In spite of the strength of such insights about both the poetry and designs, Bentley's readings of specific works are often hurried, appearing out of balance with the carefully documented biographical details. Though this problem is in part created by treating the works in very short sections, not only are the discussions fleeting, but the absence of critical perspective even suggests, at times, an adversarial relationship between the biographer's and the literary critic's approaches. By enigmatically challenging the reader to "winnow the facts from the evidence" in his preface, Bentley opens the biography with a disclaimer that it is "time to let the unmediated evidence for Blake's life speak for itself," admitting, nevertheless, that "evidence" is never "neutral" (xxii–xxiii). Bentley expresses irritation at biographical leaps made by Blake critics, such as the common assumption of a friendship between Mary Wollstonecraft and Blake leading to the conclusion—arrived at "more by critical ingenuity than by fact"—that Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and "Mary" are associated with Wollstonecraft (111). Yet Bentley makes his own leaps, such as the reductive comparison between the British government's paranoia about Tom Paine's influence and "hysterical governments [that] later demonized Napoleon, Hitler, and Castro" (112). Nevertheless, when Bentley returns to his discussion of Blake's reaction to Paine, he shrewdly suggests that Blake "submerged his distrust of Paine's easy Deism in his admiration for Paine's courage and integrity as a political radical" (113).

The biography is thus on its surest footing when it holds to its intention to reveal the life through the poetry and designs. For instance, Bentley connects the *Songs of Experience* version of "Holy Thursday" to the Blake family's hosiery business, since St. James's Parish was a customer: "Some of the poor were unable or unwilling to raise their children, and every church had records of babies 'Found by the Church' or 'dropped in the Lane'" (87). In the yet more complicated case of *Jerusalem,* Bentley traces the way Blake interweaves into the poem's mythos biographically-based characters; Hand, for example,

derives from the "pointing hand identifying editorial contributions in *The Examiner,*" a composite of the three Hunt brothers who edited, printed and wrote such scathing criticism as Robert Hunt's anonymous review of the 1809 exhibition and descriptive catalogue: Blake, he writes, is "an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement, and, consequently, the notice and animadversion of the EXAMINER, in having been held up to public admiration by many esteemed amateurs and professors as a genius" (313, 333).

What led many of Blake's detractors to label him mad was the corporeality of his spiritual forms, as seen in the negative reviews of *Night Thoughts* (172–73). Of Blake's designs for *The Grave,* one review criticizes Blake for giving "real bodies" to "spirits," leading Blake to explain that such "connoisseurs and artists" would "do well to consider that the Venus, the Minerva, the Jupiter, the Apollo, which they admire in Greek statues, are all of them representations of spiritual existences of God's immortal, to the mortal perishing organ of sight; and yet they are embodied and organized in solid marble" (306). By contrast to these attacks, the Ancients gave strong support to Blake's expression of the visionary. John Varley, a painter and astrologer, was fascinated by Blake's "Visionary Heads," convinced that these portraits of Blake's ghostly visitors were connected to the "spirit world of astrology" (369). Nevertheless, even some of Blake's most devoted followers attributed to him an albeit idealized madness. The Baptist Minister, John Martin, proclaimed that if Blake is cracked, "his is a crack that lets in the Light" (176), and Edward Fitzgerald stated that Blake was "quite mad: but of a madness that was really the elements of great genius ill sorted: in fact a genius *with a screw loose"* (132–33). The Ancients, however, thought Blake "singularly sane," and Bentley agrees, claiming that "Blake viewed the world from the vantage point of Enthusiasm" (381, 383).

Blake's roots in enthusiasm, or what Bentley calls "the language of radical religious Dissent" are at the heart of this biography that seeks to put Blake's spirituality at the center of his artistic development: Bentley traces Blake's evolution from "envying the successful, as he had done in his youth" to "perceiv[ing] that they had missed God's main chance" (xxiv, 363). Yet Bentley emphasizes that Blake was not "merely an enthusiast": Blake "transmuted" the dissenting Christianity on which he was reared into "the language of art," interfusing "the revolutionary Christian vision that was his birthright with the English literary vision in which he immersed himself during his adolescence and the neo-classical artistic vision into which he grew in manhood" (xxv). Bentley's description of Blake's enthusiastic late illustrations for The Book of Enoch elegantly conveys this transmutation: Blake "found an ancient prophecy which expressed his own ideas in Hebraic form," Bentley writes; "It was deep calling to deep, vision answering to vision" (429).

Blake's "shining serenity in poverty" during his later years inspired Dante Gabriel Rossetti to recollect a moment when Blake met a little girl "nursed in all the elegancies and luxury of wealth"; Blake said to her, "May God make this world to you, my child, as beautiful as it has been to me" (364). Given the chronological distance the reader of this rich biography travels with G. E. Bentley as guide, the anecdote is remarkable testimony to Charles Lamb's declaration that Blake was "one of the most extraordinary personages of the age" (365).

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Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War by Elizabeth Young. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Pp. 384. $47.00 cloth; $18.00 paper.

Recently I had occasion to visit Barnesville, Georgia, a small town about fifty-five miles south of Atlanta. A resident proudly pointed out to me one of Barnesville's few tourist attractions: a home owned by an actor who played one of the Tarleton twins in the movie version of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind.* My guide added, as an afterthought, that "some people in this town are still fighting the Civil War." Embedded in my guide's narrative was the internal division between the mythic memory of the Old South, embodied in the house, and the present reality of history for those Southerners who remain bitter over the outcome of the war. Elizabeth Young's *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* argues that the War itself has always been a multivalent cultural symbol that stands for contradictory constructions of race, gender, and civility (17). Although the bulk of her excellent study comprises texts by nineteenth-century women, she includes twentieth-century representations of the War, including Mitchell's novel. Young's readings of Northern, Southern, white and African-American authors illustrate how cultural typologies and literary tropes slide almost imperceptibly from one meaning to another. Second only to the War itself as metaphor is Young's use of the popular Topsy doll, which could in a moment be made black from white, and vice versa. *Disarming the Nation* goes far toward making us understand the subtle movements that make for topsy-turviness.

Young discusses texts familiar to literary scholars generally (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* [1852], now the *sine qua non* of any study dealing with nineteenth–century writing by American women), to specialists in American and African-American writing (Harper's *Iola Leroy* [1892]), and to those interested in visual

culture (Civil War–era political cartoons and a tongue-in-cheek *Vanity Fair* spread that subverts race and gender in *Gone with the Wind*). In turning from the fictional to the autobiographical to the visual and back again, Young makes a persuasive case for how the most divisive war in the nation's history divided not only politically, regionally, and ideologically, but also symbolically.

Disarming the Nation begins with a discussion of the traditional bias within American literary studies in favor of old canonical favorites such as Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) (8–10). Young goes on to establish the centrality of women's texts in Civil War literature. Like Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (1985), she makes the claim that literature contributes importantly to the way Americans see themselves (6). Specifically, women's writing about the Civil War reveals how gender, race, and sexuality are internally divided axes (17). The six chapters following feature brilliant readings of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, Frances Harper, Elizabeth Keckley, Loreta Velasquez, and Margaret Mitchell. These readings, which evince a deep awareness of historical and literary contexts, do indeed show how mutable these categories are, and that they represent the recombinant blueprint of a war that itself codes domestic and public concerns in complicated ways.

Chapter 1, like subsequent chapters, begins with a specific historical moment, widens the contextual focus, and moves on to a reading of the literary text(s). Young recounts the familiar story of Lincoln's meeting with Harriet Beecher Stowe, and his reputed claim that her novel served as a catalyst for war. She then discusses the meeting between Lincoln and Sojourner Truth in 1864 (a meeting that almost did not take place) in order to show the relationship between race and power. As Young writes, Truth "struggled against the closed door of a presidential house that was symbolically as well as literally white" (28). The familiar metaphor of the War as a house divided is itself made multivalent here, standing not only for war, but for the difficulties facing African-Americans who attempted to gain access to power. The contrast between the Stowe/Lincoln and Truth/Lincoln meetings also sets up the metaphor of topsy-turviness. Topsy, a character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* is the embodiment of a wild blackness in need of civilizing, and as Young and many others have observed, an object of white fantasy. But Young argues that Topsy also registers resistance to whiteness and its presumptive associations with civility (32–34). If *Uncle Tom's Cabin* served as a call to end slavery, William Russell Smith's play, *The Royal Ape* (1863), was a Southern satire of Abraham Lincoln and the cause of reunification. Like Stowe's novel, the play depends upon inversions of race and gender, and even reflects attacks on Stowe in Southern newspapers as a fallen woman. By turning from an abolitionist to a stridently pro-Confederate text, Young reveals that visions of a gendered and racialized body politic permeated the whole culture.

Having set up the figural grounds of her argument in Chapter 1, Young explores, in her second chapter (the title of which is "A Wound of One's Own: Louisa May Alcott's Body Politic"), the contradictory ways the War cast femininity. Alcott's fictionalized account of her service as a nurse to Union soldiers, published as *Hospital Sketches* (1863), and her well-known novel *Little Women* (1869) are the focus here. Through close readings of *Hospital Sketches,* as well as Alcott's letters and journals, Young shows how maleness is recast as femininity and nursing is made tantamount to soldiering. Chapter two reflects on how Alcott's text connects writing to the injuries of battle. In *Hospital Sketches,* "the wounded soldier produces the writing nurse" (84). Young men share their nostalgia for domestic life in these letters, while the female amanuensis momentarily becomes a soldier (85). The titular "wound of one's own" refers to Alcott's identification with male battle scars, an identification echoed in the illness of Tribulation Periwinkle, the nurse of *Hospital Sketches* and Alcott's alter ego. In *Little Women,* Alcott inverts the feminization of male soldiers by presenting them as masculinized women in the figure of Mr. March (100). It is the novel's heroine, Jo, who presides over the reconstructed America of the postbellum period, suggesting that the wild masculinity of battle has been tamed by civility—convincing proof of one of Young's central contentions: that the Civil War was, in fact, a war over civility itself.

Chapter 2 ends with the contention that *Little Women* is a utopic fantasy centered on whiteness (107). In chapter three, the terrain of gender inversion is muddied with the discourse of race. Elizabeth Keckley, an African-American, and seamstress to Mary Todd Lincoln, challenges conventional understandings of gender, race, and the connection between these categories in *Behind the Scenes* (1868), an account of her life in the White House. Before her reading of Keckley, Young discusses the works of two contemporary African-American women writers: Mattie Jackson and Frances Rollin. Jackson's 1866 autobiography illustrates how the Civil War functioned as both a public and private conflict. Frances Rollin, who wrote the authorized biography of Martin Delany entitled *Life and Public Services* (1868) under the pen name Frank A. Rollins, also plays on the margin between public text (biography) and private writing (her own diary). Jackson and Rollin are meant to show how the Civil War might also function as a setting for "warring texts" (118). In Keckley's book, the White House itself becomes the metaphorical battleground for racial and gender divisions. Chapter 3 introduces the theme of liminality in Civil War writing, which also informs discussions in later chapters. Keckley's own status is at once privileged (unlike Sojourner Truth, she has access to the powerful) but also limited by virtue of her race and gender.

Happily characteristic of *Disarming the Nation* is Young's revival of a long-forgotten contemporary issue that not only supports her case but makes for compelling reading. I am referring to the "Old Clothes Scandal," in which a

financially strapped Mary Todd Lincoln attempted (unsuccessfully) to sell her wardrobe in 1867 on a visit to New York. Keckley's text details this painful episode, and uses it, intentionally or not, to "unveil" the First Lady and subvert her position. White women ultimately become figures of "uncontrolled excess" in Keckley, effectively inverting stereotypes that saw African-American women in this light (147).

The second half of Young's book ranges from the meaning of cross-dressing in Loreta Velasquez's *The Woman in Battle* (1876), an autobiography that recounts the Cuban-born author's adventures in disguise as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford of the Confederate army, to the complicated semiotics of clothing in Octavia Albert's collection of slave narratives, *The House of Bondage* (1890). In her lengthy discussion of Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy,* Young argues that the Civil War functions as a frame for the construction of "black female subjectivity" and the interrogation of the "dynamics of civility" (197–98). This reading, in my view, is at the heart of *Disarming the Nation,* because it brings issues of both racial and gender identity into sharp focus and makes us see the "dialectic" between "War-formation" and "self-formation" (221). It also sets up the final chapter's complex readings of Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind.* Young's treatment of the text begins with Mitchell's own interest in sexology, pornography, cross-dressing, and vamping. This discussion seems largely unnecessary—her analysis of the novel's characters, especially the racialized brownness of Rhett Butler is far more interesting. Her queer reading of the text is best captured in her claim that "the best Confederate men in *Gone with the Wind* are, respectively, brown and female" (263). Young not only makes such claims against the ordinary interpretive grain, but illustrates them compellingly and proves them convincingly.

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Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination by S. Lillian Kremer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. Pp. xvi + 278. $45.00 cloth, $24.95 paper.

S. Lillian Kremer's *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination* is an extraordinary book. It conveys in rich detail the accounts of three writers who experienced the Holocaust firsthand and four who, as American Jews, powerfully explored the Holocaust through fiction. After finishing this impressive critical study, which manages to be scholarly and moving at the same time, no reader should be able to think of Holocaust literature as solely or even

primarily defined by such male writers as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, significant as their writings are. Rather, Lillian Kremer has demonstrated beyond doubt that women's voices are essential to the construction of Holocaust memory; without them our understanding of Holocaust experience (to the extent that such experience can be understood) is incomplete. In delineating the achievements of each of these seven writers, Kremer draws on historical accounts and memoirs, psychoanalytic monographs, the considerable extant criticism on Holocaust literature, and interviews with the writers themselves. The result is a work itself rich in narrative, as well as in insights and analytic detail, that in one volume vastly widens the boundaries of literature of the Holocaust.

Kremer's introduction makes clear the ways in which women's Holocaust writing is distinctive. Women's narratives emphasize supportive bonds among women in ghettos and concentration camps; they focus often on children and the attempts to protect them as well as on the responses to their loss; they document physical and psychological reactions to assaults on the body; they reveal "misogyny as complementary to racism" in the Nazi universe (8). Most significantly, "[u]nlike male narratives, in which women appear as minor figures and often as helpless victims, in women-centered novels female characters are fully defined protagonists, experiencing the Shoah [the Hebrew term for the Holocaust] in all its evil manifestations" (5). The novels and stories examined portray experience in Europe before the war; life in the ghettos, in concentration camps, in hiding, and in the resistance; and accommodation to life as a survivor in the postwar era. Kremer points out differences in emphasis between the two groups of writers, with the survivors representing more fully the Holocaust experience itself while the Americans often focus on postwar lives. Their treatment of characters differs, too, within these presentations; the survivors, writes Kremer, "explore the ambiguities and ethical dilemmas confronted by victims more penetratingly than do Americans . . . [who] treat victims while in the grip of Nazis reverentially, reserving their protagonists' shortcomings for pre- and postwar episodes" (23). Nonetheless, Kremer is firm in respecting both the choice and the right of American women to explore Holocaust experience in fiction; as her subtitle insists on the validity of both memory and imagination in creating Holocaust literature, her analyses of American and survivor writings attests to the value of both in coming to terms with the nearly unfathomable, for those who experienced twentieth-century horrors as well as those who, remote from them, yet feel their effect.

The novels and stories discussed by Kremer were written throughout the period 1953–1990. But the structure of the book loosely follows the chronology of Holocaust experience represented, rather than the chronology of literary composition. The first work examined in depth, Ilona Karmel's *An Estate*

of Memory, appeared in 1969 and focuses on the concentration camp experiences of a group of women. The last, Norma Rosen's *Touching Evil,* was also published in 1969, but it deals with two non-Jewish women who take on Holocaust memory while watching the televised Eichmann trial in 1961. The internal dilemmas imposed by "passing" (an experience much more common for women than for men, whose circumcisions betrayed them) are explored by several of the writers, most notably Karmel, Elzbieta Ettinger, and Susan Fromberg Schaeffer. Hana Demetz, in *The House on Prague Street,* details the "metamorphosis from assimilated Czech to despised half-caste" (101) of a young woman who, as Demetz did, sees her family and her way of life destroyed. Kremer shows how experience is re-created or imagined through narrative structures that combine multiple perspectives and often interwoven texts. For example, "Karmel invokes pre-camp Holocaust experience by interjecting and juxtaposing spontaneous recollection, conventional flashback, interior monologue, and dialogue within the labor camp time frame" (36). Marge Piercy's *Gone to Soldiers* incorporates "refugee interview, diary, journalistic report, dramatic conflict, and dream fantasy" (177); Ozick's *The Shawl* appends a novella-length survivor's narrative to a short story that details her most horrifically transformative camp experience, while the story of Rosen's TV watchers is told through the interlaced writings—letters and diary entries—of the protagonists. In exploring the effectiveness of these literary strategies, Kremer makes clear that they do not violate Theodor Adorno's "famous dictum, 'No poetry after Auschwitz,'" noting that Adorno himself had later admitted the importance of art in representing and commemorating suffering (29). Still, Holocaust literature is created from the materials of genocide, and Kremer does not flinch from the special critical questions it raises.

One concerns the interrelation of fiction and fact in writing about the Holocaust. Each of the three survivor-authors draws upon her own experiences in creating character and incident. For the writers who did not themselves experience the Shoah, a grounding in historical materials becomes essential if they wish (as they have made clear they do) their works to contribute to perpetuating Holocaust memory. At one point Kremer reproduces a passage from *Gone to Soldiers* next to its source in a memoir by Marie-Madeleine Fourcade, a participant in the French Resistance (188–89). The juxtaposition is reminiscent of the "parallel passages" technique used by journalists to expose plagiarism in the works of noted writers. But Kremer's purpose (like Marge Piercy's) is very different; at a time when Holocaust deniers assert that all Holocaust details are fiction, writers of fiction strive to ground their narratives and descriptions in authoritative accounts. When plots and incidents are so shocking as to be unbelievable, their source in memoir (which yet has its own limitations, as scholars have shown) helps to forestall objections of fantasy and fabrication. Fiction provides a kind of evidence of the way life is lived, and writers

of Holocaust fiction, as Kremer makes clear, recognize a responsibility to transmit the experience of the Holocaust with unimpeachable accuracy. In turn, Kremer's endnotes as well as her central text frequently present historical or psychoanalytic support for fictional accounts discussed.

In defining women's Holocaust writing as its own genre, Kremer calls on the works of male writers to show contrasts in emphasis, as in parallel accounts of camp inductions from Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's *Anya* and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*. Kremer notes how Schaeffer's description of the newly arrived, naked inmates, prodded, shaved, and harassed by SS men, "specifically genders the humiliation with emphasis on women's [physical] vulnerability," while Levi, in common with other male writers, "suggests that although men experienced the procedure as humiliation, their psychological and physical discomfort was not gender-based"; as Kremer points out, Levi describes "a loss of individuality and autonomy . . . [which, described in a more abstract way] assaults their personhood rather than their sex and gender" (133). Kremer's admiration for men's Holocaust writing is apparent, but so is her conviction that it only tells part of the story.

A feminist perspective is implicit throughout Kremer's discussions, but it becomes particularly overt in her account of Norma Rosen's novel and its critical reception. "Rosen's propensity for combining Holocaust images with those of procreation and sexuality elicited negative criticism," writes Kremer (219). But she concludes that such imagery of female experience is what ultimately links Rosen's characters (and thereby her readers) to the events of the past:

> Far from being distracting, feminist rhetoric provides the authentic voice through which Rosen's women understand and claim the Holocaust. . . . In an age of aborted dreams, an age of Nazi perversion, evocation of life and death processes in terms of children denied and children delivered is apt. Rather than criticize Rosen for her use of feminist rhetoric, one should acclaim her for recognizing the validity of this language to describe the brutality Jewish women suffered in the camps and to forge a connection between the living and the dead. (220)

Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination demonstrates both the distinctiveness and the significance of women's voices in Holocaust literature. Kremer's interviews with the writers give us additional access to those voices, and provide insights into intention and retrospective thoughts that are not often available in critical works. They also, in conveying the writers' participation, produce the sense of shared enterprise that has characterized feminist endeavors. This is the ideal critical study: it is highly readable (indeed, absorbingly so); its conclusions are astute, well supported, and grounded in

significant theory; and it dramatically develops our understanding of its subject. Perhaps most importantly, it not only defines a significant body of literature, but it also makes the reader eager to encounter it directly.

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Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century by Laura Brown. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001. Pp. xiv + 273. $39.95 cloth.

It has been more than a decade since the publication of the pivotal essay collection edited by Laura Brown and Felicity Nussbaum, *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Yet anyone who has attended a recent meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies or who has logged on to the C18-L listserv could discern rather quickly that the canon wars rage on here. Laura Brown's latest contribution to the field deftly negotiates this battleground by synthesizing the "old" with the "new," further entrenching her position as one of the most respected scholars currently working in eighteenth-century literary studies. In *Fables of Modernity,* Brown focuses on canonical poetry and the significance of specific literary conventions in a rigorously structuralist mode, while also exploring the production and reception of cultural practices such as petkeeping in a thoroughgoing Marxist-feminist fashion.

Citing indebtedness to a breadth of critics, including Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Stephen Greenblatt, Fredric Jameson, and Raymond Williams, Brown grounds her own work firmly in the methodology of cultural studies. Despite the listing of the requisite big boys, Brown's methodology is also definitively feminist in its use of the concept of difference—figured through gender, race, and species—to establish the critical category of the "cultural fable" as "a means of exploring the constitution of modernity in the English eighteenth century" (1). Working with rather than challenging extant definitions of "modernity," Brown defies classifications of the eighteenth century as part of an "early modern" period; this too starkly separates the eighteenth century from its entanglement with modernity, she argues. Indeed, Brown exemplifies and emphasizes the vitality and novelty of the period, insisting that its cultural fables participated directly and dynamically in the construction of modernity. But what exactly is a "cultural fable"? Though Brown never pins down a precise definition, she does offer some analogies and clues

to what a cultural fable is not. A cultural fable does not necessarily have a didactic function, nor does it serve as a rigid "system of classification" (2–3). Rather, Brown posits the cultural fable as a flexible analytic tool that links formal literary conventions and print culture to specific historical phenomena. It is more expansive than some tropes, more specific than a cultural movement (such as the cult of sensibility), and similar in many ways to ideology in its impact. At the same time, it adheres to a distinct, formal structure. With its definitive structure and potentially powerful, widespread influence, the slippery cultural fable paradoxically enables Brown to rein in what she sees as the all-too-often diffuse methodology of cultural studies.

Brown achieves the goal of more coherently structuring a cultural studies methodology by invoking a multitude of authoritative textual examples that persuasively build upon and connect to each other. This is particularly true of the first two sections of the book, which concentrate on expansion and exchange by exploring the fables of the city sewer, oceans and torrents, and Lady Credit. Restoration and Augustan poetry reign here, providing Brown's primary locus of interpretation and exemplum of cultural fable. The pressures of urbanization, both literal and imaginative, figure in the image of the city sewer and connect heterogeneity, indiscriminancy, force, and fluidity to the experience of modernity via the female body. In the fable of torrents, nationalism and imperial expansion, evident in the growing shipping and trade industries, take center stage, as does Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749). Chapter three defines the fable of that mysterious, changeable, and volatile figure, Lady Credit. Here Brown makes provocative and productive connections between finance—specifically credit culture—the female body, and the emergence of the cult of sensibility through readings of various cultural texts including periodical literature by Defoe and Addison, the discourse of hysteria, Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747–48), and Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). The first two sections of the book culminate in an excellent explication of Pope's *Dunciad* (1729 and 1743), wherein all of these fables interlock and illuminate one another (in concert with the fable of commodification that harks back to Brown's previous work, *Ends of Empire* [Cornell University Press, 1993], which argues that imperialism is represented in a range of eighteenth-century texts as undertaken for the adornment and edification of women). In the *Dunciad,* Brown suggests, a consideration of the power of capitalism to change the world consolidates in the female figure of Dulness.

Perhaps because of the convincing cumulative effect of Brown's reading of the *Dunciad,* the final section of the book, concerned with exploring questions of alterity through the fables of the native prince and the nonhuman being, though perhaps the most provocative, also proves less stylistically seductive. Here, the fables are not, to use Brown's own words, quite so "overlapping and mutually resonant" as in the preceding sections of the book, and the

connection to the promise of the book's title—an exploration of modernity—is implicit rather than explicit (43). Brown does not delve into how the negotiation of difference is a particularly modern problem; it is implicitly understood to be such. Brown does acknowledge that unlike the confluence of fables found in the *Dunciad,* the fable of the native prince, "does not analyze the modern crisis from which it draws its materials" (219). Here Brown moves away from canonical poetry to concentrate on sentimental fiction and accounts of visits from "royal" natives to London. I am never fully convinced that the fable of the native prince is a cultural fable and not just a particularly resonant trope. Perhaps this is a problem with the slippery definition of "cultural fable" more than the presentation of ideas in this chapter, because Brown offers a compelling argument that the native prince becomes an important model for and link to the sentimental European "man of feeling."

It is certainly true, as Keith Thomas and others have already noted, that material and ideological connections between animals and non-Europeans, especially African slaves, were also common in the eighteenth century. In her final chapter, Brown argues that "[a]nimals helped Europeans imagine Africans, Native Americans, and themselves" (262). The encounter with different species thus provided a way to structure the encounter with cultural difference. Because Brown is so adept at interweaving all of her points, I was occasionally disappointed when she dropped some potentially luminous threads in this chapter. For example, Brown notes the ways in which women, particularly African women, were repeatedly figured in European discourse as links to apes, especially as told in the ubiquitous "rape-ape" narrative, wherein a primate abducts a native woman. We appear to have the roots of the King Kong tale here. Yet Brown does not explore fully the gendered implications of this fable. Indeed, Brown also mentions the sexual connections between the lady and her lapdog, but ultimately these examples serve to illustrate the proximity between human and nonhuman beings rather than to illuminate particular connections between women and animality. The lacuna is notable because Brown earlier takes pains to connect representations of women's sexual energy to indiscriminancy and leveling in the fables of the city sewer and Lady Credit.

Despite my wish for more, what Brown does do in this chapter marks a significant contribution to contemporary scholarship on cultural representations of animals. A tremendous amount of important and revealing work on how the onset of modernity has changed and shaped human attitudes toward the natural world has been undertaken in recent years. And much has been done specifically to historicize these attitudes towards animals, by, to name only a few, Keith Thomas, Erica Fudge, Kathleen Kete, and Harriet Ritvo. Recently, a great deal of critical energy has been focused on animals in Romantic poetry in particular. My own initial investigations into the significance of lapdogs, a particularly pervasive trope in eighteenth-century literature, has

evolved dramatically in recent months thanks to much of this work, and Brown's contribution to the area promises to further enrich this area of study. Indebted to Donna Haraway's notions of the pitfalls and possibilities inherent in blurring distinctions between nonhuman and human, Brown also cites reliance upon critical interventions into the concept of anthropomorphism, specifically Adela Pinch's unpublished work on anti-anthropomorphism in Romantic poetry. Tension between exalting intimacy and the desire to hold species apart was manifest in representations of eighteenth-century relationships between humans and other animals. Whereas some scholars, including Ritvo and myself, have privileged the hierarchical impulse to taxonomize here, Brown reads such ambivalence as potentially productive ambiguity. She argues that while continued adherence to "The Great Chain of Being" may appear to reinforce hierarchy and difference, it in fact emphasizes connections and continuity, gradations rather than strict distinctions. Brown finds that the fable of the nonhuman being appears in a wide range of texts to engage repeatedly with the idea of continuity between species by representing a "leap of affinity" between the human and nonhuman being that bridges the differential gap.

Fables of Modernity is cultural studies at its best. Throughout, Brown carefully traces tropes back to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts to insist upon the distinctly eighteenth-century function and flavor of each of her fables. Her culturally grounded readings of texts not only elucidate their historical work but also their aesthetic qualities. Brown's stellar reading of the *Dunciad* particularly captures the tone and effect of Pope's scatological, satirical poem. We are told that the *Dunciad* provides: "A comprehensive vision of modernity that moves through and between a variety of cultural fables in an effort to engage the relations among empire, finance, expansion, commodification, and reification, and to project from that synthesis a visceral sense of the transformative effects of capital upon the world" (168). Indeed, Brown's meticulously evidenced and logically interconnected analysis gives us a rich tapestry that illustrates a range of eighteenth-century cultural anxieties, values, and ideals centering on the rapidly changing conditions that mark the onset of modernity. Ultimately, she suggests that a prominent, and promising, feature of cultural encounters with alterity may be a recognition of affinities rather than a demarcation of differences. While Brown characterizes modernity as distinguished by the ironic "yoking [of] . . . exploitation and liberation, brutality and progress, fears and hopes" (15), the fable of the nonhuman being interrogates the past in a utopian impulse to re-envision a more hopeful future.

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Led by Language: The Poetry and Poetics of Susan Howe by Rachel Tzvia Back. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2002. Pp. x + 238. $59.95 cloth.

It has occurred to me more than once during my own fifteen years of fascination with the poetry of Susan Howe that she may well be the most interesting and important poet of our time, albeit one of the most difficult and least appreciated. A full length scholarly treatment of Howe's poetics is long overdue, and Rachel Tzvia Back's loving and rigorous assessment, *Led by Language,* offers readers a clear introduction to and overview of Howe's poetry, as well as thorough in-depth readings of some of Howe's major poetic works to date.

Back distinguishes Howe from the language poets, with whom she does have much in common, and describes her instead as "an avant-garde writer located firmly within an age-old tradition of lyrical poetry, even as she subverts many of the premises of that tradition" (15). Howe's interest in language, its musicality and its mysteries, Back takes as a model for her own methodology in reading Howe: "I follow her words," she explains (4). This is no easy feat, given the difficulty and opacity of Howe's poetry, and Back begins her introduction by addressing this very issue.

Howe's poetry has been dismissed as elitist, so inaccessible and unreadable that only the most highly educated and eccentric audience would find merit in it. These charges have always troubled me, at odds as they are with what I have seen as central to Howe's project: an anti-elitist democratizing tendency to admit and preserve even the most marginalized would-be excluded elements in her poems—be those elements textual or historical. Back offers a helpful account of Howe's "difficulty" by pointing out that it is not the poet's intention to be "arch" or "coy," but rather the work's opacity is "intrinsic to her writing process as well as being an outcome of the thematic and formal foci of her poetry" (4–5). In other words, the work's very difficulty is precisely what might offer willing readers access to the work in the first place. Back insists that Howe's "poetry is propelled by an inner logic" to which an attentive reader can become attuned by listening, looking, and engaging with the text (5).

In addition to the difficulty of Howe's work, Back identifies two other motifs central to her project—motifs that inform the closer readings of individual works comprising most of Back's study. These are the role of place in Howe's work and her interest in history; the two are closely related in that there is a personal, autobiographical element in both. The places that figure in Howe's poetry are those that are central to her own life and family heritage: New England and Ireland, in particular. At the same time, Back finds that "the abundance of displacements, disappearances, and long absences" in Howe's work

define her relationship to place as that of foreigner or exile (8). Howe's historical/poetic project, then, is to mark the absences and exclusions in history in which she also, perhaps ironically, finds herself. Back's introduction thus offers a satisfying account of the complexity of Howe's poetics by tracing the connections among her major concerns.

In chapter two Back offers readings of three of Howe's works that engage specifically American themes and histories: *Secret History of the Dividing Line, Articulation of Sound Forms in Time,* and *Thorow.* Back suggests that to identify what is particularly American about these works we must look deeper than mere thematic or formal concerns; we must look to the most defining moments of U.S. history. For instance, Howe engages the interaction between self and other that is central to questions of identity in the United States, as well as the "Puritan voice and approach to life" and "faith system" which "revolved around intense uncertainty and the human limits of knowing" (18). Armed with these insights, Back carefully traces connections between Howe's book-length poems and the source texts to which they are responding: from William Byrd's account of surveying the border between Virginia and North Carolina, to the historical records concerning the New England minister Hope Atherton and the exiled heretic Anne Hutchinson, to the journals of Henry David Thoreau.

The works Back identifies as Howe's "European" poems—*The Liberties* and *Pythagorean Silence*—are examined in the third chapter. Back begins the chapter with an overview of Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, claiming, as other scholars and Howe herself have done, that Howe and Benjamin share an analogous "historical consciousness" (60). Like Benjamin, Howe is convinced that traditional historiography, with its smoothed edges and coherent, ordered narratives, can never accurately account for the past without violent erasures and misrepresentations. Again in this chapter, Back examines Howe's source texts in relation to her poetic re-readings of those histories. In the case of *The Liberties,* Jonathan Swift's relationship to Stella Johnson, particularly Stella's (gendered) erasure from that history, is of central concern to Howe and to Back in her reading of the work. *Pythagorean Silence* takes as its primary source "text" Howe's own autobiography, including her relationship to her parents as a child and the violence of World War II as a backdrop.

The fourth and final chapter of *Led by Language* takes as its focus the works in which Howe conducts her most radical textual, visual, and typographical experiments. These works—*A Bibliography of the King's Book or, Eikon Basilike* and *The Nonconformist's Memorial*—each take as their source text "a book of Western canonical power": King Charles I's *Eikon Basilike* and the Bible, respectively. Back's reading of these works is centered on her understanding of Howe as an "antinomian writer"—taking a stance of "resistance to

the hegemonic authority of the Western literary canon" (122). Back distinguishes an avant garde from an antinomian stance by situating the latter "firmly within a tradition as much as she is in defiance of that tradition" (124). Back makes some of her more salient observations about Howe's poetic method in this chapter, addressing the function of paratextual elements, encoded meanings, textual oddities, and drama in her work.

Led by Language's most valuable contribution to Howe scholarship is what also stands out as Back's particular gift as a scholar: the agility with which she traces references in Howe's poetry to the specific source texts on which they depend. Back attends as closely to these source texts as she does to Howe's poems, giving a reader the sense of almost retracing the poet's steps. Back's historical research is excellent, and her understanding of Howe's project convincing. Still, the study is not without minor weaknesses. For instance, one unhappy effect of Back's emphasis on history and source materials is that Howe's poetry itself at times seems to take a back seat. In addition, Back's organizational method, requiring her to classify Howe's works into three distinct groups to accommodate her chapter themes, is not without limitations. In particular, the theoretical framework of historical materialism that begins chapter three seems equally relevant to the works discussed in chapter two. Similarly, Howe's "antinomian stance" described in chapter four is every bit as helpful in situating her vis-à-vis the "American" works treated earlier in the book. And what, exactly, makes *Pythagorean Silence* a particularly "European" work is not made entirely clear by Back in the course of her discussion of that work in chapter three. The writing itself is consistently clean and clear, though in contrast to the highly readable introduction, the later chapters tend to feel a bit bogged or dense in places, an effect no doubt of the consistently close readings which are, ironically, just what make these later chapters so valuable.

Led by Language is a carefully written and exquisitely detailed account of Susan Howe's poetry. I came away from the book with an even deeper appreciation of a poet whose work has more than once been the subject of my own scholarship. Back's study is instructive and inspiring, sending me once again to the tattered volumes of Susan Howe's poetry in my bookcase, to encounter her complex music with fresh ears and insight.

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Edward Abbey: A Life by James M. Cahalan. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001. Pp. xv + 357. $27.95 cloth.

James M. Cahalan sets the agenda and the tone of his detailed biography of Edward Abbey in the first four sentences of his introduction, "From Home to Oracle." He writes: "This is a book in which I seek to separate fact from fiction and reality from myth. *I have to tell readers* [my italics] that Edward Abbey was not born in Home, Pennsylvania; he resided in several other places before his family moved to Home. And he never lived in Oracle, Arizona. Yet he convinced *almost everyone* [my italics] that he had been 'born in Home' and 'lived in Oracle'" [xi]. Later Professor Cahalan announces: "Abbey *knew* [my italics] that he had not been born in Home" [xi]. As if there were any doubts left, Cahalan continues: "My intention is not to perpetuate the mythology surrounding Abbey, but to examine it and to understand the actual man and his work. . . . I intend and hope that this book is useful to readers who are already knowledgeable about Abbey and want to know more as well as to others whose impressions (whether positive or negative) may be too simple and in need of correction or complication" (xii). Cahalan goes on to reveal to all of these potential readers that there were two Edward Abbeys—the public and the private. And while Cahalan admits he never knew Abbey personally—a strength which he believes will make him objective or "at least" impartial—he states "he did get to know Abbey intimately by studying everything" in his research (xii–xiv).

So who will benefit from this gradually paced demythologizing of one of the most legendary and deliberately paradoxical writers and personalities in recent American letters? As Cahalan says, everyone who has an interest in the subject will benefit from his labor and its results. On that basis *Edward Abbey: A Life* is to be recommended to anyone who knows of and enjoys Abbey and his work, but the biography is as much a research tool as *A Life* to be dipped into with the help of over eighty pages of excellent notes, bibliographies, acknowledgments and an index provided by the scholar. But can this not particularly critical biography be read with pleasure, let alone enthusiasm? Probably not by its primary audience who bring their own kinds of enthusiasm to its subject, and unfortunately not by many in its secondary audience who perhaps would have read little or no Abbey beforehand. That makes the biography a disappointment but not without the kind of usefulness the author clearly intended.

The book's organization into ten chapters is chronological as would be expected. Every reader will have to decide which chapters are the most interesting and insightful. Chapters two through four (27–96), covering Abbey's years of development as a writer and less so his maturation as a person, are the least interesting despite Cahalan's efforts to make them more than just informational. He calls attention to how the Southwest discovered and explored by Abbey in the 1950s barely exists today and how Abbey can be related as

much to the culture of the Beat writers of that period as to the classic naturalists and environmentalists with whom he is normally associated.

On the other hand I found Cahalan's first and last chapters, "The Boy from Home: 1927–1944" on Abbey's parents, his siblings and his upbringing (3–26) and "One Life at a Time, Please: 1985–1989" (233–61) on the writing of *The Fool's Progress* and his approaching death the best written and the most moving. Here the biographer manages to exceed his intended purpose of stating objectively only the facts by revealing his own deep feelings for Abbey. Cahalan who is a Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania lives and writes in the midst of the original Abbey Country and he makes one of his truest contributions to Abbey's story when he reinforces how much Abbey's Appalachian origins and his early nurturing contributed to his persona and his development as an artist. In addition to having been associated at least tangentially with Abbey's home environment Cahalan also keeps a clear focus at the beginning and throughout the biography on Abbey's paradoxical yearnings for stability and order in his life and work even as he thought of and represented himself as the personification of the anarchic.

Other solid portions of the book include chapter five, "Writing the Wild: 1965–1970," (97–127) on *Desert Solitaire* and its reception, still one of the most remarkable stories of how a single book affected readers in the last half-century, and chapters seven through nine (150–232) covering the most intentionally controversial period, 1974–1985, of Abbey's life. As Cahalan points out almost every reader of *Desert Solitaire* who discovered the book in 1968 has a personal recollection about reading it. Without relating my own story—which is no more or less significant than those of other early readers—I feel that Cahalan recaptures the excitement of those days when the existence of Abbey's book and its protests were spread by word of mouth from reader to reader. The writing, the publishing and the initial reception of *Desert Solitaire* remain one of the classic stories of how a single book entered the public consciousness in recent times. Cahalan tells the story well and adds to it.

Chapters seven through nine cover Abbey as the Bard, first of Moab, then of Tucson, and finally as the deliberate rabble rouser and controversialist. Unsurprisingly Cahalan in his Baconian search for objectivity and completeness gathers and repeats laboriously the accomplishments, disappointments and inconsistencies as well as the myths that will continue to surround Abbey if his books are going to be read in the future. Accordingly, Cahalan does yeoman's work both in correcting Abbey's storied inaccuracies—intentional and unintentional—and in tracing and summarizing Abbey's adaptations of his nonfiction from magazine publication to book publication. Chapter eight is particularly interesting because it contains the parallel and continual narrative of Abbey's complex and, of course, contradictory relationships with college and university education as controversial student, teacher and academic guru.

Cahalan brings out that the motif of Abbey in and out of the academy serves as a lasting theme tying the various lives of the author together in surprising and significant ways. Cahalan pulls together here important personal information heretofore scattered except for the excellent memorial, *Resist Much, Obey Little,* eds. James R. Hepworth and Gregory McNamee (Harbinger House, 1985, reprinted, 1989; Sierra Club, revised, 1996). Cahalan has begun to make a case here, that Abbey, the man of books and representative of writers and writing, may eventually rival, if not overshadow, the environmental controversialist whose specific contributions to addressing the problems of society and the environment inevitably will become dated. Does this mean Abbey the novelist will outlast Abbey the activist-essayist? Probably, at least in the case of the strongest of the novels, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *The Fool's Progress,* for both of which Cahalan makes an efficient, if subdued, case.

Cahalan's conclusion, "Waking a Legacy" (262–76), on the status of Abbey's lasting reputation and on some of the key issues needing to be addressed further is an effective summing up of where we are and where we need to go next.

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William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt: The Continuing Dialogue by Payson G. Gates. Edited and annotated, Eleanor M. Gates. Essex, Conn.: Falls River Publications, 2000. Pp. xv + 376. $22.50 paper.

This is the second book edited by Eleanor Gates to emerge in as many years, both of which draw on her father Payson G. Gates's mid-century Romantic scholarship and—more importantly—on his excellent collection of holograph letters and other primary materials. The first of these two books, *Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters* (1998), greatly enlarged the Hunt canon by making available a selection of 422 of his letters (along with fourteen Hazlitt letters), many previously unpublished and all complete with well-researched headnotes. Such a book has therefore already found an indispensable place on the shelves of most university libraries. Whether the present book will be found equally important, however, is much less certain. It does have strengths that make it worthwhile to consult as a supplement to currently available biographies of Hunt and Hazlitt, offering adjustments to our perspective on certain events made possible by reference to previously unpublished letters. As its editor also points out, "there is still no study specifically devoted to the

Hunt-Hazlitt relationship [and] [Payson] Gates's is in fact the first work to explore this in any systematic fashion" (xiv). However, her subsequent claim that the book "as such fills a large gap" is somewhat overstated (xiv). To match such a claim, one might imagine a study of the mutual influence of Hunt and Hazlitt that attempts to situate this relationship along some of the more intriguing fault-lines of early nineteenth-century struggles for political and ideological authority mapped out by the mass of recent scholarship in this area. Instead, we have here a more traditional biographical narrative—albeit a dual one—that employs a strikingly unself-conscious Romantic style, a style that at its most pronounced (in the opening and closing chapters of the book) presents something of a period piece, of more interest to a history of literary biography than to the current study of these two writers. However, if this strong flavor of anachronism can be accommodated, there does remain a core of interest to be gleaned in the details of a story that pairs these two writers in a "Continuing Dialogue," and in the way Eleanor Gates's more than 800 endnotes double the trope of dialogue by working hard to modernize her father's text, often along the way providing useful checklists of primary sources (both old and new) for key biographical details.

If nothing else, Payson Gates's narrative registers the shock of difference created by the utter transformation of critical discourse over the last half-century, in particular by throwing into vivid negative relief the prevailing convention of avoiding at all costs what McGann has famously called an "uncritical absorption in romanticism's own self-representations" (*The Romantic Ideology* 1). Consider the following passage from Gates's first chapter, entitled "When the World Was New":

> Whatever the subject, Hunt is well-nigh perfect in the dual role of genial companion and guide par excellence in matters literary—at once the friendly essayist who comes to the reader's fireside and chats with him in the most entertaining fashion, and the discerning and sympathetic critic whose exquisite taste and wealth of knowledge admirably qualify him to select and interpret the works of others. It is no wonder that Charles Lamb called him "matchless as a fire-side companion." (9)

The echo of Roosevelt's "fireside chats" situates this discourse in the postwar "politics of vision" that did so much to produce the "Romantic Ideology" in America. At what other period, one might ask, would Hazlitt be described as "healthily liberal" in an "unregenerate age" (6), or could one risk the unfettered Keatsian hyperbole of the assertion "At his best, Hazlitt is unsurpassed in the whole realm of English literature" (6)? One other example of this style will suffice, in which we observe the construction of Romanticism as a secular faith amidst the new set of postwar global fears:

> Hazlitt placed his head and heart at the service of Freedom, but his soul worshipped at another shrine. Just as the perplexed and weary pilgrim turns to the silent church sanctuary for a respite from troubled thoughts and a renewal of the bonds of faith, so Hazlitt sought spiritual regeneration and a refuge from worldly strife in communion with Nature:
>
> . . . for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us. . . . (200)

It is worth quoting this entire passage to observe the seamless movement from prose to poetry, from Hazlitt to Wordsworth, in an unmarked amplification of the term "Nature" that mimics Hazlitt's own use of quotation as a kind of secular scripture, yet in such a way as to remind us that our own ready recognition of these lines from *Tintern Abbey* is due precisely to the proselytizing efforts of such mid-century (re-)inventors of "Romanticism."

Eleanor Gates's role in this instance is to provide the obligatory line reference in the form of an endnote (343n77), but elsewhere, and more interestingly, she enters into a kind of dialogue with Payson Gates's narrative. When it is said, for example, that Leigh Hunt's father, while practising law as a Tory loyalist in pre-Revolution Philadelphia, was "carted about town, stoned, thrown into prison, smuggled out, obliged to forsake his wife and children and take refuge aboard one of this father-in-law's vessels bound for the West Indies" (10), an endnote points out that "A rather less heroic account of Isaac Hunt's conduct is given in *Notes and Queries,* Aug 11. 1860, pp. 104–5," going on to provide a lengthy quote from one of the elder Hunt's anti-Painite pamphlets of 1791, and then adding the nicely ironic suggestion that "In many of Isaac Hunt's spirited and uninhibited remarks and arguments one can easily anticipate the future political editor of *The Examiner*" (213–14, n17). Elsewhere, a passage is quoted from Leigh Hunt's unpublished review of Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* that is critical of Hazlitt's lack of sympathy for Shelley, and Payson Gates notes that "Whether this formed part of the 'sketch' read by Hazlitt in Florence is unclear" (126). The endnote answers "But it seems unlikely in view of Hazlitt's later allusions to the sketch in an 1828 essay (*Works,* XVII, 317–18) and the fact that this portion of Hunt's unpublished review *did* find its way into the *Lord Byron* book," thus correcting a subsequent implication in

the main narrative that all of Hunt's remarks about Hazlitt had been cancelled from *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (284 n109).

Author and editor combine at several points to refine the biographical record by drawing on the Payson G. Gates Collection of manuscripts. This collection contains, for example, De Quincey's copy of Hazlitt's 1805 *Principles of Human Action,* which "bears evidence of a minute examination of the work and numerous disagreements with the author's statements" (116). This intriguing detail is then amplified in the endnote by provision of a representative piece of De Quincey's marginalia and a checklist of his subsequent references to Hazlitt's book in which he downplays the intensity of his original engagement with it. The Gates Collection even challenges the redoubtable Stanley Jones at his own superb game of meticulous biographical details: where Jones had thought the "sole evidence of direct contact between [actor and playwright John Howard] Payne and Hazlitt" was a letter of February 1819 (qtd. 236 n19), the Gates Collection contains a copy of Hazlitt's *A View of the English Stage* inscribed to Payne in June of 1818. Perhaps the most important detail of this kind involves an expansion of the Hazlitt canon with evidence that "Hazlitt . . . organized and drastically revised the papers that became Northcote's *Life of Titian* (1830), which, we learn from Lamb's letter to Edward Moxon in June of 1829, was then 'in the hands, and entirely at the disposal of Mr Hazlitt, who has engaged to see it thro' the press'" (138). Lamb's previously unpublished letter in the Gates Collection is reproduced in full in an Appendix, while a convincing case is made in the notes that "Hazlitt's son was quite correct in assigning a large share of the two-volume work of 1830 to his father" (295 n44), thus overturning the judgments of both Geoffrey Keynes and P. P. Howe, who held the book to be firmly outside the Hazlitt canon.

These details combine on a somewhat larger scale to make good Eleanor Gates's claim that "a parallel presentation" of the lives of Hazlitt and Hunt provides a "useful" perspective on certain events (x). Their disagreement over Shelley, for example, is given more ample coverage than in other biographies, as is their reconciliation and interaction in the late 1820s, and Hunt's post-1830 retrospective writings on Hazlitt. Eleanor Gates's endnotes are particularly strong in returning to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century sources (witness the *Notes and Queries* reference to Isaac Hunt above); these sources, she points out, "often contain information not available elsewhere and which serve as a testament to the interest (now happily reviving) taken by earlier generations in Leigh Hunt and his associates" (xiii). Two particularly strong examples are her extended treatment of Hunt's depression in Italy (281–82 n94) and the dispute between Leigh and John Hunt over *The Examiner* in 1827 (282–84 n103). Her post-1950 primary-source and biographical

references are comprehensive up to about 1985, but there are only two post-1990 references, which leaves out the historiographical and analytical scholarship mentioned at the outset, and such interpretative articles as Kim Wheatley's on the *Blackwood's* attacks on Hunt (*Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47.1 [June 1992]: 1–31). Other gaps include John Beer on "Coleridge, Hazlitt, and *Christabel*" (*Review of English Studies* ns 37:145 [1986]: 40–54) and Richard Holmes on both Shelley and Coleridge. But these do not fundamentally undermine the accuracy of the book or its capacity to function as our most current supplement to extant biographies of the two authors. Beyond this, *William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt: The Continuing Dialogue* may also be helpful for what it suggests, in spite of itself, about the way the discourse of Romantic scholarship has changed so dramatically since Payson Gates first wrote it, thus stimulating, perhaps, the "Continuing Dialogue" over how Romanticism gets (re)constructed in each generation.

Robert K. Lapp
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