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*History of Shit* by Dominique Laporte. Trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000. Pp. 160. \$20.00 cloth.

When “Super-Masochist” Bob Flanagan proclaims in his explanatory poem “Why?”: “because I had to take my clothes off and lie inside this giant plastic bag so the doctors could collect my sweat” (in *Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist*, eds. Andrea Juno and V. Vale, People Series: Number 1 [San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1993]: 64–65, 65), we experience a moment of synchronicity with M. Geoffrey’s eighteenth-century treatise on the uses of excrement, *Suite de la Matière médicale*. In that scatological document, which Dominique Laporte has recourse to in the newly translated *History of Shit*, we learn of the socially elevated French woman who relied on stercoreal fluid to maintain the youthful lustre of her face. Her boy Friday’s only duty would be to seal his fresh feces in a special basin to prevent evaporation, and after cooling, scrape the condensation that formed under the lid so that Madame might splash her precious pores with the age-defying liquid.

Laporte presumes that this servant’s diet and physical condition must have received “special ministrations” (108), and while we cannot be certain if the perspiration of performance-artist Flanagan was collected, scraped, and applied in similar fashion, each of the two excretions draws a spectacular power from the potential use-value of bodily waste. Amid the history of such sublimated discharges, Laporte’s *History of Shit* indulges an array of scatological impulses to demonstrate the ways in which the history of the “State,” the history of modern subjectivity, and to a certain extent, the history of history, are entangled in wonderful and horrible ways with the history of the fundamental fundament, that basest of human products—*shit*.

Laporte’s cultural ode to excrement, originally published as *Histoire de la merde (Prologue)* in 1978, requires a radical dissolution of what he sees as State-sponsored mechanisms controlling language and excrement, so that all excesses, linguistic and anal, gleam with the light of shit-transformed-into-gold. Nadia Benabid’s and Rodolphe el-Khoury’s engaging translation from the French preserves the excesses of Laporte’s prose style as it attempts “to reverse the deodorization of language by means of a reeking syntax” (ix). Augmented by a gallery of fantastic images, *History of Shit* celebrates a “language as slut” paradigm that defies the virginal turn where a castrated “feminine” state of a neutered language works intently on maintaining production, so that the “profits of [language’s] harvest must be indistinguishable from those elements by which it is sublimated and refined” (17). The sublimation of shit to any totalizing teleology cannot be dethroned through mere revelation or exposure of control elements, and the problems Laporte addresses in his six feculent chapters are not only those of political production and individual waste retention within a matrix of profit and loss. Instead, the crude alphabet of shit,

urine, bile, and its other hoary phonemes also challenges a complex social system that ultimately authorizes its own excesses through an invasive program of obsessive purification—separating the “extra matter” of waste from its counter-disciplinary stink. Freed from odor and turned to “gold” by the State, the treasure trove of rationalized language (and thus, excrement), “resembles the young girl who sells her body in exchange for the dowry that ensures her virginity on her wedding night” (18).

Laporte knows from Barthes that “when written, shit does not smell” (10), but also that the taint of base feces still remains even after the complete declination of the olfactory sense. *History of Shit* argues that all superfluous matter arising from the Freudian triad of cleanliness, order, and beauty, must conversely be “put to use; the gain-in-pleasure must be made to enrich civilization in a *sublimated* form” (14). Any escape from the prison house constructed from a social domination of “excess” shit-words depends upon a deployment of over-coded language and matter somehow capable of eluding the apparatuses of capture and consolidation that manipulates, to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari, all flows and schizzes.

Central to Laporte’s puncture of civilization’s humanist grandeur is the axiom that the concurrent domination and legislation of excrement by the “State” excises the superfluity of (broadly-defined) waste products through a host of symbolic purification mechanisms: “Shit comes back and takes the place of that which is engendered by its return, but in a transfigured, incorruptible form. Once eliminated, waste is reinscribed in the cycle of production as gold” (15–16). This is a process of laundering, purifying, and rendering translucent.

Juxtaposing the rationalization of official discourse to the domestication of shit and urine (and farm animals) establishes the modern city as a site of a carefully-mandated ideal of purity, where the traditional powers of the government travel, by legislative extension, out from the seats of official authority and over the city streets, penetrating into the cesspool and outhouse, and by extension, into the intestinal tract of each legal subject. Private concerns become mandated by public oversight, and Laporte suggests that this mandate to eliminate the stench of shit from the city via an “investment” in the sublimated use-value of excrement bears complicity in the entire modern system of production.

In the cities of the United States, this fight to sublimate all malodorous excesses manifests itself through similar social engineering initiatives. In the 1880s, typhoid and cholera epidemics spurred the creation of Chicago’s Metropolitan Sanitary District to dig a drainage canal that would reverse the course of the Chicago River. In the early part of the twentieth century, the young William S. Burroughs would watch “as turds shot out into the polluted

water from the vents along the sides” of St. Louis’s Rivière des Pères (Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* [New York: Avon Books, 1998], 29). Today, second-ring suburbs of New York City such as Lyndhurst, New Jersey, dream of processing the landfills that surround them into family-oriented golf resorts, transforming, as Thom Metzger writes of the Jersey turnpike, “vast tracks of landfill, junk-yards, chemical sump-holes and slag pits” into the gold of capitalist efficiency (*What the Fuck: The Avant-Porn Anthology*, ed. Michael Hemmingson [New York: Soft Skull Press, 2000]: 155–62, 155). Such manifestations of the perpetual urban battle against waste are also common in Laporte’s historical France. Civilization’s interest in controlling waste function does not automatically produce a concomitant interest in the Freudian triad of cleanliness, order, and beauty. Rather, significance resides in the edict’s introduction of a *discourse* that would soon spread along myriad symbolic lines.

For instance, the potential anality of society and its cleanliness of presentation manifest themselves for Laporte in the private/public split that successfully launders a shit that “must nourish the very cesspools of its production” (26). In chapter 2, “cleaning up in front of one’s house, heaping against the wall,” Laporte identifies this process with the domestication of waste as a marker of State-imposed responsibility masked by an illusion of private control (the same that many postmodern theorists see in the organization of the family unit): “This little pile of shit, heaped here before my door, is mine, and I challenge any to malign its form . . .” (30).

The imposition of specific waste protocols combined with notions of private ownership escapes the mere banality of excrement, binding the “subject to his body” (31) and leading to the revival of ancient models of waste-value. In sixteenth-century France, translated authors such as the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenes appealed for a significant time-lapse before human *stercus* would “break its pact with the devil and become nourishment and fertilizing breath” (37). The devilish stench that would presumably inhibit the alchemical process whereby shit becomes gold, fits unsurprisingly into Freud’s notion of the overall declination of the olfactory sense as an outgrowth of the civilizing process—prompting Laporte to cite Immanuel Kant’s remark that “the beautiful does not smell” (38). The reeking shit of the earth is banished to the country, so that the town and city advance a public sphere of the *visible* where the odor of shit is transmogrified, once again, into the visual gleam of gold.

Still, the purification rituals of the city involve a suspicion running through all economic classes that vile filth corrupts that which they are not. The rich associate the poor with vulgar and corrupt feces, while the poor sniff the stench of corruption from the upper class. This “othering” allows the State to act as a meta-purification system capable of keeping the dirty transactions

of money-making and its fecal association separate from the final golden product. Laporte identifies the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a time when the State assumes control of both the private production of shit as well as its public treatment—so that the latter process, analogous to the accumulation of capital, manifests itself as a political object through “a discourse that urges proprietors to become even richer, while casting a withering eye on the foul odor of their accumulations” (46).

For Laporte, the State’s controlling dialectic between private and public, town and country, rich and poor, and waste and profit, has as its true aim a loss of the personal object of shit in favor of symbolic replacements—a policy concerned more with modifying the subject’s relationship to his feces than any obsession with the physical product. Think here of Jean Genet’s works: the prisoner in *Our Lady of the Flowers*, whose olfactory realm is partially composed of “urine, formaldehyde, and paint” carries the stench common to all prisons-houses, so that the narrator “recognized that this odor would finally be the odor of my destiny” (*Our Lady of the Flowers*, trans. Bernard Frechtman [New York: Grove Press, 1991], 103). The subject’s relation to her/his own production, even when manifesting a gain-in-pleasure à la Genet’s excremental prose, finds itself uncomfortably compromised, fixed in a “dangling and dependent position vis-à-vis the absolute State” (Laporte 49).

With the basic theoretical framework of argument established, Laporte moves on to more intriguing points of analysis. In the short chapter entitled “the colonial thing,” the paralyzing sameness of the State (as emulate of the Roman sewer—the *cloaca maxima*) finds an exemplar in both the British domination of Ireland (illustrated through Professor MacHugh’s speech against “foreign invaders” in *Ulysses*) and in a discussion of race relations equating the white man to a corpse. The colonist is bound by the “return of that repressed ‘remnant of earth’ which clings to him as much as to any man” (60) despite his urge to rise up from the soil that he associates with the black man *and* shit.

The colonial master’s false beneficence is evident in the urge of this white “corpse” to remove the subject from its shit, a process which introduces the civilizing sameness that results only from the removal of foul odors. To return to Kant, the beautiful does not smell because imperialism will eliminate that which does. Of course, separating the subject from shit refuses to equalize the oppressor/oppressed power differential. All persons may be similarly humbled when defecating, but the colonizer always tidies his patriarchal behind *first*: “The cleansing of others comes later, as an aftereffect. . . . others must not remind me . . . that I once walked on all fours” (64). One manifestation of the colonial project, then, is to institute a standard of *near* sameness in process that allows the colonizer to be acknowledged always for his “beneficent” policies, imposing his will to the point where these policies “elevate” the subject while simultaneously maintaining the threat that the subject can be

made to “topple back into [shit] at any moment if it pleases the all-powerful Master” (65).

It becomes a necessity to, at a minimum, mask, and ideally eliminate the smell of this unholy log, so that those force-fed its purified matter will remain blissfully unaware of any putrid origin. Laporte closely identifies this remnant of shit with the business of commerce, noting that if a person dirties her or his hands through various and sundry transactions: “Your shit itself will be taxed. Only an offering of gold, placed in the hands of the tax collector, can expiate you of your crimes. Only then shall you be washed of your sin, and what once was foul be transformed into the site of pure power” (78).

This “pure power” carries Laporte’s argument past its seemingly infinite golden telos. Borrowing from Marx’s *Capital*, the concept of “crystal money” replaces the golden offering; the continuous, temporal movement of money through generations effaces the foul stain of its delivery. Through the dirty pact of shit-to-gold through commerce, the bourgeois denies his own birth so that advent of new masters breaks with the temporality of a traceable lineage, making it impossible to pinpoint the origin of wealth, and necessarily suppressing all “surplus value and primitive accumulation” (79). For Laporte, this translucent state of systematic nullification “elevates” all elements of the system as signs: “the very light that penetrates (bodies and objects) blurs their contours, renders them opaque and tasteless, luminous and free of smell” (80).

The stakes here are significant. Free of odor, only matter remains, and, to the reader’s delight, *History of Shit* wends through the territory of perfumes used to cover the noxious stench of *excreta*, approaching a crystal standard linked to healthy digestion. The healthy and odorless digestive system “emerges as the signifier for the rich, the attractive, the beautiful” (82). The odorless ideal entirely sublimates bodily processes; sundry perfumes, “orange blossom-scented drops” (83) favored by Parisian cesspool workers, attempt to alleviate the superfluous elements of their waste/capital sign system, yet this odorless condition, no matter how advanced by the most sophisticated chemical or biological procedures, remains an asymptotic move toward an impossible zero. And while this odorless ideal perpetually crystallizes its object through a negation of olfaction, Laporte argues that aesthetics has no place for smell, because full activation of that faculty would disrupt the system: “Were smell to be beautiful, then the beautiful would have to smell, to breathe, to sniff itself, and then what would transpire? Would not mud and blood splatter the virginal, still-translucent surface of the beautiful?” (86), adding in the next paragraph “All smells are primordially the smell of shit” (87).

The closing chapters examine this suspicious irreducibility of smell and beauty in the production of an odorless pure-matter that remains from these cleansing processes. Laporte takes great rhetorical pleasure in cataloguing the

uses of waste's "quasi-magical properties" (97), often rediscovered in the nineteenth century, so that even as excrement has a use-value for production, it also occupies a place as "hygienic imaginary" (97). Dioscurides, Apuleius, Catullus, Strabo, Diodorus of Sicily, and Pliny celebrate the wondrous powers of urine, with the latter commenting: "The most celebrated midwives have declared that no other lotion is better treatment for irritation of the skin, and with soda added for sores on the head, dandruff, and spreading ulcers, especially on the genitals" (99).

Dung serves a similar cosmetic function, and Laporte revels in the immense list of shit-inspired works published between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (noted in the *Biblioteca Scatologica*), commenting via Bachelard that "*Stercus nigrum*, or rat droppings, is a sure-fire remedy for constipation as well as a cure for baldness when mixed with honey and onion juices" (101). The multiform uses of waste in an emergent capitalist discourse privileges a denial rather than a repression of shit's foulness; upholding its curative powers results in its elevation to the plateau of the finest perfumes. These therapeutic and cosmetic uses of waste persisted well into the sphere of our modern world, and Laporte refuses to mark a clear division between the barbarity of ancient civilization and the manufactured reality of our own.

In the closing chapter, "i'm with shakespeare" [sic], Laporte establishes the spiritual nature of shit, championed by the figure of the production-minded hygienist, "prince consort of bourgeois civilization, of colonialist Europe as embodied by Queen Victoria" who speaks tirelessly of "blood, milk, shit, sex, corpses, sperm, sewers, hospitals, factories, urinals" (119). Spoken by these brave social engineers unafraid to deal with the *stercus* of society, the hygienist's discourse represents the potential profitability of shit in primordial terms: "[The imperative of profit] also marks the return of a repressed fantasy of which utility is merely the displaced reversal . . . the dream of satisfying all need and thus liberating the subject from lack" (119). Human shit is revered above animal waste for its agricultural efficiency, and Laporte's coterie of hygienists, pressing fearlessly for more efficient drainage systems, never "doubted for an instant that his invention of a separator, a ventilation system, a new form of toilet bowl, or a mobile urinal would transform the future of humanity" (123). The hygienist's mania toward production manifested itself in a learned discourse that indeed called shit by its name, but still masked the fear of loss in the language of profit.

Despite the manifold structures intent on excising what cannot be sublimated and controlled, *History of Shit* defies these notions in its complete refusal to play by the conventions of the linear read. Imposing a rational order on its contents (as I have attempted) is to share complicity with the objects of Laporte's critique. Readers who delight in scraping every bit of condensation

from their air-tight canisters will be able to find familiar strands of '70s post-structuralism in Laporte's study. Those who put less stock on the efficient collection and purification of waste and language, who defy, in even small ways, the scatological imperatives of the State (whether capitalist or socialist), will also find themselves rolling—happily—in something entirely different.

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*Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England: Beyond the Law* by Hal Gladfelder. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Pp. xiii + 281. \$49.95 cloth.

Hal Gladfelder's *Criminality and Narrative* makes the case for an eighteenth-century reader whose taste for narrative subtlety stems from a familiarity with criminal trial pamphlets, news reports, and criminal biographies. Changes in the "physical format and representational strategies of trial reports, in the mid-1670s through the 1720s," Gladfelder explains, placed readers in the position to both judge and identify with the accused. "By incorporating the contested and doubt-charged process of judgment into the structure of narrative itself, trial reports anticipated the openness to discordant meanings and discrepant points of view which I see characteristic of the fictions of Defoe and Fielding" (12). Though Gladfelder does not provide what archival scholars might perceive as evidence of readers' marginalia about their thoughts on crime texts—or for that matter how many eighteenth-century libraries actually contained crime reports—his argument about the ideological connections between crime writing and the novel is powerful and likely to hold sway for critics interested in the ongoing discussions about the rise of the novel and the debate about the social contexts of realism.

Gladfelder's main focus is on the ideological construction of a bourgeois reader whose sense of freedom is constructed, ironically, through a complicated identification with the outlaw hero. "Lingering over scenes of rupture, alternately celebrating and condemning the violent self-assertion that defines the outlaw, criminal narratives play on a shared anxiety that we become ourselves at the moment of transgression" (6). Gladfelder's thesis that "crime narratives and the novels derived from them tend to legitimate, to project as desirable, the very disruptive potentialities they set out to contain" is indebted to Foucault's "reversal of the political axis of individualization." In this theory the modern notion of individuality is predicated on an unconscious identification with outsider status, where, in Foucault's words, "the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the



madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent" (7). Gladfelder maintains that the novel's concentration on the experiences of "socially disruptive figures familiar from the network of criminal narrative(s)," like "climbing servants (as in *Pamela*), illegitimate and outcast children (as in *Tom Jones*), runaway and fortune-hunting adventurers (as in *Robinson Crusoe*)" complicates the traditional connection made by Ian Watts forty years ago that a hegemonic conception of individualism is the political thrust of the novel.

As Gladfelder explains, the novels of this period overtly express a wish to discipline deviant experiences like self-preservation at any cost, over-reaching for status, property, sex, money and revenge—"desires fostered by the newly dominant ideology of individualism"—but do so in a way that ultimately allows for an unchecked exploration of these drives as liberating impulses. "In the open-endedness of their plots, their violence, multiplicity of voices, obsession with detail, underpinnings of social conflict, and concentration on moral and psychological disturbance," these fictions allow the reader to deliberate on transgressive experiences and ponder their liberating possibilities. Though the novels begin with a "belligerent disavowal of criminal intent," many end up affirming the illicit practices they attempted to police. "Once readers are drawn into imaginative complicity with deviance, they may not recoil when called on. For not only does the criminal protagonist embody and act on the impulses encouraged by bourgeois individualism itself—that is, by the very ideology underlying the system of property and social relations the law exists to secure—but the audience for criminal writing might share, at least in part, the outlaw's alienation from the centers of economic and ideological power" (9).

Before turning to Defoe and Fielding, Gladfelder examines in the first half of his book the different genres of crime writing of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Criminal anatomies like the *New Canting Dictionary* (1725), indebted to Richard Head's *Canting Academy* (1674) and Charles Hitchin's *Regulator* (1718)—"the most frequently reprinted of these texts before the late eighteenth century"—configure the underworld in "racialized" terms, using an ethnographic mode of representation to expose how the so-called "sodomitical tribes," "Wild Irish," and "Aegyptians" of London imperil "the moral well-being of the normal" (22–24). In chapters two and three Gladfelder explores what he calls the more "psychological fictions" in crime writing: how the picaresque and related "providential fictions" (like John Reynolds's 1621 *The Triumph of God's Revenge*) are "fundamentally concerned with retracing the origins of criminal rebelliousness" through "obsessive detail [of] the singularity of individual psychic experience" (34); and how "crime reports" and "gallows writing" signal the uncertainty of human action—"a living contract with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality"—due to being published so quickly after the reported events. These crime genres establish patterns later seen in the novel. In the former, an identification between reader

and hero(ine) is established: “picaresque and providential tales enforce a recognition of likeness between reader and criminal” (43). In the latter, readers are brought into contact with an ambiguous world: “the use of narrative suspense” in the crime reports, “resonates with real uncertainty and is thus essentially unlike the suspense produced by the tactic of starting an epic narrative . . . in the story of murder, by contrast, the mystery of the initial image is genuine . . . That truth is never given and never certain; the news is a carrier of mysteries” (49).

Similarly, criminal trials (chapter four) “experimented with techniques for the presentations of complex, circumstantially dense narratives . . . [concentrating] on the contentious, discontinuous process of inquiry, forcing the reader to work through the fragmentary, often contradictory evidence in all its multiplicity of voices” (63). And criminal biographies (chapter five) provided “a sense of the whole of a subject life through narrative” while evoking “the singularity and distinctive material texture of that life” by “drawing out patterns that underlie disparate moments . . . origins, traces that link cause and effect” (75). The strength of Gladfelder’s argument that criminal genres were a shaping force of eighteenth-century realism resides in his masterful recounting of the colorful, sordid crime stories themselves, where he teases out the subtlest inconsistencies and conflicting perspectives in case histories. Gladfelder’s historical work here is meticulous and well-researched, with careful paraphrase of the current and pertinent scholarship.

The second half of Gladfelder’s book brings Defoe and Fielding into this rich setting of crime writing. Defoe’s focus on the notorious pickpocket Colonel Jack in *Lives of the Six Notorious Street Robbers* (1726)—particularly its veracity and “anthropological description,” its “scrupulous, step-by-step detail . . . and “inward verisimilitude” (chapter six)—provides a frame for Gladfelder to speak about the animating features of Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* (chapters seven and eight). “All of Defoe’s criminal texts raise problematic questions concerning the relationship between the voices he projects and his own ideological and authorial stance” (119). Considering the different narrative perspectives Defoe used in his criminal treatises, Gladfelder admits that Defoe is “an eighteenth-century Zelig”; he takes on “uncannily, the characteristic of those personae whose words he speaks yet never loses his sense of estrangement from them nor . . . a corrosive, distancing irony” (120). This irony allows Defoe to project an object of sympathy in Moll; the reader is invited to feel complicity with her “vivid and disruptive experience of sexual adventurism and urban criminality” (130). Gladfelder interprets Moll’s autobiography in the context of the “labyrinthine and unregulated spaces of London” where it was easy to escape the “social and political apparatus of identification.” “If the plot of *Moll Flanders* describes her struggle to elude the captivity of a stable, socially recognized and constrained identity—an identity whose sign is

the name others know her by—criminal names plague her like revenants and nearly destroy her” (128). Gladfelder cleverly interprets Defoe’s use of the autobiographical mode as the author’s own method of escaping the apparatus of identification. “The writing of autobiography thus becomes, for Defoe, as it is for Moll, a strategy of evasion, a way of assaying and multiplying identities” (130).

In *Roxana*, Gladfelder examines how the “psychological excess of guilt . . . pulls the narrative framework apart and leads to the collapse of the expected plot of trespass and redemption” (132). This dramatic rupture uniquely exposes the “gradual criminalization of subjectivity” that calls for a “more and more attentive policing of the inward and concealed shifts of desires” (133). *Roxana* is ultimately a tale of modern subjectivity: “the most damaging crimes emerge from the repressed inward violence of the respectable self. The hierarchies of social difference, however closely monitored, are permeable to currents of desire—for freedom, pleasure, power—which threaten, and more than threaten, to undermine them” (144). Gladfelder’s Defoe is not the undisciplined writer some have argued, but something of a modernist who breaks with narrative conventions to explore the multiple states of consciousness: “his most complex interrogations of subjectivity are carried out in the voices of wayward and marginal personae, and the effect is to unsettle sanctioned forms of identity, to write selfhood as always, inwardly, verging on crime. . . . By disfiguring the inherited genres of criminal writing with an exhaustive, evidential realism and a harrowing concentration on the grain of an imagined voice, he articulated a new sense of estrangement, complicity, and risk, of identity eroded and shaped by transgressive desire” (148; 149).

Fielding’s commitment to criminal identity, Gladfelder explains, is more vexed given his dual role as magistrate and novelist, which positioned him to speak with both authority over and professional interest in the “disruptive energies” of crime. His playful criticism of his own book, *Amelia*, published in *Covent Garden Journal* (1752), provides a window into Fielding’s ironic edge as a writer. In chapter nine Gladfelder examines Fielding’s legal writings (*Charge Delivered to the Grand Jury* [1749], and *Enquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*, [1751]), showing us the “harsh ideological ends” of his legal rulings and what Gladfelder calls his “undisguised nostalgia for a lost and in any case largely imaginary economy of political subjection and humility” in the face of the “war zone” that was London’s besieged city streets. “If in his juridical writings Fielding adheres to the role of reactionary ideologue, his registering of dissonant voices and fascination with the energies of the outcast and rebel expose a certain disenfranchisement with the authoritarian positions” he held as judge (158). Gladfelder’s close reading of *Amelia* (chapter eleven) first turns on Fielding’s emblematic use of space in the novel, where the “naturalness” of realist descriptions of prisons and domestic space work both to illustrate a real-world existence and an allegorical state of mind. Fielding explores

the inward intrusions of social convention through metaphors of space; the “tiniest enclosed spaces” in the novel—the little casket Amelia gives Booth . . . an iron snuff box stolen from Booth inside Newgate . . . Booth’s servant Atkinson’s little Box—are, Gladfelder maintains, “enclosures of hidden feeling, unspoken intimacy—spaces of refuge from the encroachments of political history and the social determinants of permissible desire.” “In *Amelia*,” he concludes, “the private sphere of seclusion and domesticity is repeatedly shaken by the violent intrusions of a public sphere of poverty, fraud, and authoritarian conflict” (192). Fielding’s sentimental defense of this founding notion of a private, authentic self is negated by a deeper skepticism in the questionable motives of human affairs. “All the principal characters in *Amelia*,” Gladfelder argues, are “marked by ambiguous motives, unarticulated desires, shifting and contradictory behavior. . . . The difficulty and insecurity of judgment . . . are the heart of the narrative’s meaning” (199). If Fielding the magistrate is severe and rigid in his certainty—“upholding an almost terroristic conception of authority” (158)—Fielding the writer is probing and hesitant. “Fielding’s difficult and often contentious practice as examining magistrate seems to have led him to doubt the possibility of ever ascertaining the truth, as the narrator of *Tom Jones* had, in fictional terms, done effortlessly: the problems of evidence, and all the material and imaginary forces that condition it, were too intractable to allow for confidence in narrative reconstructions. *Amelia*’s plot is, if anything, a representation of unreason in human affairs—our inescapable vulnerability to unrecognized biases, unacknowledged desires, and the duplicity of outward appearances” (204).

Gladfelder ends his book with an epilogue that points to the trajectory crime writing takes as it affects English radicalism more generally, evidenced in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, Elizabeth Inchbald’s *Nature and Art*, and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria*. These authors “signal their indebtedness to an ongoing tradition of criminal writing by incorporating fragments and pastiches of the popular genres in their own texts” (214). *Caleb Williams* not only depicts a politicized criminal gang—“anticipat[ing] Eric Hobsbawm’s category of the social bandit”—but its plot hinges on Caleb’s epiphany that “his recourse to the institutions of justice is a betrayal of all he holds true, subjecting his trust in reason and openness of heart to the coercion of legal power” (211). Likewise, the political consciousness of Wollstonecraft’s Gothic novel hinges on its affiliation with crime writing: “Jemima’s story is a distillation of the whole tradition of ordinary accounts and halfpenny criminal lives with . . . the difference that her crimes are traced not to a sinful nature but to the corrupting power of institutions” (214). Inchbald’s *Nature and Art* is equally indebted to crime writing in its “sympathetic comprehension of the material bases of crime which is far removed from the traditional genres’ reliance on the categories of sin and depravity” (213). Though Gladfelder’s treatment of these texts is only

passing compared to his careful readings of Defoe and Fielding, he means to show how pervasive the influence of crime writing was throughout this period, to “reveal how thoroughly the social world has been penetrated by the rituals and discourses of legality. . . . At the end of the eighteenth century in England the crime and sensational genres that had begun to assume a distinct form a hundred years earlier served to epitomize both the hegemony of the law and the struggle to resist its incursions into the spheres of intimacy and desire” (216). Gladfelder ends by countering a traditional leftist reading of *Caleb Williams* made popular by D. A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police* (University of California Press, 1988) that even though Godwin’s anarchism means to free us from the hegemony of criminal law, “we would only be exchanging this for subjection to a still more oppressive regime of perpetual surveillance” (223). The argument is that Godwin’s exacting interrogation of individual circumstances and motivations is itself a mode of panoptical scrutiny. “To infer that all ‘investigation into individual motivation’ implicitly affirms the use of technologies of surveillance to enforce authoritarian power is facile,” Gladfelder responds. “The realist strategies,” he continues, “of circumstantial narration and the registering of individual voices . . . work against the imposition of unitary meanings and against the resolution of narrative contradictions. . . . [T]here is a powerful and material difference between the use of spying and imprisonment to thwart political oppression and the close registration of private experience and inward speech as a basis for protest against the misconstructions of the law” (223).

In sum, Gladfelder’s *Criminality and Narrative* will be of immense value to traditional literary scholars of Defoe and Fielding, those interested in the rise of the novel, and to early modern cultural studies critics interested in the latest iteration of the “subversion/containment” debate. It may also be of interest to American literature scholars interested in penal colony history (one suspects though that in Americanist criticism the theme of outlaw heroes shaping bourgeois culture is an old handsaw). Gladfelder’s book will be of significant interest to early modern literature scholars invested in the emerging “rogue criticism” that explores literary constructions of the criminal underworld following recent publications of Bryan Reynolds’s *Becoming Criminal: Transversal Performance and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Linda Woodbridge’s *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), and Paola Pugliatti’s *Beggary and Theatre in Early Modern England* (Ashgate Press, forthcoming). In fact, Gladfelder’s only fault is that he overestimates the originality of eighteenth-century “criminal anatomies.” In suggesting that the most popular of these texts before this time belong to the post-Reformation, Gladfelder neglects to consider the true English origins of the genre, Thomas Harman’s *A Caveat or Warning of Common Cursetors* (1567), which went through at least

five printings and influenced generations of Elizabethan and Jacobean writers obsessed with the canting rogues of the underworld. This is an important part of the history. Harman and other rogue pamphlet writers used the trope of categorizing criminal trades or “guilds” made popular by *Liber Vagatorum* (1509)—for which Martin Luther wrote an introduction—the first true “criminal anatomy” that listed the different types of fraudulent gangs in very much the same mode as the eighteenth-century taxonomies. The history of Tudor England’s response to vagrancy and the criminal underworld is the center of larger debate being revisited currently by scholars, in part as a response to Woodbridge’s *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* which argues that these rogue pamphlets functioned less as reactionary social complaints and more like humorous jest books. Such a reference would support Gladfelder’s claim that eighteenth-century crime writing served a mainly imaginary function of providing an exotic, illusory world that, in his words, “induces us to identify with . . . or at least project ourselves imaginatively into” the represented criminal experience (29). But it would also fill in more of the historical map by demonstrating how early modern England’s strange fascination with criminal heroes is connected to the Reformation project of desanctifying poverty. Gladfelder’s ambitious book is not held back by such a period boundary though, since it casts such a wide net already—across literary genres, law, politics, London history—and advances considerably work done in criminal history and its relation to literature.

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*The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* by Jonathan Rose. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001 Pp. ix + 534. \$39.95 cloth.

A more auspicious birth for a text can hardly be imagined: besides uniformly glowing reviews from all the major newspapers, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* garnered two awards: the SHARP Book History Prize and the Longman/History Today Book-of-the-Year 2002 Award. Although the focus of the praise is mostly on Rose’s use of a vast and widely-untapped field of primary-source material, it is the structural organization of that material, using the “framing” model, that exercises Rose the most. As Rose was a founding member of SHARP, and is an editor of the organization’s scholarly journal, *Book History*, it is not surprising that his book is an experiment in the creation of a viable framework for a way of seeing (in one content area) that mirrors

the aspirations of SHARP (in a broad array of content areas). How well, then, does *The Intellectual Life*, as the flagship for Rose's wider interests, sail?

Although the book spans a period from the Lollards to New Labour, Rose primarily examines the autodidact tradition from around the time of the Reform Bill up to the end of the Second World War. His approach, however, is not consistently chronological. Rather, he takes the pulse of several manifestations of working-class intellectual life across the period—including the autodidact's "Desire for Singularity" and "Mutual Improvement" (both early chapter headings), the impact of schools, of the WEA, and even of Bohemia; within each of these thematic units he tends to follow a chronological trajectory. I say "tends to" because some thematic units are more cohesive than others.

Rose's approach works best where the thematic unit is least diffuse, as in the chapter on the Welsh Miners' Institutes and their libraries. Within this specific topic, Rose's synthesis of statistical and anecdotal sources across a clearly defined timeline is embedded in a confidently declarative prose. We share Rose's enthusiasm for the Institutes, "one of the greatest networks of cultural institutions created by working people anywhere in the world" (237), and with him lament their decline along with the demise of the industry, in part because Rose seamlessly interweaves the words of miners such as W. H. Davies and their almost tragic prescience, with a minute analysis of the borrowing records of the Institute libraries:

In Bargoed the miners' institute only issued 2,661 books in 1961, down from 33,021 in 1931. The typical institute had become, said one ex-collier, a "stark waste of froth and strip-tease, surrounded by the slick decor of vinyl-covered easy chairs and formica-covered tables and glistening counters that click to the sound of glass." The Tredegar Institute, which spent more than £1,000 a year on books in the late 1940s, was broken up in 1964. Nearly all of its magnificent collection is lost. The last Rhondda colliery (Mardy) closed in 1990. Only two Welsh miners' libraries (at the Cwmaman Institute and Trecynon Hall) survived to the end of the century (254–55).

Rose's affection for his sources—not only does he grieve the loss of Tredegar's "magnificent collection" as if it were a working-class Alexandria, he relishes the day "when someone finds a fourth library ledger" (255)—is not a form of nostalgia. He mines the statistics not for numbers alone, but to create a profile of what the working classes (he consistently uses the plural of the liberal observer, rather than the singular of the vulgar Marxist) read, discussed, and thought. He then uses this material to offset—or confirm—the image of working-class culture posited by less industrious commentators (such as Q. D. Leavis). Moreover, the trajectory described concisely in this particular area

mirrors the larger trajectory followed by the book as a whole, a “success story with a downbeat ending” (11).

Although Rose’s familiarity with such an extensive field of material enables him to challenge the premises of other, often demeaning, critics (he reserves a special venom for the snooty coterie of Bloomsbury), it can lead to problems. Rose could heed the advice given in 1860 to the Lancashire social reformer J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth by a reviewer of his novel, *Scarsdale*, “not to put so much even into the omnium-gatherum which the three-volume English novel has become.”<sup>1</sup> The three main problem areas—and Rose is aware of them—are those of content, organization, and focus. Even the chapter on the Welsh Miners’ Institutes is not immune to the tendency to stray: a Yorkshire coal town and the thoughts of a Lancashire miner make cameo appearances. Such appearances are fine where they bolster the main theme: but there are places—most notably in the chapter preceding the one on Wales—where the material obliterates the focus.

This is apparent even in the discrepancy between the title—“Cultural Literacy in the Classic Slum”—and some of the content: much of the discussion has nothing to do with “the Classic Slum,” but covers a whole slew of cultural indicators (classical music, sex-education, mass-media, class-ownership of vocabularies, and book-buying habits) referenced to Sheffield in 1918, the Jewish East End, nineteenth-century Lancashire, and—in some Mass-Observation surveys—the country as a whole. There is a needless conflation of diverse working-class contexts into the stereotypic slum (which, to be fair, does fit some parts of the discussion). Some of the content (the autodidact’s memoir) repeats what we have learned elsewhere: the thirst for knowledge meets the epiphanal text and leads to personal, social, and cultural maturity. It is not that the content is not of interest—indeed, some of the most fascinating material appears in this chapter (for example, the familiarity of the working class with *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*, “a handbook of folk gynecology and obstetrics” [207] rather than with the Greek philosopher)—but that there is no unifying purpose in the organization of the several subsections.

Rose’s application of the “framing” metaphor to the plethora of material works well, when used to elucidate the levels of relationship between the autodidact and what he—and, Rose is at pains to show, she—read, particularly when making the point that a working-class reader can find sustenance for a radical political outlook from a conservative literary canon, or the finer point that “it is equally possible for the same reader to adopt different frames for the same story, relishing it on one level while seeing through the claptrap on another” (332). There are times, however, when he strains the metaphor—a reference to “prepubescent frames” (374) seems particularly ungainly. This merely proves that Rose is not immune to the jargonizing which he roundly



condemns in his fellow academics—a disease he finds endemic in English Departments—but he avoids what he sees as anathema for academics and autodidacts alike: the “cage of ideology,” which is the worst example of the loss of “versatility” or the ability to “assume another frame” (8). There are times, though, when “versatility” can become a liability. When he says, “whether a text is ‘conservative’ or ‘subversive’ depends on the context in which it is read and the larger literary diet of the reader” (332), he overindulges his own “anti-intrinsic” frame. It is one thing to criticize the “blind spot” of MLA-types whose “fixation” with dense textual interpretation leads them to the “receptive fallacy” (that the text manipulates the reader); it is another thing to assert that the text is a tabula rasa when it comes to value-transmission (4). This occasionally leads to secondary problems of focus. For example, immediately after including *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in a list of “more structured and accessible work” (426), he refers to a Leicester bottlewasher, Tom Barclay, unmoored from his class, who is “forever scolding the proletariat for preferring Ethel M. Dell and *Tarzan of the Apes* to Eugene O’Neill and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” (427). This leaves us unsure of Rose’s position: is Joyce’s early novel accessible or Modernist-obscurantist?

We are particularly dependent upon Rose’s selective “framing” in *The Intellectual Life*, as we have to trust his sampling from the extensive range of statistical, anecdotal and autobiographical sources. Rose does not wield a broad brush: rather, he approaches a broad canvas with a pointillist’s incremental exactitude. His use of tabular representation at its best balances the first-person narrative—a blend perfected, interestingly enough, by those middle-class social observers of the moral and physical condition of the working classes in the industrial North in the 1830s whose “frame,” Rose feels, helped eclipse that of the workers themselves. Given the extensive use of information from the Mass-Observation archives, it would have been useful if Rose had given us a brief grounding in the origins and changing philosophical foundations of that entity (what cultural baggage did the founders, Harrison, Jenner and Madge, bring to the project? How did the shift from “social issues towards consumer behaviour in 1949”<sup>2</sup> affect the data collected?).

We are even more dependent on Rose’s selectivity with the pool of first-person narratives. The industriousness with which Rose has gone to the sources, not just neglected regionally-printed memoirs, but unpublished narratives, alone makes *The Intellectual Life* a great book. Yet this very industriousness has created an embarrassment of riches. Each autodidact can only appear briefly on the stage, though some make repeat appearances. W. H. Davies, mentioned above, is one; his fellow miner turned M.P., Aneurin Bevan, gets more detailed attention. Sometimes they appear singly, sometimes as a crowd (proletarians turned Labour Party founders, for example). Rose does not have

a dry, clinical relationship with his memoirists: one of the things that is so engaging about Rose's writing is that it is at its best when he obviously admires, sympathizes with or finds obnoxious the autodidact under discussion (examples of each would be Neville Cardus, Ephraim Wise, and Edwin Muir, in that order). Still, Rose must distill the essence of each autodidact's account and turn it to the purpose at hand, which inevitably leads to the question, is this selectivity valid? Without personally reading the hundreds of accounts that Rose has used, how can we be sure that he is not just picking isolated characteristics that do not reflect the overall picture painted by the memoirist? The answer is, of course, that we can't: but there is a cumulative commonality to the accounts that validate Rose's interpretation of them. A case in point: Rose uses Samuel Bamford, the Lancashire weaver, as an example of an autodidact whose early exposure to Milton led to a chain of reading that in turn led to his radical political stance (39), as did his sense of *Pilgrim's Progress* as a thrilling romance (95, 105). He quotes Bamford on the importance of Sunday Schools as a seedbed for articulate working-class reformers (62); and notes that he was a model for Samuel Smiles' self-help ethic (68). Missing from the account are Bamford's sour-grapes at the perceived loss of his family's ancestral home, Bamford Hall, to the rising cotton magnates the Fentons. This was only one sign of his latent nonradicalism. Although he was respected enough by the local handloom weavers that, at a moorland meeting in the middle of the 1826 riots, he talked them out of a suicidal attack on Manchester, by the 1830s he was considered a pawn of the Liberal oligarchs (especially once he became a writer for the Manchester press), distrusted by the radical working class, and ended his career as a lonely and bitter conservative.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that Rose's references to Bamford are misleading; rather, it illustrates Rose's own point that different "frames"—in this case, the "whole-Bamford" frame—can lead to different conclusions. Rose is not wrong on Bamford; he selects that which, along with accumulated autobiographical data, enables him to draw the general conclusion that "only canonical literature could produce epiphanies in common readers, and specifically, only great books could inspire them to write" (371). We can trust Rose's selectivity, but as this Bamford example shows, one way to view *The Intellectual Life* is as an invitation to a more in-depth look at various aspects of the primary material.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, though, if there are weaknesses in Rose's book, they are of commission, not omission: he is passionately concerned to let the individual voice of the working-class reader be heard, and particularly when it comes to popular culture, he is aware of the difficulty of that task. "[T]he actual uses of literacy may be much more complicated and ambiguous than most students of cultural studies imagine," he says, arguing that the combination of "inter-textual influences" and the fact that "no two individual reading histories were alike," applied to an "audience of millions" makes any "reliable generalization

about popular culture” impossible. Unless, that is, we concur that the “only workable method is to consult the readers themselves, and let them explain how they made sense of it all” (367). This is a little disingenuous, as Rose himself uses different “frames” to extract explanations, but the democratic impulse to give voice to the voiceless remains one of the strengths of the book. Any attempt to strike a balance between quantitative analysis (“lies, damned lies and statistics”) and the personal narrative (“damned anecdotes and dangerous confabulations”<sup>5</sup>) is a risky business, but Rose has made it a noble and illuminating one.

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### Notes

1. *The Critic*, XXI, No. 52 (July 7, 1860): 13–14.
2. See “A brief history of Mass-Observation” at the Archives’ Web site, [www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs/history.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs/history.html).
3. As well as the autobiographies cited by Rose, *Early Days and Passages in the Life of a Radical*, see Bamford’s *Walks in South Lancashire* (1844). Bamford Hall became “Scarsdale Hall” in Kay-Shuttleworth’s “omnium-gatherum” novel, and Samuel Bamford himself a meliorist radical clogger: Kay-Shuttleworth had lived with his uncle Joseph Fenton at Bamford in his teens. The whole Kay/Fenton family were major founders of the Congregationalist Chapels and Sunday Schools which were to become seedbeds not only of radical proletarians but of docile, assimilationist proletarians. The more we contextualize Bamford’s life and writings, the harder it is to use them to illustrate a “type” of working-class intellectual experience, though Rose certainly does address working-class conservatism elsewhere.
4. It is regrettable, then, that use of *The Intellectual Life* in such a way is made harder by the absence of a bibliography. Retracing some of the sources to their original citation via the index is sometimes necessary, as characters contextualized in early chapters resurface in later ones, and the reader benefits by applying the early information to the later discussion; this could be made a little less laborious by fuller references and a bibliography.
5. From the title of D. Sheridan’s paper, “‘Damned anecdotes and dangerous confabulations’ . . . Mass-Observation as Life History”, M-OA Occasional Paper No. 7, University of Sussex Library, 1996.



*The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* by Janet Sorensen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. x + 318. \$60.00 cloth.

How does language work as an instrument of imperial power? Imposing a standard language installs that power in the individual consciousness, fusing personal with national identity in the matrix of imperial culture. This process,

however, is by no means linear, predictable, or irresistible. Janet Sorensen studies its Scottish ramifications during the period when Johnson's *Dictionary* set out to standardize English in England. As readers of Johnson's *Plan* and *Preface* know, the nationalist implications of the dictionary project are not far to seek. Johnson's jingoist joke that one Englishman ought to be able to do in three years what took forty French academicians forty years playfully alludes to the *Dictionary's* quite serious implications for national cultural prestige. Though her study is devoted mainly to Scottish writers, educators and grammarians, Sorensen astutely chooses to include a chapter on Johnson, as well as a thought-provoking epilogue on "Jane Austen's language and the strangeness at home in the center." Canonical metropolitan texts, as well as those by "peripheral" Scots, trouble the ideological intersection between language and nation. Johnson's *Dictionary*, she argues, "alienated English from its contemporary speakers in ways not dissimilar to colonial language practices" (63). The influential standard English of Johnson and Austen was also produced by and productive of emerging constructs of nation and empire.

Sorensen analyzes what she sees as the dialectical relationship between the imposition of standardized English on marginal populations such as the Scots, who struggled with this more or less alien language, and the parallel creation of a Scottish cultural identity centered around the Gaelic language. Beginning well before mid-century with efforts to spread English literacy in the Gaelic-speaking Highlands, spearheaded by the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), her investigation concludes with the publication by Samuel Johnson's protégé, William Shaw, of the first Scots Gaelic grammar in English (1778). Along with these politically motivated linguistic developments, Sorensen traces two very different ways of understanding language and the "simultaneous and mutually determining movements" (222) between them. The first is "universal grammar," the Enlightenment belief that the deep structure of language is uniform across languages. This view goes along with beliefs in a one-to-one equivalency between words or ideas across different languages and, more fundamentally, in the transparency of language with respect to things themselves—concepts that arose at least partly, Sorensen points out, in the context of imperial relationships to foreign languages. The other view is of each national language as radically particular, historically produced as a tradition arising over time, and untranslatable, as well as being central to cultural definitions of nationhood: what she calls a "cultural nationalist" model. The book sets out "to explore the claims that colonial and national discourses make about these conceptions of language within a particular historical location"—eighteenth-century Scotland—"and to critique them *in that context*" (16, italics in original). At least in the Scottish context, Sorensen asserts, these two models of language dialectically produce one another.

*The Grammar of Empire* advances two basic claims about colonial identity and language. The first, broadly accepted by now (and also found in various forms in recent work from Anne McClintock and Simon Gikandi to Katie Trumpener and Robert Crawford), is that colonial or “peripheral” culture does indeed influence imperial identity. The second, more specific assertion—persuasively supported in the course of Sorensen’s study—is that national linguistic identities emerge out of, rather than predate, imperial relationships. In other words, the myth of a national language rooted in the misty depths of time is just that. A unified Gaelic language, for example, emerged from the campaign by England (aided by influential, upwardly mobile Lowland Scots) to teach the Highlanders English, which turned out to involve first making them literate in their own language. This in turn entailed reifying Gaelic, turning it from a predominantly oral tongue into one with a “material, embodied, visible print existence” (47). One important lesson here is about the volatility of literacy: “the ends to which the technology of literacy gets put cannot be completely determined by the imperial grammarians” (32). Alexander MacDonald, for example, the somewhat enigmatic figure who is the subject of Sorensen’s first chapter, initially worked as an instructor for the SSPCK and in 1741 published the first Gaelic-English glossary. In 1745, though, MacDonald came out as a radical Jacobite, and even after the failure of the rebellion published “agit-prop Jacobite poems in Gaelic, a move breathtaking in its daring” (50). Sorensen interprets this as not an about-face, but rather as the continuation of a career marked by what Robert Young calls “intentional hybridity.” Both MacDonald’s literacy work and his Gaelic poetry manipulate linguistic resources in the service of his cultural nationalist program, contends her richly detailed and nuanced account.

The other Scots figures who make an appearance are the novelist and pundit Smollett and the Edinburgh rhetoric professors, Adam Smith and Hugh Blair. Each of these two chapters rewards the reader with far-reaching insights. In the case of Smollett we learn about the function of the novel, in particular the epistolary novel, as an instructional technology of imperial literacy. Orality and the body are key concerns in Sorensen’s reading of *Humphry Clinker* in the context of Smollett’s career as London cultural insider, editor of the *Critical Review*. His Scottishness makes him continually vulnerable, and not just to attacks in print. Sorensen retails an anecdote of Smollett walking with another Scot in London around the time of the battle of Culloden, their swords drawn, Smollett warning his companion to keep his mouth shut lest the mob recognize his Scottish accent. The physical embodiment of language in speaking is what gives away the Scottish difference. This is amplified in *Humphry Clinker*, whose letters showcase both exemplary and flawed speech, the latter belonging to women, Scots, and lower-class figures like the eponymous Humphry, “materialized” through oral pronunciation as well as misspelling. Their solecisms become “Scotological”: Smollett’s “forays into

absolutely bawdy, culturally marked language,” Sorensen argues, are not subversively carnivalesque, but work to reaffirm the superior status of standard English (126). One Scot, however, the Scottish nationalist Lismahago, is represented as speaking flawless English, and “it is not clear that we are to dismiss him when he maintains that . . . ‘the English language was spoken with greater propriety in Edinburgh, than in London’” (131). Access to a linguistic and cultural identity thus does not depend on location, but is available to English and Scots alike. When it comes to a spatial model of the nation, Smollett remains ambivalent: the novel presents London as a source of corruption, while a peripheral region like Scotland appears as the “last preserve of uncorrupted social space” (120).

This is reminiscent of the role played by the Gaelic language in the writings of Smith and Blair. In the tensions and ambiguities between nature and culture that haunt their lectures, Gaelic re-surfaces as a sublime myth “in moments of awareness of the disciplining, alienated, and doubled character of the national . . . language” (143). Their influential Scottish Enlightenment appropriation of pre-Kantian aesthetic discourse emerges as shaped by their status as ambitious, upwardly mobile peripheral subjects. Their key innovation, Sorensen points out, was their appeal to taste—in the sense of “subjectively experienced aesthetic effects” (141)—as an arbiter of correctness in language. Letting this kind of internalized feel for language do the work of mediating between individual and nation gave Scottish subjects a chance to identify as natives if they could speak and write English well. Sorensen also offers an interesting and persuasive interpretation of Smith’s well-known regulatory construct, the “impartial spectator,” as the product of a Scottish sensibility—a linguistic and cultural outsider, always observing himself, continually aware of cultural difference and the performative quality of identity.

Approaching colonialism through language in the way Sorensen has done in this impressive study powerfully re-orientes the focus of colonial discourse studies, as she points out: from the one-sidedness of which Said’s *Orientalism* is the archetype to the study of cultures as mutually informing, even if drastically asymmetrical. She makes sophisticated use of postcolonial theory throughout the book, while never letting it displace or distort the historical specificity of her subject. *The Grammar of Empire* contributes importantly, as well, to studies of Scottish literature and culture and of the history of the English language, whose transnational politics, we learn, started at least this early. Grammar and empire, readers will be persuaded, are—in the British case at least—inseparably intertwined.

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*How Milton Works* by Stanley Fish. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001. Pp. vii + 616. \$35.00 cloth.

In 1967, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* established Stanley Fish as a major critic of Milton and an outstanding practitioner of reader-response theory. Now, some thirty-five years later, and with a certain reputation as a cultural critic and theorist, he turns his attention to the poet's work as a whole in a study that reproduces ten older essays and adds five new ones to produce a lengthy study boldly titled *How Milton Works*. The effect of these fifteen chapters is uneven but provocative as the author, without recourse to excessive critical jargon, focuses on indeterminacy in the poet's famously ambivalent texts. Fish, often as contentious and controversial as Milton himself, requires his readers to do what he does with passionate intensity: read the poet closely and challenge him with questions.

The basic, interrelated questions that inform these essays are thematic (What is Milton about?), epistemological (What is Milton's account of knowing and perception?) and interpretive (How is Milton to be read?). Ultimately, these and other probing questions are intended to direct the reader to understand how Milton's ideas of truth and certainty, rooted in God, are constantly being tested by the instability and uncertainty of this world. In Milton's world, Fish proclaims, "there are no moral ambiguities" because "there is only one value—the value of obedience" (53). Yet Fish's Milton is also more tentative and open to moral ambiguity, even though the first chapter, "How Milton Works," posits a simple, uncompromising God who is the basis for asserting the poet's pre-modern world view, according to which knowledge is not empirical but interior, based on a belief in fixed certainties. Fish enjoys presenting this position to counter his critical opponents, who are likely to share what he calls post-Enlightenment "liberal" biases that prevent them from seeing the poet's belief that there is but one position at stake for the reader of Milton: "we must discern the will of God and do it—that should form the basis of our thought and action in any and all situations" (57). The result of this thinking from the inside out is that the main ideas in Milton's poetry are neither stated nor clearly implied; there results a "determined reticence" (62) that enables Fish to show that in Milton's speakers "the true meaning can be discerned only by the heart and mind already informed by it" (85).

There are many revealing insights in this introductory chapter, where Fish combines analysis of early and later texts, moving from *Comus* to *Paradise Regained* and back again, with interesting comments on several passages, such as the mixture of military and sexual puns in *Paradise Lost*. Here and elsewhere, Fish the deconstructionist remains fixated on the problematic nature of Milton's texts, especially those passages that tend to "adopt an attitude toward

some thing or person or action, only to turn in a few lines and apparently sanction exactly the opposite attitude" (144).

Fish's two chapters on *Comus*, one of them new in this volume, illustrate his interest in ambiguity and wordplay. The wood that can appear both frightening and friendly is typical of the masque's dual point of view as the reader shifts his or her perspective; the masque itself remains static, Fish insists, though its *experience* for its audience is what really counts. In this reading, the subject of the poem is not virtue or temptation but the reader's interpretation. One wonders what the original seventeenth-century audience might have learned from a text that has been rightly called a "Puritan masque." But such historicist approaches to Milton are not a part of Fish's critical agenda. Since context, whether theological, political, or historical, is not considered, this chapter, like so much of the book, tells us as much about how Fish works as about how Milton works.

The book's more recent essay on *Comus* opens some new interpretive windows by making revealing use of the *Aeneid* and of the Narcissus-Echo myth to show how gender roles are reversed in Milton's depiction of *Comus* and the Lady. That *Comus* "argues for qualities that Milton would identify as female" is obvious; that the Lady, a "virtuous narcissist," has internalized her father's authority and identifies with him "so strongly that her feminine nature has been wholly subordinated" (172) is more interesting; but is it supported by the text? And is it fair to say that the Lady's tempter, with his phallic wand, is *totally* feminized? "With the Lady occupying all the available male positions, there is nothing for *Comus* to do but be more like his mother . . ." (173). Fish's subtle probing of complexity and ambiguity leads, in this case, to an oversimplification. As with his focus on puns, Fish can go to extremes at times, showing that a close reading of a court masque, however clever or illuminating, has to go beyond the reading of selected passages.

Fish's preoccupation with hidden puns is central to his study. He believes that one must "lean on" words so that they reveal the kind of duality of meaning and structure found in Milton's ideas. One of his major theses is that Milton has an obsessive interest in working from the inside out, and so the reader must be attentive to the "distinction between inner and outer, the distinction between a deep truth always present . . . and the appearances and surfaces that seem to be, or seek to be, divorced from it" (31). Hence, for Fish, the interpretation of words, scenes, and texts overlaps, and there is no need for him to consider the works in historical sequence, despite the fact that Milton's ideas changed and developed significantly over the years. The focus here is on puns that reveal the doubleness of the poet's meaning or the double way we perceive it. This emphasis can produce revealing results, as when we are asked to consider *haemony's* root (in *Comus*) as "unsightly," meaning both unseen and ugly; the root from one perspective is weak and from another strong, all of this



leading to our awareness of the subtle ways Milton manipulates the reader and produces ambivalence. But the conclusion, that the Lady is both safe and in danger and that nothing in the masque can be read unequivocally, is hardly a revolutionary insight.

Elsewhere, as in a later chapter on the phrase “gently rais’d,” part of an early description of Satan (*Paradise Lost*, I: 529), the effect is more clever than convincing. Here we are told the pun on “raised/razed” reveals “the equivocal nature of the action we are being asked to visualize” (480); if our attention is only on words and not on the dramatic context of Hell in which Satan is described, we might be tempted to agree with this interpretation. But when we are told that it is “difficult to tell even what ‘gently’ means here, or if it means anything . . .” (480), Fish’s reader, who is central to his interpretive project, is left as much adrift as Satan on the fiery lake of Hell. The theoretical basis of this chapter is that Milton’s style “admits variety only in order to either banish or condemn it” (478) and that his language does not point to a referent outside itself but “traps us within its own confines” (479).

To supplement the critical insights of this book, the reader who *really* wants to learn how Milton works will need to know how seventeenth-century theology, history, and politics inform the poet’s work. Still, *How Milton Works* is an impressive performance; it is consistently stimulating in that it forces the reader to be especially discriminating. Whatever reservations one may have about some of the conclusions, the process of thinking and probing by which Fish works his way to these conclusions makes the book valuable. This is true of the now-classic (and still controversial) essays on “Lycidas” and on the undecipherability of *Samson Agonistes* as well as the new material, all of which reveal as much about the skeptical mind and methodology of Stanley Fish as about the meaning of John Milton.

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*Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* by Heather Ann Thompson. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001. Pp. viii + 295. \$35.00 cloth.

This is the kind of book that while you’re reading it, you keep wanting it to be a whole lot better than it is. Not because it’s bad. Just the reverse. Because it isn’t, and because it could be and should be a whole lot better since all the essentials are here: a powerful story, a talented young scholar trying to do the right thing, and most important of all, a worthy cause to be served.

It's the worthy cause that puts Heather Ann Thompson's *Whose Detroit?* in company with several other, recent books—books by young scholars who grew up in or around Detroit, who went to graduate school, got their degrees, and then decided to do right by their home town. There is, for example, Thomas Sugrue's crucial investigation of race and economics, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; or Suzanne Smith's study of Motown music, *Dancing in the Street*, or John Hartigan's wonderful examination of whiteness and "hillbillies" in Detroit, *Racial Situations*. Now, thanks to such works as these, there's a whole revisionist genre of Detroit studies, the aim of which is to show what Americans generally don't know about the city, but think they always already understand, and also to expose the cost that such ignorance exacts from us all, because Detroit is the most American place in this country, when it comes to race and racism, class and labor and the kinds of violence, overt and otherwise, that ignorance breeds. Detroit is not the exception, as most people elsewhere would like to believe; it's the rule (merely exaggerated), so that what we don't know about Detroit is what is bedeviling the rest of us, no matter whether we credit this truth or not.

And that's right where Heather Thompson (Assistant Professor of History at the University of North Carolina/Charlotte) begins and ends her story about "politics, labor, and race in a modern American city," as the subtitle puts it—with the insistent, and justified, claim that Americans fail to understand Detroit at their peril:

By excavating the history of inner-city Detroit and its labor movement, and by re-examining their respective fates as the twentieth century neared its close, this book demonstrates the following central claims: America's urban centers did not merely waste away by the 1980s; political tensions among radicals, conservatives, and liberals after World War II shaped urban America as surely as did racial clashes; and finally the U.S. labor movement always had more power over its destiny than its leaders imagined. (8)

We get it wrong, in other words, when we write the city off as the failed, empty product of racial politics run amuck. The story is more complicated, and more complicatedly ours—all of ours—than that, as Thompson says in her conclusion: "[I]t would be a tragic mistake to see American urban centers by the mid-1980s as simply the doomed place that many whites left and where the economy took a nosedive" (219). And that's the important story she sets out to tell, about what most people don't know, or else don't want to credit about post-war Detroit. There's nothing inevitable about this most typical American city and the devastation that has taken place here; it is the result of choices that people made. And we might have chosen otherwise. But we didn't.

Thompson has organized her book around the story of an African American auto worker, James Johnson, Jr., whose name is probably unknown now even to most people in the city where he lived, and where his life went disastrously and dangerously wrong. "While Johnson is clearly not an Everyman," Thompson reasonably cautions,

his participation in the Second Great Migration to Detroit during the 1950s, as well as his experiences in Detroit's auto plants, courtrooms, and city streets during the 1960s and 1970s, were certainly understood by many Motor City residents and plant workers. Johnson's story is emblematic of the complexity that was Detroit and the urban North writ large between 1945 and 1985. (2)

As a child growing up in the rural south, Johnson had been a victim of both poverty and racism. (At age nine, he witnessed the lynching of a cousin, who was reputed to have fallen in love with a white woman.) The hope of a better life brought him north, to Detroit, when he was eighteen. What he found, instead of prosperity, was an industrialized and unionized form of racism of exactly the sort that he was trying to escape. Johnson had, from childhood, suffered mental troubles and a pathological dread of white people, exacerbated obviously by the terrors he'd seen. Although he found a place in an auto plant, as he'd hoped, he never escaped discrimination there. His frustrations culminated in July 1970, as a result of a dispute with a supervisor at work. Johnson went home, got a gun, and came back to the Chrysler factory where he worked, and proceeded to kill three men before allowing himself to be taken into custody by security officers.

It's the things that led up to Johnson's mental break, and the murders, and the events that followed, that make him an engaging subject for Thompson. And Johnson's story is important, and revelatory, and genuinely tragic. He affords Thompson access to the "emblematic complexity" that she is trying to convey, involving local politicians, the police and the courts, labor unions, radical political organizations, reporters, Great-Society liberals, and a lot of just plain citizens. Johnson was acquitted, by reason of insanity, his attorneys pleading racism as the underlying cause of his mental debility. And he later won a worker's compensation case against Chrysler, for the racist abuse he'd suffered on the job. He would ultimately be released from the state institution where he was confined for four years, in a legal case that has all the drama and double-dealing of revenge tragedy. And then he just vanished from sight.

Which gets to the point I made at the outset, about wishing that this was a better book than it is. Johnson's story is important, and compelling, and terrible. But by threading it through her book in a haphazard fashion, Thompson loses the power of her narrative, which gets bogged down in accounts of politicians and labor leaders that frequently suffer for lack of dramatic interest.

Don't get me wrong. This is not a bad book. The problem is that Thompson's strengths as historian and archivist and the strength of her main story make you wish it was either a political biography of James Johnson, or else a historical investigation of radical labor in Detroit. But trying to be both at once, the project fails to achieve all that it might have.

This difficulty becomes clear in the general organization of materials. There are eight chapters, each dealing concurrently with the main subjects of the study: race, labor, politics. But it's not always clear what the point is, or how individual discussions (which are often wonderfully detailed) are meant to advance our understanding of Detroit. To prove once more that the post-migration North was just as racist as the pre-migration South is not exactly necessary. The question is why, and how, this happened, which is more in the way of a cultural studies question, of the sort that Thompson is not prepared usually to ask. Nor is she typically interested in the larger historical context of her local narrative: the national political scene, the war in Vietnam (and how it inflected racial politics), the assassinations of the 1960s. There is no strong sense of chronology, from chapter to chapter. And what is perhaps the most troubling feature of Thompson's writing is her tendency to use commonplaces and clichés and undefined terms (liberal, radical, conservative) as if their meaning were indisputable and clear. One example will suffice:

[W]hite police officers were not the only ones hostile to living in Detroit after it came under black leadership. As [Coleman] Young began a second term as mayor, whites' hostility to his rule had escalated to such a degree that their ongoing exodus from the city that had begun slowly in the 1950s became a virtual stampede in the 1970s and early 1980s. (206)

Yes, the city did change hands racially speaking. But this shorthand, white "stampede" is not the way to understand what went on, as Thompson herself would seem to argue. How many people left, in which year exactly, who were those people, how much money did they make, how was their behavior different from or similar to the behavior of other migrants in U.S. cities? That's what we need to understand.

Which is not to say that this is a bad book. Far from it. Thompson has done some valuable and highly suggestive work here, especially in her investigation of the connections between student organizations and labor politics, and between political careers and high-profile trials. And what is perhaps most valuable of all, her regrettably slight investigation of the role played by women in "radical" labor organizations, and how gender politics came to inflect the more familiar politics of race in the 1960s. Obviously, this is an author with a wealth of archival information, who has a lot more to say about Detroit. What

I hope happens now is that she will write those other books that this one is clearly a preparation for.

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*Professions: Conversations on the Future of Literary and Cultural Studies* edited by Donald E. Hall. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. Pp. 296. \$44.95, cloth; \$19.95, paper.

This is in every way an admirable book, a *necessary* book, starting with the good intentions that called it into being—especially because of those good intentions on the part of the editor, Donald E. Hall, who has assembled this anthology of “professions” from scholars, most of them big fish, more or less, who have addressed themselves to the future of literary and cultural studies:

. . . *Professions* was born as something of a challenge to myself to meet an articulated demand from students: to read and have as a point of reference a collection of essays that helps define some of the most important issues facing literary and cultural critics in their professional and scholarly lives, but that also demonstrates a genuine respect for divergent opinions and diverse practices. I imagined it as a comprehensive textbook of sorts, to which students could turn to find a range of opinions concerning major methodologies and professional controversies. . . . (2)

Admirable, as I suggested, and necessary. Hall’s wish to have professional experts engage each other in conversation (by writing back and forth, by being interviewed, by co-authoring) so that students and—God forbid—thinking adults generally could understand what’s involved when academics consider the work we, variously and often contentiously, do, especially the future of that work.

Hall, to his credit, is quick to admit that the collection is not comprehensive, in the sense that every form of opinion is collected here. The hostile crank fringe (left, right, middle) while they may have gotten invited, disdained to participate. (Hall suggests quite civilly that they’ll get their chance when reviews come out.) What he did, again admirably, as he explains in the introduction, is

to contact individuals whose profiles in the profession and whose distinct voices excited my own interest, to ask them what *they* thought were the most pressing issues that needed airing for the benefit of

graduate students and the broader profession, and to ask them also to suggest individuals with different views with whom they wished to engage in dialogue. (11)

And that—dialogue—is what readers will find in this excellent book, which takes seriously and honorably the mission of teaching. People who know what they are talking about talk to each other about the differences that animate the work of literary and cultural studies. And they do this out of the shared conviction that understanding and consensus are not the same thing, and that disagreement under conditions of mutual respect is the fundamental work of teachers, because teachers is what we are, all of us, or else we are nothing at all worth mentioning.

*Professions*, then, is like a number of other books, or kinds of books, that academic readers may be familiar with. It's like, but blessedly also different from the rant-thologies, as they might be called where professional bigwigs offer post-apocalyptic musings on the death of this or that—language, the profession, intelligibility, their adversaries' mode of interpretation. It's the kind of stuff generally that makes David Lodge and Richard Russo seem like callow romanticists. Then there are the how-to manuals, about this or that form of either more or less valuable practice. And finally there are the histories of the profession, some obviously better than others, and more fair. Hall's collection is like all of these in some degree but also original (and necessary) insofar as it produces something that they do not, which is dialogue. "You have to build community and conversation into the *structure* of the educational enterprise, or they'll never happen," (23) as Jane Tompkins says to Gerald Graff in their exchange, "Can We Talk?" And she's right of course, and that's precisely what Hall has done—in a variety of ways—and why his enterprise is both valuable in itself and a useful model of what we ought to want to do, but rarely achieve.

There are ten contributions to the collection, organized into three sections. The first, "Changing Paradigms," discusses just that, the paradigms that organize academic practice. There are three pieces in this section that pair off Gerald Graff and Jane Tompkins on the subject of academic community, John McGowan and Regenia Gagnier on the subject of differences between individualist American institutions and collectivist British ones, and finally James Phelan and James R. Kincaid on the subject of textuality. As the list makes clear, this is not a comprehensive examination of all possible paradigms, but an examination, in dialogue form, of what it looks and sounds like when paradigms get talked about. And wonder of wonders, the results are not only oftentimes illuminating, but—especially when Hall himself gets involved—wonderfully funny. Take, for example, this "editorial interruption" that Hall inserts into the dialogue between Phelan and Kincaid. Hall consults "one W. J. T. Mitchell" to whom he turns for help, editorially. Here's a part of their

exchange, which interrupts Phelan and Kincaid's back-and-forth discussion (DH is Hall; WIDJIT is Mitchell):

DH: So you know both these people.

WIDJIT: Yes, friends with both, if you can believe it.

DH: Oh, I can. Phelan seems amiable.

WIDJIT: He is, very.

DH: Kincaid too?

WIDJIT: No, I wouldn't say that.

DH: Anyhow, you see my problem in this exchange.

WIDJIT: When are we going to start having fun?

DH: Something like that. There is something about the feel of all this, you know, the tone. It's . . .

WIDJIT: Fucking boring.

DH: Well, perhaps formal.

WIDJIT: Archaic fumbblings, fussy pedantry, quadruple missings of the point, rhinocerine wit, convulsive belches.

DH: So what should I do?

WIDJIT: Edit Kincaid.

DH: He does seem to go on a bit in making his points.

WIDJIT: He doesn't by God get it. He never makes a point. I must say that even Phelan, weighted down with his 1930s-era theoretical clodhoppers, runs rings round him. (69)

It goes on like that a bit longer; Mitchell makes some suggestions, those get passed along to Kincaid and Phelan, and the discussion continues. It's the best kind of showing *and* telling exposition of academic differences, here relevant specifically to the topic under consideration, which is textual authority.

Part 2 of the collection is titled "Changing Applications," its point being the examination of change, and how fields of inquiry deal with and prove capable of discussing change. Marjorie Perloff and Robert von Hallberg take on contemporary studies in poetry and poetics. Judith Jackson Fossett, a literary critic, and Kevin Gaines, a historian, discuss the evolving field of African American Studies, along with their two disciplinary approaches to that field. And then in a textually interesting exchange, Dennis W. Allen and Judith Roof deal with the academic star system and the question of who gets to speak for whom, and from what paradigm (in this case Marx or Freud). One is a gay man, the other a lesbian woman; they collaborate by refusing to identify, textually, who is saying what:

. . . we begin by discussing three exemplary instances (the murder of Matthew Shepard, the coming-out of Ellen DeGeneres, and the rise of the academic star system in lesbigay studies) in order to illustrate

the strengths and limitations of the two methodologies [psychoanalysis and marxism] but also, finally, to provide the basis for a critique of the very idea of the exemplary individual, a critique that leads us in turn to an interrogation of the nature and function of methodology itself. (131)

What might have been a hollow gimmick turns into a pedagogically valuable means of illustrating the underlying point here, about individual identity and celebrity representation. It's a fine piece of work that I expect would teach really well.

Part 3, "A Changing Profession," takes up specific aspects of professional practice. Gordon Hutner, Niko Pfund, and Martha Banta discuss academic publishing. Geoffrey Galt Harpham provides a one-man "rant" on theory and the academic star system, its quick-draw procedure intended to provoke response: "How did the university, the spiritual home of unremunerated idealism, come to germinate a whole class of overcompensated sybarites? The answer, I believe is counterintuitive but inescapable: theory" (188). Then there's an engaging dialogue between Hall and his grad school mentor, Susan Lanser. Grad directors might usefully send this bit out to prospective students, as a kind of truth-in-advertising initiative—albeit a user-friendly one—to make them aware of all the other stuff involved in academic training besides the big ideas. The book ends with a set of interviews in which Hall talks to a range of academic "successes" about how the profession has changed over the course of their careers: J. Hillis Miller, Herbert Lindenberger, Sandra Gilbert, Bonnie Zimmerman, Nellie McKay, Elaine Marks. There's a lot of history here, which is not only valuable in a scholarly sense, but also specially meaningful since it arrives as personal narrative. Sandra Gilbert, past president of the MLA, is both funny and wisely admonitory:

. . . [W]e aren't doing a good enough job of teaching students how to communicate ideas to younger people and to general, nonspecialist audiences. . . . Just read what is published in learned journals and in academic "bestsellers" (if that term isn't an oxymoron) to see why our students use so much needlessly complicated language. . . . [S]uch an inability to speak clearly to larger audiences is inextricably related to the failures of self-representation that have put us in lamentably bad positions economically. Until we can speak directly to our fellow citizens in language that they can understand, we're going to be the losers in the culture wars—which means we're going to be the losers in the funding wars. (251)

Somebody say Amen. And while we're at it, we might also say thank-you to Donald Hall for this batch of dialogic "professions," which are various, most



of them smart, and eminently teachable too. The book is a success, in other words, and not just for those reasons, which are laudable enough. Hall succeeds at making this too-often-beaten-up profession of ours seem plausible as work a young person might believe in and think better of himself or herself for being attracted to. It's a good job, that one, so good for Donald Hall.

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*Writing History, Writing Trauma* by Dominick LaCapra. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Pp. xvi + 226. \$42.20 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

*Writing History, Writing Trauma* marks less a new direction than a continuation, and in some senses an elaboration, of Dominick LaCapra's work over the last decade. It extends both his interest in Holocaust representation and his long-standing debate with his own discipline about the nature and purposes of historical study, and it turns to the same modes of psychoanalytic interpretation on which he relied in *Representing the Holocaust* (1994) and *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (1998). For LaCapra, any critical apprehension of twentieth-century history must have at its center a theory of trauma; trauma constructs the subjectivity of survivors of this history and demands the deliberate construction of a particular subjectivity for the "secondary witness" as well. He thus turns to the Holocaust as an historical "limit event," exemplifying a contemporary "vision of history . . . as traumatic, especially as a symptomatic response to a felt implication in excess and disorientation" (x–xi). Its occurrence challenges the most fundamental principles of Enlightenment self-understanding (176), just as the effort to interpret it challenges the most basic assumptions of historiographical methodology, indeed, the very existence of history as a discipline. "Should historiography," he asks, "rely *only* on standard operating procedures, however necessary some of them (such as footnoting) may be, when it confronts such limit events and attempts to address the problem of trauma in its bearing on different groups or subject positions?" (205).

*Writing History, Writing Trauma* reiterates LaCapra's long-standing critique of "objectivist" history, that is, any neutral, comprehensive survey of the past that does not recognize its own implication in the act of understanding. At the same time, it rejects the constructivist assertion that truth claims can be made only in relation to discrete events, not in relation to the higher-level interpretive structures within which historiography embeds them. For LaCapra, much about the past is determinable; it is the inditing of the past's reality into "critically tested . . . empirically accurate, accessible memory of significant events

which becomes part of the public sphere” (95) that the historian, particularly the historian of trauma, should pursue. Doing this requires more than simply recording the past, it demands a disciplined empathy with the traumatized, “understood in terms of attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others” (40). The survivor is a “living archive” (92), whose potential contribution to public memory must be solicited with ethical sensitivity, but whose testimony can and should be felt as emotionally and intellectually disruptive. LaCapra terms this sensitivity an “empathic unsettlement” that entails “being responsive to the traumatic experience of others” (41), while insisting that an empathy that, “resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the experience of the other would depend both on one’s own potential for traumatization . . . and on one’s recognition that another’s loss is not identical to one’s own loss” (79). This text looks forward to the approaching era of Holocaust criticism in which interpreters will have only texts and artifacts with which to reconstruct the past. If ethical questions are to remain central concerns for understanding the Holocaust, then these must assume different forms when all criticism will be by and for secondary witnesses; whether empathic unsettlement may serve as a bridge to a new hermeneutics is the central question raised by LaCapra’s text.

LaCapra deploys empathic unsettlement within a psychoanalytic framework of pathology and potential rehabilitation (in the form of collective memory). Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia—the former a restorative “working through” of traumatic loss, the latter an “acting out” that remains fixated upon a traumatic event—can be applied to the subjectivity of both the survivor and the secondary witness, though differently for each. In the “tense relations between procedures of objective reconstruction of the past and empathic response” (87) there may appear “the tendency to repeat or enact performatively in one’s own discourse or relations processes active in the object of study” (36). Coming to terms with trauma in second-hand, historical terms, however, must mean moving from acting out to working through. “When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out . . . but which may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency” (90). LaCapra is sympathetic to the idea that pathological acting out may be inevitable for survivors, while sharply critiquing critics who fail to stand apart from identificatory processes. When the critic does fail, limit events such as the Holocaust acquire a negative sublimity; they become sanctioned as incomparable and unrepresentable events, unavailable for the act of collective history-making.

The strength of LaCapra's text lies in its urgency, in the clarity of its commitment to historiographic adequacy and the constructive potential of a psychoanalytic mode of interpretation, and in its appeal to a sense of civic responsibility. It is an appeal above all to the practicing historian to acknowledge the hold that the past has upon us as critics and as citizens; it is an appeal more broadly for academic scholars to recast their conversations in more publicly accessible terms. "History is not merely professional . . . [it may create] a critically tested, accurate memory as its contribution to a cognitively and ethically responsible public sphere" (91), and he follows up this invitation by reprinting here a public interview of his own from 1998. And yet the audience to whom LaCapra himself is writing is hard to pin down. This seems a text directed less at Holocaust studies (where these issues have long been matters of serious debate) than at American academic historians. Yet it is hard to imagine even practicing historians disagreeing with the general idea of empathic unsettlement, even if a great deal depends upon what that would mean in practice—how we can recognize the appropriate empathy in our responses, and what interpretation resulting from these responses would look like.

This is hard to determine, for LaCapra provides in this text no extended, illustrative readings as he did, for instance, in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. While he does devote a chapter to Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, this serves as a negative example of the damage wrought upon historical argument by excessive identification. LaCapra does offer one intriguing (if also troubling) analogue for his interpretive ideal in his discussion of the middle voice, a linguistic mode given broader discursive force by Barthes and carried into Holocaust hermeneutics by Hayden White. He argues that the "undecidability and unregulated difference" of the middle voice—its destabilizing of agency, as compared with active or passive voices, its blurring of past and present registers—could "disarticulate relations" (21) and protract melancholia. Yet he also recognizes a function for the middle voice in approaching "one's most tangled and difficult relations of proximity and distance with regard to the other" (29), such as the figures occupying Primo Levi's moral "gray zone." Attention to the middle voice's potential to represent trauma emphasizes LaCapra's mandate for the secondary witness: only severe self-examination will enable the desirable "process of judgment" and "ethically responsible agency." Even this remains ambiguous as critical practice, however, especially when the instances offered—Binjamin Wilkomirski's pseudo-autobiography (32ff.) or novels by George Steiner and Bernhard Schlink (199ff.)—exhibit only "more or less [of a] middle-voiced manner" and are treated briefly.

So this book feels at best preliminary, a prolegomenon to a project yet to unfold. And it seems imperative to read LaCapra alongside critics who pursue more radical hermeneutical possibilities of empathic unsettlement (a project LaCapra himself might well endorse), as in Ulrich Baer's *Remnants of Song*:

*Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (2000). In reading Celan's "Whichever stone you lift," Baer writes that "All of Celan's work constitutes a warning against the belief in the healing dimensions of remembrance. To address a catastrophic event directly—regardless of whichever 'word' you speak—will not necessarily allow for the retroactive ordering of experience but reinforce the breach in language that proved so traumatic" (181). This differs sharply from LaCapra's mention of Celan as a writer for whom "language has been so distorted or corrupted by political and propagandistic uses that it must be made strange, difficult, even resistant to pleasure in order to be used again" (4n), though it also differs from the excessive identification that LaCapra criticizes in Shoshana Felman's work. LaCapra sees Celan's texts working through problems of language that arose "through the deceptions and euphemisms of Nazi discourse" (4n), agreeing with Baer that Celan confronts a language that has been historically disrupted. Yet Baer insists that unresolvability—an irreducibly non-therapeutic experience—is essential to the audibility of Celan's poetry. Being addressed by Celan is the constant demonstration that to "use" language is to admit excess and breach with every word. At stake, then, is whether a critical subjectivity like Baer's, constructed by openness to the text's unsettlement and not oriented toward specifiable ethical outcomes, can itself be employed as a transitional stage in LaCapra's recuperative hermeneutics. What requires further demonstration is how an interpretive model like LaCapra's, focused upon therapeutically working through traumatic history, would incorporate a confrontation with a truly unsettled critical encounter like Baer's.

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*Aharon Appelfeld: From Individual Lament to Tribal Eternity* by Yigal Schwartz. Translated by Jeffrey M. Green, Foreword by Arnold J. Band. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2001. Pp. 194. \$60.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Yigal Schwartz's *Aharon Appelfeld* is a work that moves the discussion of its subject beyond the context of the Holocaust, where most previous criticism of Appelfeld's work has remained. Schwartz's three-tiered book reads Appelfeld by using "Literature and Memory," "Literature and Place" and "Literature and Religious Anguish" as different points of entry to his multifaceted fictional world. Given that Appelfeld is still productive as one of Israel's most important writers, Schwartz's study, which appeared in a slightly different version in

1996 under the additional Hebrew subtitle of "The Picture of His World," is necessarily a snapshot of a writer in progress. Appelfeld gained increasing distinction in Israel from the 1960s forward, a somewhat anomalous figure as a writer who brought diaspora concerns into a literature still focused on the theme of "Israeli-ness" in a period of national consolidation. From the publication of Appelfeld's first collection of Hebrew stories, *Ashan* [Smoke], in 1962, critical and popular acclaim steadily grew in Israel and abroad, until *Badenheim 1939* (1975) made a splash in Europe and the United States. The early stories, as Schwartz points out, are crucial to understanding this later work, structured as they are "by the tension between the necessity and/or the desire to forget, and the necessity and/or desire to remember" (11). As a child survivor from Czernowitz, Appelfeld felt the biographical need to recapture the lost world of the European Jewish past, in both its assimilated and traditional forms, and come to terms with the Hebrew-speaking Israeli present. As this book argues, Appelfeld's fictional return to Europe in his later fiction, and his more limited exploration of the Israeli present, achieve "artistic greatness" (8) in classic, modern Hebrew form, exploring the creative tension between these two crucial sectors of the modern Jewish world.

Schwartz moves beyond previous Appelfeld criticism by shifting the discussion of his work to this larger frame of discussion. The Holocaust, as he accurately observes, is like the blank page Appelfeld himself places between the two halves of his novel *The Age of Wonders* (1978), separating its young protagonist's pre-war existence in Europe from the section entitled "Many Years Later When Everything Was Over." Schwartz insightfully places this novel at the center of Appelfeld's own vision and career. For unlike the assimilated Jewish writers peopling Appelfeld's fiction who tried to leave the "tribe" behind, Appelfeld's work, in Schwartz's view, portrays an exemplary process of both connection with and separation from the past that creates the authority of the classic work. Appelfeld's stories and novels reconstruct a world of both assimilated and traditional, often Hasidic, Jews in the Europe of his fiction, with struggles that reappear, in different form, in the post-war Israeli reality of survivors Appelfeld constructs with loving care. Schwartz's most eloquent insights portray the guilt that accompanied this negotiation between Jewish culture and modern, individual identity. That process did not come to a magical conclusion at the end of the war, with the revival of Hebrew literature, or writers of the "generation of the state" in Israel after 1948. The European concerns of Appelfeld's fiction, Schwartz notes, give him a "view with regard to the Jewish world that is more comprehensive than that of any recent Hebrew author since S. Y. Agnon and Haim Hazzaz" (3).

Appelfeld's comprehensiveness is not achieved through expansive realistic description, but through carefully constructed, Kafkaesque restraint that allows a seemingly absent world to appear through abstract, but precisely

evocative detail. Schwartz describes this artistic line between memory, Appelfeld's attempt to reconnect with the lost world of European Jewry, and the forgetting that post-war life in Israel required. The imperative of becoming a Hebrew writer meant that Appelfeld, who came to then-Palestine as a refugee, had to subordinate Hebrew German, his mother tongue, as well as Yiddish and the other European languages he had learned, as markers of a scorned and painful past. Walking the line between memory, the desire to "connect," and a mournful modern imperative to "detach"—this time, a Hebrew one—allowed Appelfeld to create a comprehensive fiction that tells "the life story of all assimilated Jews of modern Central Europe during the past century" (27). This rejection of the languages of the past, according to Schwartz, is recognized in Appelfeld's fiction as a price never fully paid by both the modern Jewish writers in European languages before World War II, and in the Hebrew-centered Israeli reality "when everything was over." This insight alone makes Schwartz's book a powerful revision of Israeli literary history's normatively Hebrew self-conception. Stories like "Mikhvat Haor" [The Scorch of Light], he points out, "make it impossible to ignore the fact that the Zionist option . . . occupies a place parallel to that of the option of assimilation in 'the land of the Cattails'" (56). The dynamic of "assimilated" Jewish writing in Europe, and the consolidation of Hebrew as a national literary language in the new state, as Schwartz points out, are portrayed in Appelfeld's work in subtle, yet tandem fashion. Both quests for a more modern, universal form of Jewish self-expression sustained a hidden intercourse with languages that could not be relegated to the past.

The fact that Appelfeld opted for Hebrew as his literary language in the new state, of course, is not surprising, and rightfully influences Schwartz's interpretation. The cost of that choice is certainly portrayed in the lives of the "uprooted" (59) survivors in Israel Appelfeld described in his fiction, and writes of so powerfully in his recent memoir (*The Story of a Life*, Hebrew, 1999). Schwartz sometimes underplays this back-and-forth in Appelfeld's fiction, between the "Jewish historical segment" and the "Israeli regional segment" (59). The texture of Schwartz's nuanced readings, however, militates against his own claim that Appelfeld's work "implies a kind of declaration of allegiance" to the "Jewish-historical" past. The finest descriptions in Schwartz's book are of Appelfeld's style, whose careful restraint produces a richness of meaning that effectively refuses to choose between divergent linguistic and cultural worlds. Appelfeld's "journey stories," as Schwartz perceptively defines them, are characterized by "a desperate effort to find the 'lost center point,'" or a grounding in the culture of the past, and a simultaneous "desire, no less desperate, to be freed from that effort" (73). This model of critical dialogue between European languages and traditions, as Schwartz recognizes, "belies the efforts of certain scholars and critics in Israel and the United States to present Appelfeld as a Zionist author, or as an anti-Zionist" (32). As Schwartz argues, a strong strain in Appelfeld's writing strives to open up the idea of a

closed Jewish tradition. On its religious level, for instance, his work often portrays a “strange mingling of the basic components of Jewish faith” and aspects of the “‘primitive’ gentile Christian faith” (106), and other cultural strands supposedly beyond a Jewish culture, nationalistically conceived.

Schwartz’s treatment of this theme of cultural exchange in Appelfeld, however, is sometimes more limited. The frequent “journey stories of various kinds” (74) in Appelfeld, as he points out, usually end in failure. In both Israeli and European versions, these stories characteristically end with “a description of the way Jews are swallowed up in various vehicles,” sometimes to extermination, but other times, simply to isolation and removal from their linguistic sources. This powerful insight into the importance of the linguistic past as essential to life itself, however, takes an ideological edge at odds with the previous analysis. These journey figures, Schwartz writes, are part of a “Dor hamidbar,” or “generation of the desert” in classically Zionist terms, who cannot reach the promised national homeland, caught in a “journey to eternal exile” (75). Appelfeld’s travelling characters, according to Schwartz, are those who have “left one place”—that is, the Europe where the Jews were once at home—“but will never arrive at their destination, or return to their place of origin.” This judgment of Appelfeld’s figure of the journey as a “cultural condition that can never be repaired” (74), to be sure, recognizes the wound of history as it affects refugees to Israel in Appelfeld’s fiction. Unfortunately, Schwartz here implies that Appelfeld has made a choice for a simplistic, ideological view of the Israeli present that regards an attachment to the European past as a failed dream at best, and cultural or linguistic defect at worst. If this ideological card is played in Appelfeld, as other critics have argued, this description of it runs counter to the broader thrust of Schwartz’s book.

*Aharon Appelfeld* analyzes the themes of a writer who moved beyond the limits of mourning to create a Hebrew vision of a plural national tradition. At times, Schwartz’s model of a “tribal” identity wholly opposed to the modern world, cannot do full justice to these themes of cultural interplay that give Appelfeld’s prose its special beauty. In Appelfeld’s rich fictional world, the search for the “primordial, mythological roots of the tribe” (127) becomes the source of plural, forward-looking and more than modern strength. The “lost central point” (107) Appelfeld’s characters seek is at bottom a productive quest to carry the languages of the past forward into the future. Schwartz’s book examines the many fictional sites where this linguistic and cultural exchange occurs: the train station cafes in post-war Europe, refugee camps, pre-war vacation resorts like “Badenheim,” the dingy coffee shops at the edge of Jerusalem and other places outside the formal purview of “tribal” Jewish religion and culture. In these typical Appelfeld locales, different languages, and cultures, both Jewish and non-Jewish, meet, argue, and permit his narratives to carry the weight of European languages into the modern Hebrew literary tradition. At its best,

Aharon Appelfeld is an important guide to these sites of memory, where the pictures of a diverse world become markers of the new, multilinguistic path that Israeli literature has begun to take.

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*Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian* edited by Kwok-kan Tam. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2001. Pp. v + 345. \$43.50 cloth.

This essay collection about Gao Xingjian's plays and novels consists of an Introduction by the editor, Kwok-kan Tam, and fifteen essays that trace the 2000 Nobel laureate's literary footsteps in chronological order, which "A Chronology of Gao Xingjian" sums up at the end of the collection. According to the editor, *Soul of Chaos* was born as a critical appreciation of "[Gao's] contribution to the rejuvenation of Chinese tradition and his significance in world literature," (2) as endorsed by the Swedish Academy the previous year.

In chapter one, "Gao Xingjian on the Issue of Literary Creation," Mabel Lee tackles the illusive concept of Asian cultural homogeneity, an implicit antithesis of the heterogeneous West. Observing the similarities in Daoist texts and Nietzsche's thinking, Lee maintains that "the perspective of the other" can be used "to describe the self" (25).

The three essays from chapters two to four concern Gao's second play *The Bus-Stop* (1983). Tam compares the first Chinese Absurdist play to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in which waiting or wasting is portrayed as the means of scrutinizing—or failing to do so—the epistemological meaning of human existence. Appraising *The Bus-Stop* as a dramatic inquiry into the critical, experimental stage of the post-Mao China, Tam sees this play as a landmark of the new generation of Chinese drama, generating controversies over its ideological inclination which anti-modernist critics consider as a challenge to Mao's socialist doctrines of literature and the tradition of the realist theatre of Ibsen and Stanislavsky (45). William Tay argues that Gao's avant-garde theatre frees the stage from socialist-realistic constraints by means of Artaud's and Grotowski's theories of the minimalist theatre and the theatre of poverty while at the same time sustaining traditional Chinese aesthetics. Ma Sen suggests an equivalence between the post-war European existential crisis manifested through the birth of the Absurd theatre in the tragic mess of China following the Cultural Revolution.

In chapter five, Xiaomei Chen focuses on Gao's third play *Wild Man*



(1985), which creates “Chineseness” with the local dialect of Sichuan Province and episodic scenes filled with colorful costumes, masks, songs, dances, and acrobatics, recalling, as a whole, the ambience of the Beijing Opera. Gao goes beyond Artaud’s “total theatre” by allowing characters with in-depth social, psychological dimensions; by stressing the cordial, festive atmosphere during the performance, Gao’s theatre clearly differs from Brecht’s theatre of alienation. Chen’s contention that there are in Gao “two distinct but comparable entities” (104) seems to be countered in Jo Riley and Michael Gissenwehler’s “The Myth of Gao Xingjian.” However, the cultural essentialism of their assertion that the intrinsic Chineseness of Gao’s play with the full resources of the Chinese language makes it impossible for a Westerner to understand his works properly seems to be quite common among Gao’s Western readers, which raises the question of translatability of culture through literature.

According to Amy T. Y. Lai, Gao’s trilogy, *Alarm Signal*, *The Bus-Stop*, and *Wild Man*, all end in optimism heavily tinged with uncertainty. In the same vein, she argues that in *Monologue* (1984), where Gao deals with the linguistic constitution of subjectivity through the changing positions of the actor, there is little indication of hope about what the actor would do after breaking down the fourth wall, yet the game-playing of the actor exposes the self to uncertainty in a vigorous postmodern inquiry. In chapter eight, Gilbert C. F. Fong propounds that in Gao the interchangeable subject position is achieved through Daoist, or Zen Buddhist contemplation taken as a dramaturgic device in which the actor exists in the three modes of the self, the neutral actor, and the character; that, in turn, creates “a pan-subjective consciousness or even self-effacement” of the modern man (151). In chapter nine, Quah Sy Ren uses Zhuang Zhou, an ancient figure who pursued truth in its untruthful disguise, as a metaphor for Gao’s theatre of supposition, whose prototypes Ren discerns in Meyerhold and in Brecht as well as in the traditional Chinese *xiqu*. The multiplying images bounced between two mirrors become another metaphor of the impossibility of knowing what the truth is. For this critic, it is the unreality of the real in *Wild Man* that indicates Gao’s departure from Marxist didactic theatre.

In chapter ten, “Gao Xingjian and the Asian Experimentation in Postmodernist Performance,” Tam argues that in Gao the two aspects of postmodernity, the anti-representational and the self-referential, deconstruct the world to create a human subject (203). To him, postmodernity is a mode of creating subjectivity and a means of resistance to counter the dominant culture (207). In his collaboration with Terry Siu-Han Yip, “Gender and Self in Gao Xingjian’s Three Post-Exile Plays,” chapter eleven, Tam argues that through self-transcendent observation of Daoism and Zen Buddhism, the self becomes “subject-in-object” and also “object-in-subject,” manifesting “the self in chaos” of modernity (218). Yip and Tam point out that Gao deconstructs the woman’s

fantasy of the man in *Between Life and Death* (1991); in *Nocturnal Wanderer* (1993), the Sleepwalker encounters scattered reflections of his fantasies in his nightmarish sleepwalking; the play that completes the trilogy of this psychological deconstruction of the self, whether male or female, is *Dialogue and Rebuttal* (1993), in which the linguistic project to reconstruct the self and the other through deconstructing the fantasies, the false manifestation of the sexes, gives way to Buddhist “awakening and non-reasoning” (231). Buddhist non-distinction becomes the redemption of the soul in its absurdity (232).

In chapter twelve, Lee focuses on the pronoun protagonists in *Soul Mountain* (1990) and maintains that the merging of “I,” “You,” and “She” is the narrative style Gao develops to explore subjectivity in this much-acclaimed novel. The absence of “we” becomes then one indication of Gao’s conscious resistance to group politics (252). Torbjörn Lodén, in “World Literature with Chinese Characteristics: On a Novel by Gao Xingjian,” considers Gao’s literary position as a fixed point from which to sum up the Chinese literary tradition. To him, *Soul Mountain* is a window open onto an anthropological investigation of Chinese culture and literature.

In chapter fourteen, Lee finds historical precedents for Gao’s staunch disavowal of ideological totalitarianism in the literature of Xu Wei and Lu Xun, even if the latter, much to Gao’s disappointment, later in his life had to suffer renouncing creative writing for the public, which Lee calls “the superstition of nation” (286). In chapter fifteen, Tam reads in *One Man’s Bible* (1998), the latest work of Gao, a temporalization and spatialization of the subject through the application of his understanding of cubist painting to Gao’s narrative style (306). The implied “I” interconnects the “He” of the past and the “You” of the present, which form a “three-faced subject” comparable to the cubist representation of the object; the result is the portrayal of the subject through an object.

This collection helps understand how the Chinese-speaking literary world, backed by the power of cultural cohesion the Chinese have as an ethnic group, tries to encompass in the idiom of postmodernity the absurdity of the late-capitalist crisis happening in late-communist China—and one may need to apply a different critical perspective when reading the Western scholarship of Lee and Lodén. The conflicts between the western and traditional Chinese modes necessitate a negotiating indigenization of the concept of a liberalist pursuit of the self within the spiritual base of modern China, which has been self-sacrificially community-based. Whether Gao’s characters at the bus stop are an optimistic commentary on the future of China or whether their seemingly unending wait is a nihilistic criticism of communist China, the riddle of the bus stop asks for the individual’s participation in a possible decoding, thus creating the individual in totalitarian China.

As a Chinese political refugee in Paris, Gao rebukes both totalitarian communist ideology and capitalist interest, promoting his “cold literature,” the

non-utilitarian literary affirmation of the value of the self (See his Nobel lecture in *PMLA* 116, No. 3:594–608). His self-exile in 1989, soon after the Tiananmen massacre, resulted in the Chinese authority's official ban of his works. Consequently, Gao's plays, novels, and literary criticism, written in Chinese, found readers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and through translation, he could reach Western readers to a limited extent. Under those circumstances, the Swedish Academy's decision to award Gao this prize for his literary achievement seems to be a political move. Gao's "cold" literature, his self-proclaimed non-committal stance, perhaps ironically, is celebrated as a form of resistance.

The political reification of Gao's non-partisan position also seems to happen among Gao's Chinese-speaking readers. The contributors of this collection honor Gao as a successful grafter of a western dramaturgy of the Absurd onto the indigenous Chinese dramatic stem. Almost unanimously, Ma, Chen, and others, argue that Gao's appropriating Western technique was a way to preserve and renew traditional Chinese dramatic aesthetics, which themselves had influenced Western philosophy and dramaturgy, and which Gao then reimported through the medium of the performing arts. Chen contends that Gao's and Brecht's theatres are "two distinct but comparable entities"; the nationalist agency in his work seems to lie in that relation: "Gao Xingjian felt compelled to find things 'new' in a foreign culture, a culture which in fact is 'originally' his own" (104). The question of the origin of those specific dramatic devices, the Brechtian alienation effect and Artaud's total theatre, forms a Möbius strip: depending on the stand point, the starting point of the circle could be either inside or outside. This nationalist project, even though the Chinese colonial past and its modern history of revolutions render the use of the phrase "Chinese nationalism" problematic, furthers the post-Mao liberalist rhetoric according to which the marriage between western techniques and Chinese indigenous aesthetics was consummated to overcome socialist realism.

Tay defensively argues that "Gao's indebtedness to Western avant-gardists can only be seen as technical borrowings, which come without the ideological trappings" (72–73), which signals the cultural conservatism those contributors share as a form of Chinese nationalism. In his defense of the *Silent Man*, in *The Bus-Stop*, against the accusation of being an "individualist who has abandoned the masses," Tay uses Brecht's view of technique as inherently neutral: the same device can be used in different settings, free from ideological trappings (73). In a similar vein, Ma argues that the Theatre of the Absurd is no more than a mode of representation among others, and does not convey any ideology. However, it may be precisely because any genre or mode of representation is saturated in ideology that this play raised controversy at the very moment when a pluralist China began to arise. A socialist critic who focuses on the reciprocity between infrastructure and superstructure would argue back

that modes of cultural representation cannot but be saturated with the material base of the society.

Socialist-realist critics see pessimism in *The Bus-Stop* on the grounds that this play is a Chinese adaptation of the Absurd Theatre of the West; however, post-Mao liberalist critics seem to perceive the waiting as a token of an imminent utopia because they too hope for the evolution of China, and thus they argue that the dramatic medium Gao uses is neutral. A circular reasoning is apparent in Tay's conclusion: Bloch's view of "the transcendent power of hope is certainly applicable to [*The Bus-Stop*], for the opposite of hope is nihilism, which is precisely what the play attempts to negate by resurrecting a familiar, unmistakable, and sanctioned figure of this utopian wish" (74); this reveals how the critic's own politics, the optimistic inclination toward a utopian China, determines how the play is read. Those efforts to overcome socialist-realist Chinese drama by bridging the distance between a western liberalist view and a traditional Chinese aesthetics of Daoism and Zen Buddhism, constitute an ideological stance that the Chinese-speaking literary world seems to have adopted in the post-Mao era. However, apart from the question of whether western recognition of Chinese-speaking Gao is the result of political maneuvering in support of Gao's non-partisan effort to construct a revolutionary anti-socialist hero or of whether this collection strikes a deliberate note of nationalist conservatism, it is clear that Kwok-kan Tam's project to publish essays written by western and eastern scholars on Gao's literary works is not only a tribute to Gao but also a welcome sign that greater attention is being paid to voices and tongues unduly neglected at present.

A few quibbles, on matters that do not detract from the overall quality of the volume: overlapping contributions by the same authors, for example, five essays by Kwok-kan Tam and three by Mabel Lee, create a sense that the critical appreciation of Gao still depends heavily on a few pioneering critics. And it was bothersome to follow the Chinese phonetic spellings followed by written Chinese and its English translation. It might have been enough to provide the English translation of the titles followed by parenthetical Chinese, considering that the intended audience is mainly one of English speakers. And while some names are westernized by putting the last name last, some were given in the Chinese way, for example, Gao Xingjian, Ma Sen, which was a bit confusing.

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