

1994

## Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism>

---

### Recommended Citation

Editors, Criticism (1994) "Book Reviews," *Criticism*: Vol. 36: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol36/iss1/7>

*Distinguo: Reading Montaigne Differently* by Steven Rendall. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. Pp. x + 136. \$39.95.

Steven Rendall's study is among the most significant on Montaigne, and one may situate it critically as cutting across the best of recent trends. It is first and foremost a postmodern project reminiscent of work by Terence Cave, André Tournon, and Jean-Yves Pouilloux, situating its problematics within broad cultural and intellectual parameters in the manner of Walter Ong, Gérard Defaux, and Antoine Compagnon.

Rendall's critical approach is explained in an Introduction in which he opposes his (deconstructive) method to that of such critics as Pierre Villey, Fortunat Strowski, and Arthur Armaingaud, who in various ways reduce textual complexity to such concepts as mimesis, evolution or hidden discourse used to fend off censors. Rendall opts for a view of Montaigne that would conserve the "irreducible difference in the text" (1) and a critical strategy in which "reading differently focuses . . . on the frictions and discontinuities within the text including those produced by the reinscription of other texts). Such readings stress the text's difference from itself, the internal differences that characterize any discourse and resist its reduction to formal or thematic unity" (1).

In Chapter 2, Rendall analyzes what may be considered Montaigne's primary mode of reasoning called "Distinguo." This multi-faceted term, derived from Scholastic logic, is appropriated by the essayist to designate the infinite distinctions required in the epistemological realm to trace the irreducible diversity and fragmentation in the metaphysical order that resist totalization and universal judgement. By citing a line from the essay "De l'inconstance de nos actions," Rendall rightly points out how Montaigne virtually came to emblemize this term to characterize his reasoning process: "Distingo est le plus universel membre de ma Logique" (27). This ironic motto expresses the endless distinctions (ultimately self-neutralizing [31]) called upon to refine a judgement which, when confronted by insuperable difference, wind up problematizing the putative criteria for any judgement. In this lucid and tightly written chapter, Rendall makes use of logical terminology to marshal *distinguo's* ceaseless labor in producing the significant issues broached by the art of essaying. Examining "Par divers moyens on arrive à pareille fin," he finds that Montaigne's logic "is not reducible to syllogistic deduction or induction from examples" or "to a collection of instances confirming or contradicting the prudential rule from which it sets out. Rather, it is organized by a complex grid operating on several levels and along different axes that intersect but remain distinct and incompatible" (2). In his study of "De l'inconstance de nos actions," *distinguo* comes to upset any reliable inference, from judgement to human nature, from words to things, or from act to intent. And in this Chapter's third part on "De l'experience," Rendall moves to the *distinguo* that reveals Montaigne's highly self-conscious meditation on the "oscillation" (31) between model and distinction and model and resemblance brought about by the oxymoronic perception of "Universal diversity" (29).

In Chapter 3, Rendall fleshes out the differences spun by "the weave of voices" (43) that complicate the authority, position, and stability of Montaigne's various speaking roles. Studying the play of deictics within the com-

plexities of enunciation, Rendall poses rich questions regarding the source of discourse, the identity of the subject, the shifts and reversals of alliances and oppositions between addresser and addressee, and the paradoxical workings of figuration that simultaneously mask and unmask the face of nature. Concentrating on one of Montaigne's key essays, "Que philosophe, c'est apprendre à mourir," Rendall problematizes the notion that there can be a predominant and undivided communication function. In effect, he debunks the evolutionists' appraisal of this essay as the paradigm case of Montaigne's first stoic period by showing how discursive shifts generate both epicurean and skeptical voices simultaneously with those of Seneca. Section 4 ("Masks and voices") is an object lesson on how treacherous it is to characterize Montaigne's meaning by source hunting. The well known prosopopoeia of Nature that concludes "Que philosophe," echoes the views of Lucretius, Seneca, Manilius, and Virgil, but these allusions are highly ironic because "Nature appeals precisely to the sort of *auctoritates* that she was supposed to supersede" (48). Moreover, in the Lucretian intertext (*De rerum natura*), the Latin author privileges the knowledge of the sage over the ignorance of the *vulgaire*; but through the volatile reversal of deictics, Montaigne transforms Lucretius and thereby puts his reader in oscillation between knowledge and ignorance of death. Finally, if Lucretius insists that death can only speak through nature by the face and voice of art, Montaigne requires that we unmask death of its cultural rituals ("equipage") to achieve a salutary ignorance of its threat. However, Rendall sees this goal as highly paradoxical: "To unmask either persons or things is to deprive them of access to language. The valets and chambermaids do not hear the voice of death, but neither do they speak of it, and therefore cannot enter into the linguistic texture of Montaigne's essay" (51). The important implication of this sentence is that the aim of "Que philosophe" and the work of the *Essais* must be to "de-culturize" or "de-philosophize" (my terms) the discourse of "equipage" to achieve the silent ignorance of the common people.

As the twin principles of *auctoritas* and *traditio* were losing their authority to control such writing practices as translation, commentary, and imitation, the Renaissance encouraged relatively freer use of antecedent texts as common property. As Rendall points out in Chapter 4, Montaigne's *Essais* appear at the interstices of this changing paradigm, since they give evidence of the tension between "free appropriation" (exemplified by Erasmus' celebration of the tension between "free appropriation" (exemplified by Erasmus' celebration of *copia*) and "authorial interiority" (illustrated by Quintilian's notion of *pectus*) (54). Free appropriation was inhibited by the growing concept of writing as personal property and by what Foucault has termed "penal appropriation"—the view that literary discourse may become "potentially transgressive and punishable" (55). Such tensions manifest themselves in the *Essais* as two incompatible but mutually inseparable models of reading/writing. The first seeks to justify the position that a single author is the unique source and origin of meaning, and this idea is grounded in two systems of imagery. One clusters around the metaphor of paternity which holds that "the father is to the son as the author is to the text" (59). The other underlines Montaigne's formulation of pedagogy as the process of making other texts one's own through extraction and application of moral principles (66) and by carefully "sifting" and "digesting" (62) the intellectual matter so as to transform it into

one's own designs. The second model of discourse as free appropriation derives from Montaigne's statements granting that readers have at least half the share of producing meaning: "La parole est moitié à celui qui parle, moitié à celui qui l'écoute" (69). Though mutually inseparable, these two models of meaning are reciprocally adversative, since "the same procedures of appropriation that make it possible to write the self seem to make a corresponding expropriation at the hands of readers inevitable" (72).

This paradoxical effect of appropriation provides the reader with a telling transition into the problems of the fifth chapter dealing with expropriation. If it is true that the father is to the son as the author is to the text, then the "child's escape from paternal authority, and his displacement or replacement of the father" is not only possible but inevitable (74). Rendall calls this kind of dispossession "The Prodigal Text" (73), and summons its theoretical types from Plato, Horace, Ronsard, D'Aubigné, and Montaigne's friend and editor, Pierre de Brach. In Montaigne's eyes, *fama* looms as a particularly threatening type of expropriation, because by its speed, force, and scope, it can proliferate complete fictions utterly beyond the author's control. A metaphor for "the iterable or quotable" (80), *fama* also divides the author internally as the mutual struggle between the desire for glory and the recognition of its vanity. Montaigne is cognizant that praise of his name has little to do with him as a unique individual; but his attempt to preserve his identity by distinguishing between words and things cannot halt the false attributions made to a proper name which seem to multiply his very being.

Expropriation of the writer's work can also come about through the "Menace of Interpretation[s]" (86) which, as Montaigne says, "dissipent la vérité et la rompent" (91). Rendall surmises that this fear of disfiguration caused Montaigne to construct ideal readers who would conserve authorial authority. For example, in the "Au Lecteur," Montaigne specifically limits his audience to friends and family "less to communicate knowledge of its author than to recover or keep alive the knowledge the reader already has" (93). The "honneste homme" would be another figure of the ideal reader who, like Montaigne's cherished friend La Boétie, would understand the author by natural affinity before having met him. But under these circumstances where affinity determines interpersonal knowledge, writing would be accidental and interpretation would be unnecessary. As Rendall observes, "Thus the understanding that makes correct interpretation possible at the same time makes it superfluous" (94).

The dispersion and fragmentation of personal identity cause Montaigne to seek a stable form of self-reference. What in fact is the nature of the referent and how may it best be communicated? These are the central questions of Chapter 6. In Rendall's view, Montaigne bases self-reference on an indication of *trust* (*fiance*)—the credibility established by writing that he is a person of good faith and that the public will know him through his sincerity and good will (108–109). Notice that what warrants the identity of the referent is not truth but "the fiduciary value of the sign" (109). Since it is the sign that will corroborate the tie between communication and referent, what sign is the best index of trust? Images or verbal signs? Montaigne's insistence in the *Essais* that his work is a *self-portrait* leads Rendall to conclude: "The description of the *Essais* as self-portrait suggests that, like a picture, the text resembles

Montaigne, and that, like his face, it can be read as a *sympton* of his good faith" (102). Rendall anchors his argument on Montaigne's beliefs concerning "physiognomy" (102), as developed in such essays as "De la phisionomie," which studies the relation between the exterior and the interior and whether one can infer the latter from the former. Rendall situates Montaigne's position on physiognomonic principles in contrast to Socrates' skeptical epistemology and Erasmus' confidence in speech. That is, Montaigne differs from the "Silenic Socrates" (103) of the *Symposium* who holds that outward appearance belies inward truth as well as from Erasmus who gives priority of *oratio* over *vultus* (99). As most humanists, Montaigne does not exclude speech as an index of the soul, but, as Rendall notes in a fine distinction, "the face determines the interpretation of speech in only one way: it warrants the *sincerity* of what is said" (109). Thus, the face mediates the correlation between language and meaning, and in this sense self-portraiture would be a "speaking picture" (110). But self-portraiture may give the impression that, like painting, writing is naturally related to its object by resemblance, a "kind of Cratylism" (111) that would transcend the problems of mediation between language and referent. However by borrowing semiotic concepts from Peirce (misprinted as "Pierce" [111-112]), Rendall shows that Montaigne's attempt to stabilize reference in such iconic signs inevitably exacerbates the differences he had sought to overcome (112).

Rendall's last chapter achieves the robust irony of concluding his book by demonstrating that the *Essais* resist closure. Neither a recapitulation nor a final thesis statement, this last chapter is a continued meditation the effects of difference, a meditation, however, strategically placed at the end to dramatize how difference counteracts every kind of finality. The focus of the discussion is Montaigne's famous principle of non-correction: "J'adjouste, mais ne corrige pas" (113). This means that although the essayist may emend his writing by additions, he will neither delete previous statements nor correct himself. Thus, additions made to the first 1580 edition of the *Essais* neither supersede nor replace previous subjects but "incorporate and extend them" (113). Rendall maintains that this position constitutes "an ethics of writing . . . or . . . of publishing . . . that echoes throughout the *Essais* and challenges traditional ways of reading them" (114). The principle of non-correction unites the last three sections of the book as three ways of resisting closure. In "Appendices," there are two reasons for not correcting. First, from the consumer's perspective, this would break faith with readers of the first edition "who have the right to expect an author not to publish prematurely" (114). The second reason is rooted in Montaigne's skepticism that "there is no assurance that he is wiser or better" (115). This second reason is supported by Montaigne's refusal to privilege any given moment as a superior vantage point for judgement. Therefore this conviction "works against any notion of change as a cumulative, unidirectional movement towards improvement—in short, as progress" (116). In fact, inconsistency is a kind of coherence in diversity, since any given opinion proffered by Montaigne entails consideration of the opposite one it engendered. In the second section, "Shame, Memory, and Repentance," the principle of non-correction counters Montaigne's temptation to redress antecedent statements that he finds embarrassing. The reason is that "*le démentir* is a form of *le mentir*" (119), for Montaigne endows

his writ  
respec  
tent su  
writing  
ings in  
Benjam  
"Death  
is, the  
ginning  
nary dr  
from B  
materie  
teleolo  
ing, Mi  
deferra  
(127).  
Impe  
sais, in  
that co  
to mak  
Wayne  
Sexual  
Straub  
cloth;  
Cer  
stand  
litical  
time  
Kristi  
mant  
teste  
beyond  
ask  
conco  
to d  
with  
part  
has  
cible  
If  
caus  
tury  
sex  
"civ

his writing with the binding power of a promise, a kind of "commitment to respect the paradoxical integrity of the text as a representation of an inconsistent subject" (119). The last section, "Endings," shows that the diary-like writing of the *Essais* (an indirect consequence of non-correction) resists endings including narratives of death. In his essay, "The Story Teller," Walter Benjamin makes a connection between narrative and death by affirming, "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell" (125). That is, the drama of death tends to articulate retrospectively key moments of beginning, conflict, and ending. While the *Essais* are presented "as a valetudinary document written in the shadow of impending death" (124), they differ from Benjamin's maxim because Montaigne's practice of interpolating new material into his text subverts any type of internal chronology" (127). Neither teleological nor chronological, but like the open ended present of diary writing, Montaigne's text "enacts passage 'itself,' the movement of difference and deferral that repeatedly divides the present and postpones every conclusion" (127).

Impeccably written and relentlessly attentive to the complexity of the *Essais*, intelligently and precisely contextualized within the cultural pressures that condition this work, Rendall's study has used the concept of difference to make a major contribution to our understanding of Montaigne's thought.

Wayne State University

Michael J. Giordano

*Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* by Kristina Straub. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Pp. x + 194. \$35.00, cloth; \$12.95, paper.

Certain promises, and compromises, of the Clinton presidency notwithstanding, in the United States we are currently living through a period of political polarization and considerable conservative backlash. During such a time "the litany" of "race, class, gender, and sexual identity" (151), which Kristina Straub employs to structure her study, promises to be more than a mantra. As categories through which power may be consolidated or contested, these terms should now, more than ever, be recognized as extending beyond academic piety into social action. So it may seem wrongheaded to ask the particular question I am going to ask in relation to this impeccably conceived and argued book—impeccable, that is, in the terms that have come to define the academic discourse of "materialist feminist criticisms" (151) within which Straub situates her project. The question I wish to ask of this particular study, in many ways exemplary of materialist feminism, is: What has happened to the *strangeness* of the English eighteenth century, its irreducible differences from late-twentieth-century U. S.-style culture?

If some of the strangeness of this period has eluded Straub, it is not because her argument is reductive. She shows effectively how eighteenth-century theatrical players served as prime "suspects" in the struggle to regulate sexuality and gender, part of the project of consolidating a properly "civilized" British identity, one befitting an imperial power. Since English

people ranking socially with or above the middling sort were being increasingly recruited into the so-called polite classes through the discourse of spectatorship, the theater provided a particularly crucial site for cultural work. The ideal spectator, like the eponymous figure of Addison and Steele's periodical, was to cultivate cultural authority through the regime of taste, showing empirical sensitivity and rational detachment in all things. Those who provided the spectacle, on the other hand, were usually perceived as embodying everything the spectator was not, as "Other," "effeminate," *déclassé*. As Straub observes, "'effeminate' stage entertainments, ropedancing, puppet shows, the sexually ambiguous castrati singers all serve as visible foils for the rational, critical, and all-but-invisible observer" (3).

Thus is established the Western imperial paradigm of the subject as spectator, the object as that which is viewed, a paradigm so important for the development of anthropology, and one which is still being challenged across various disciplines as former objects of the colonizing gaze continue to interrupt previous imperial discourses and to write their own histories. This argument about the social and political positioning of viewer and viewed, which will translate into various forms of "Othering" along axes of class and race as well as sexuality and gender, is neatly interwoven by Straub with an argument about how the eighteenth-century English theater becomes a repository of "remnants of older sexualities that do not fit an emergent set of norms." Popular discourse about players constitutes a space where these older sexualities can simultaneously be "articulated and defined as deviation," so that such discourse functions for Straub as a particularly fruitful site in which we can read "the workings of this new sexual hegemony even as it serves it" (23).

Here Straub's study draws upon recent research by a number of gay theorists and historians of sexuality, including Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Alan Bray, Martha Vicinus, Randolph Trumbach, Jeffrey Weeks, and G. S. Rousseau. Straub particularly wishes to contribute to the history of lesbian sexuality, but she is committed to doing so by paying attention to homophobia as it affects gay men and styles of masculinity, as well as lesbians and their sexuality. Straub quotes Eve Sedgwick arguing in *Between Men* (1985) that "homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic, and perhaps transhistorically so. (By 'misogynistic' I mean not only that it is oppressive of the so-called feminine in men, but that it is oppressive of women)" (20; quoted by Straub, 29). Turning Eve Sedgwick's formulation around, Straub argues, conversely, "that the misogyny working through the feminization of actors as specularized sexual suspects sustained and finally enabled . . . the homophobia that was to surface in the explicit charges of homosexuality that were made against David Garrick and Samuel Foote in the 1770s" (29).

This is an interesting and not very predictable move for a critic who, unlike Sedgwick, is self-professedly more interested in investigating the history of lesbianisms than the tropological and sexual histories of gay men. Perhaps it was a move dictated by the richness of Straub's material about male homosexualities and English theater, as much as by a principled commitment to integrating work on lesbianism with work on gay male sexuality under the double banners of anti-homophobia and anti-misogyny.

Arguably, her two best chapters are those on "Colley Cibber's Butt: The

Constr  
the Sci  
master  
out,"  
pose c  
is a si  
thority  
tempo  
tion' a  
In "I  
uses m  
respec  
boy's  
miotic  
define  
school  
erary  
out fr  
mode  
repres  
ass as  
Cibber  
in an  
Stra  
tural  
unan  
Iro  
atical  
the s  
an i  
mak  
abist  
titill  
teen  
of h  
ies a  
that  
ous,  
so f  
the  
thei  
plim  
Col  
pos  
oth  
situ  
pro  
terr  
bic

Construction of Actors' Masculinity" and "Men from Boys: Cibber, Pope, and the Schoolboy." In the first she demonstrates that Cibber's rhetoric of non-mastery, of not being in control, of exposing himself and "letting it all hang out," as represented in his memoirs and public statements, is very much a pose constructed antithetically to that of the Addisonian spectator. This pose is a sign of Cibber's professionalism as an actor, but even professional authority cannot rescue the actor entirely from feminization according to contemporary gender codes: "The actor's feminization brought him into a relation with audience that implies an obvious parallel between his 'consumption' as a commodity and the sexual consumption of women by men" (46).

In "Men from Boys," Straub even more interestingly addresses the different uses made of the trope of the schoolboy by Cibber and Pope in terms of their respective relations to literary authority. Since the "spectacle of the schoolboy's bent knees or his bared ass before the corrective birch constitutes a semiotic terrain upon which are continually being inscribed masculinities defined in power relation to each other" (69), Cibber's identification with the schoolboy and Pope's repudiation of him prefigure our modern model of literary "greatness" versus "minor" authorship: "Cibber is a boy to be separated out from the privileged group of literary men to which Pope belongs in the modern canon" (70). Yet Cibber's homoerotic use of the schoolboy as self-representation turns to homophobic deployment when Cibber "bares Pope's ass as a 'Truant School-Boy'" in his *Letter to Mr. Pope*: "Used against Pope, Cibber's schoolboy takes on the homophobia that Pope himself participates in and helps to construct as a part of English literary tradition" (75).

Straub is scrupulous in the tracing of relations of complicity as well as cultural resistance. This study does not recuperate figures like Colley Cibber as unambiguous heroes for gay history.

Ironically, Cibber's daughter Charlotte Charke proves even more problematic for Straub's project than does her father. Straub would like to find in the swashbuckling, cross-dressed, picaresque, and willfully eccentric Charke an intimation of eighteenth-century lesbianism, but she also hesitates to make too much of her, or to turn Charke into an icon of gay history in an ahistorical or unscholarly way. After all, women wearing men's breeches to titillate male audiences has a significant theatrical history by the mid-eighteenth century in England, and there is a sense in which Charlotte's mimicry of her famous actor-father both does and doesn't transgress gender hierarchies and differences. Yet Charke's autobiographical *Narrative* is a complex text that foregrounds its protagonist's "monstrosity," stages bold, if also ambiguous, scenarios of female same-sex desire, and remains intractable even today so far as easy labelings go: "The intractability of this text can be read in both the irritation of late eighteenth-century readers at its transgressions against their standards of feminine behavior and in more recent attempts to 'discipline' it by labeling it as definitively 'lesbian' or 'heterosexual'" (143). Like Colley Cibber before her, Charlotte Cibber Charke both plays on homoerotic possibility in her self-representation and deploys homophobia in constructing others. Her novel, *The History of Henry Dumont*, according to Straub, is firmly situated within contemporary discourse against homosexuality: "The same process of negation by which Charke challenges the validity of models for female same-sex desire leads her to reinforce the construction of a homophobic model for male homosexuality" (149).



Straub explicitly invites us to judge the achievement of her study by her success or failure in reading Charke. Or rather she hopes, deconstructively speaking, to have staged some of the problems as well as the virtues of reading according to certain codes in the present historical moment. "Ambiguity is slippery stuff on which to found a politically self-conscious reading practice," she writes, "and yet faithfulness to the specific histories of sexuality often asks the feminist critic to assess such politically shifty materials" (150). This "mixing of ambiguity with a clearly defined political reading"—and here her formulation begins to break down both as deconstructive thinking and as political strategy—"is particularly pointed within the context of gay and lesbian studies," because lesbian and gay critics "define their politics by clearing up ambiguities—naming the 'vice which cannot be named'—in the very act of investing with 'resistance' the ambiguous texts of the past" (150).

Now the paradoxical status of naming the "vice which cannot be named" in the interests of opening up the history of sexuality, rather than policing it, should not be underestimated. Straub's strategy here strikes me as less effective than one might wish. It will not do just to end with stating a paradox, rather than working it through, as a more patiently deconstructive practice might; this leaves gay and lesbian critics open to charges of self-contradiction by those who have not done their deconstructive homework and continue to expect paradoxes to be resolved or overcome. Straub seems here to be leaving herself much too open to misreading, perhaps even conceding antagonistic readers too much potential territory. The lessons of deconstruction surely begin with the necessity of acknowledging textuality of any sort as slippery stuff. The discourse of sexuality, especially when it comes to alternatives to heterosexuality within modern bourgeois cultures, may be particularly overcoded, but is not the distinction one of degree and nuance rather than of kind? And then can one really envisage a contemporary academic politics of reading or interpretation shorn of ambiguity? Even in the interests of a principled commitment to gay liberation, anti-homophobia, and writing new histories of sexuality?

In contrast to Straub's caution regarding what to make of Charke's text in a lesbian context, Lisa Moore in a recent essay is much more forthright, less ambiguous. And in taking such a provocative stance, Moore keeps the difference and the strangeness of the eighteenth century before us. Reviewing Felicity Nussbaum's magisterial *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Johns Hopkins, 1989), Moore insists on playing the categories of female gender and sexuality against one another, not combining them. Her Charke does not play it safe through gender ambiguity so much as disrupt gender codes through sexually "freakish self-fashioning" whose political status we should not deny ("She was too fond of her mistaken bargain": The Scandalous Relations of Gender and Sexuality in Feminist Theory," *Diacritics* 21:2-3 [Summer-Fall 1991]: 89-101; this passage on p. 98). Alternative 'fictions' such as Charke's make it clear," Moore argues, "that the mapping of gendered identity across the social is by no means as seamless as it represents itself" (99). It may well be that only through such working through of unexpected continuities between our own moment and past moments will we discover that which remains most unfamiliar about the past.

Straub  
position  
but curio  
standbys  
feminist  
eighteenth  
well kno  
first publ  
Fielding's  
edition o  
sity of Fl  
cities onl  
here, an  
better. H  
offhand  
we have  
If we  
only fen  
find a ra  
mer of  
one of  
Charke's  
playgoe  
by her f  
prime n  
ing cont  
famous  
and the  
English  
It is  
the abs  
argume  
adequa  
atrical  
the eig  
Never  
ground  
they o  
which  
Wayne  
Over  
fen. N  
Alt  
wom

Straub might wish to distinguish, on the grounds of scholarly caution, her position from Moore's more confident staking out of a lesbian interpretation, but curiously enough, both writers play rather fast and loose with those standbys of historical scholarship, bibliographical facts. It is worrying to find feminist scholars seeming a bit casual in their citation practices with regard to eighteenth-century sources, especially when the texts in question are still not well known. Inexplicably, Straub offers no evidence for her claim that the first publication of Charke's *Narrative* occurred in 1746, the same year as Fielding's *The Female Husband*. She goes on to quote only from the second edition of 1755, as made accessible to a general audience through a University of Florida facsimile brought out in 1969. Even more mysteriously, Moore cites only "the second edition of 1759" (94, n. 1). There is some confusion here, and it does not inspire confidence. Feminist literary history deserves better. How is one to do justice to the otherness of the past when one is offhand about the few characteristics of the few material tokens of it to which we have access?

If we turn to The Girl's Own Theatre, who advertise themselves as the only female touring company in the southwest of England today, we will find a rather different kind of historical investigation in progress. In the summer of 1992 this company performed a play called "Dangerous Women" by one of its members, Jayne Newton Chance, a play based on Charlotte Charke's life and adventures. In one exquisite scene, Mrs. Scruton, an avid playgoer who has been ill and thus absent from a recent performance, is told by her friend Lady Devonshire what she has unfortunately missed—a certain prime ministerial figure, having taken offence at some political satire, leaping onto the stage and boxing the ears and bloodying the nose of a certain famous actor. Mrs. Scruton is aghast—to have missed a single performance and thus to have missed, all at one go, the real heart of eighteenth-century English theater: "Blood, Fisticuffs, and History!"

It is this strange brew of the satirical, the tragicomical, the melodramatic, the absurdly political, and the seriously social that Straub's taut and sober argument in some sense fails to capture. Perhaps today few academic genres adequately can, since academic tolerance for theatricality is so low. The theatrical remains basely, disturbingly "suspect," and, in that respect, perhaps the eighteenth century is not entirely beyond us, nor we beyond it, after all. Nevertheless, eighteenth-century scholars cannot afford not to take Straub's groundbreaking and highly intelligent study into account, any more than they can afford to ignore the emerging history of multiple sexualities, to which she has contributed a notable chapter.

Wayne State University

Donna Landry

*Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, by Elisabeth Bronfen. New York: Routledge, 1992. Pp. 460. \$59.95, cloth; \$17.95, paper.

Although Edgar Allan Poe's 1846 statement that the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (cited p. 59)

does not appear in Elisabeth Bronfen's book until the beginning of the second section, it nonetheless underwrites the entire project. The prevalence of dead, beautiful women in western art and literature provides the pretext for examining the assumptions and strategies supporting the image. Through uncovering displacements and doublings negotiated literally over the woman's dead body, Bronfen explores how representations of death function symptomatically for the (male) survivor-artist, mediating the dual threat of femininity and mortality. Her densely argued, copiously illustrated, and thoroughly researched text constitutes a significant contribution to applied psychoanalytic theory and to the cultural critique of linkages between women and death.

The chapter in which Poe's assertion appears carefully analyzes each word of his famous sentence, reflecting Bronfen's meticulous approach to her material. Working from a psychoanalytic viewpoint with which she allies feminist, formalist, and anthropological perspectives, she offers a formidable series of readings: they range from texts by Rousseau and Dickens to the Grimm Brothers and Atwood, from visual art by D. G. Rossetti and Millais to Lichtenstein and Hitchcock, from theory by Lacan and Derrida to Benjamin and Cixous. If the sheer volume of material combined with the opaqueness of Bronfen's style can be overwhelming, the revolving door of texts at least keeps the jumble interesting. And fortunately, Bronfen's central argument is relatively uncomplicated. Throughout her catalogue of examples, she traces the way in which the double castrative threat posed by female death is assuaged by the creation of a safe aesthetic or symbolic double that essentially kills the woman it replaces. This attempt at protective substitution, however, never completely succeeds; the repressed returns either as a threatening, uncanny doppelganger or through the gaps of the woman's subversive complicity.

Bronfen most frequently argues in terms of the death drive, of separation anxiety anchored in umbilical rather than genital rupture, of *das Unheimliche*, and of female hysteria. Thus *Over Her Dead Body* occasionally displays a tension between historical and psychoanalytical method. Bronfen seems aware of this tension. She explains that although she wants to "offer a social-historical discussion of death in Part III and an anthropological discussion of death rituals in Part II, these serve to frame what is first and foremost an attempt to work out the hidden or ambivalent semantic encodings harbored by these images; the psychic material they serve to articulate and the rhetorical strategies by which they function" (xiv). In other words, universalist psychoanalytic models and their semiotic counterparts supersede historical and cultural specificity. They also tend to annihilate differences of class, of age, and of race. Bronfen's female subjects usually illustrate the same theoretical point, whether they be real people or fictional heroines, outsiders like Méri-mée's Carmen or insiders like Rousseau's Julie de Wolmar, children like Nabokov's Lolita or adults like Marilyn Monroe. Further, though Bronfen's interest lies explicitly in western culture, her selection of readings does not consider ethnicity either in authors or in characters. Such conflation and omissions, apparently risked for the cause of consistent critical focus and persuasive demonstration, can open her text to charges of totalization, even reductivity.

Yet h  
biograp  
lars, su  
Freud's  
in fact  
rated e  
the "pli  
nal abe  
tering t  
specul  
narciss  
framed  
return  
I fou  
in its e  
Bronfe  
played  
trait,"  
body a  
repetit  
anxiety  
the fe  
ble, b  
with v  
the in  
exper  
An  
in WI  
fen lo  
tive i  
and  
tural  
ents  
soma  
The  
theo  
in w  
hyst  
Bron  
and  
Res  
van  
a fe  
L  
ske  
fro  
to  
tha  
vis

Yet her skill as a critical reader generally deflects such charges. Individual biography can substitute for other kinds of historical and contextual particulars, such as in her supple analysis of the *fort-da* game detailed in Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Because the child Freud describes was in fact his grandson, because the child's mother had died between the narrated event and the published account, and because Freud does not identify the "players" in the game, Bronfen links the child's attempt to control maternal absence to Freud's literary repression of his daughter's death. By recentering the narrative on the missing maternal figure, Bronfen connects "Freud's speculations on the death drive [with] an attempt at healing an injured narcissism" (29). He does this through a symbolic sacrifice of his daughter framed as renunciation of the mother, culminating in the uncanny narrative return of the repressed Other.

I found this re-reading of Freud a high point of the book, both in itself and in its enabling function. Subsequent readings of literary texts are indebted to Bronfen's versions of Freud, such as the sacrifices, renunciations, and returns played through Poe and Hawthorne's short fiction. In Poe's "The Oval Portrait," for instance, the ambivalence between the animate, present material body and the inanimate, belated figural body structures the uncanny through repetition and supplementation, simultaneously redirecting narcissism into anxiety. In parallel fashion, Bronfen reads Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* as the fetishistic icon of Lovelace's desire, yet her death renders her inaccessible, both preserving and negating sexuality. *Clarissa's* corpse, like the reel with which Freud's grandson represents his absent mother, becomes a sign of the imaginary "perfect body [that] is and always was absent from any real experience" (97).

Another creative chapter includes analyses of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Bronfen looks at Collins's novel in terms of Tzvetan Todorov's definition of detective fiction. She connects his framework for a double narrative of murderer and detective to theories of second burial, mourning, and woman as the cultural embodiment of enigma. *Wuthering Heights*, according to Bronfen, presents one of its main characters, Catherine Earnshaw, as an hysteric whose somatic and mental illnesses are a reaction to her acknowledgment of lack. The portrait of Catherine illustrates Sarah Kofman's adaptation of Freud's theories, showing a woman's dissimulation of complicity. This trait, located in what Kofman labels the "affirmative type," Bronfen associates with the hysteric whose position alternately resists and accepts her cultural castration. Bronfen's reading of *Dracula* combines the detective and hysteric elements and adds the vampire as a figure who represents death's inscription onto life. Response to this inscription is gendered; Bronfen utilizes Ellie Ragland-Sullivan's Lacanian argument that "the hysteric's discourse is usually encoded as a feminine, the obsessional's [the detective's] as a masculine one" (323).

Less consistently impressive, the analyses of the thirty-five photographs, sketches, sculptures, and paintings reproduced in *Over Her Dead Body* veer from a subtle examination of Gustave Courbet's *La toilette de la morte (mariée)* to the seemingly interminable treatment of Gabriel von Max's *Der Anatom* that opens the book. In the case of the von Max, Bronfen's uninspired use of visual material expresses itself in a tediously formalistic discussion of axes

and triangulations that obscures her elucidation of how the male survivor aestheticizes the female body as he tries futilely to deny death. Similarly, the chapter dealing with Ferdinand Hodler's series of paintings of his dying mistress proves to be somewhat unsatisfactory, despite the potential of the material. Her main point in this discussion, that a representational corpus both resurrects and denies the actual female body is little different than her theses about verbal texts. In addition, she avoids considering the ethical dimension of sitting at a loved one's bedside, sketching the fatal progression of cancer.

By contrast, Courbet's painted palimpsest, a scene of marriage ceremony painted upon a scene of funerary preparations, provides a perfect metaphor for the uncanny return of the repressed death drive. It also is examined in interesting ways, as Bronfen shows how the painting takes up "the question of dressing thematically and structurally, [since] the viewer must undress the canvas in an act of disclosure" (259). Even though by the middle of the book where the section occurs, many of the themes addressed in the Courbet discussion are a bit repetitive (the idea of death shining through beauty's imperfect covering, for example, is as old as the opening on von Max), the circumstances of Courbet's painting make such an effective conceit, and Bronfen's theoretical elucidations are so lively, that even the redundancies seem fresh.

Still, the illustrations that I found most provocative are those contained in the last chapter, "From Muse to Creatrix—Snow White Unbound," artistic renditions of feminine death by female artists. Frustratingly, Bronfen never even mentions these pictures, allowing them to make only a subliminal impression without the benefit of any discussion. Apparently, she is either not concerned with how women envision a female death not their own, or she believes such depictions to be self-evident. In fact, this chapter notwithstanding, Bronfen seems generally disinterested in the theoretical questions raised by women as subjects and creators. Although this last chapter is ostensibly devoted to literature and art by women, it does not counterbalance her relative neglect of women writers in the rest of the text. Bronfen explains that she "did not distinguish women from men writers, because both wrote within the [same] cultural context," and that she "privileged the question of deconstructive narrative strategy over that of gendered writing" (405). Yet having the same cultural context does not guarantee identical material conditions, and one need not make the full leap to "gendered writing" to ask whether these material conditions might make a difference in aesthetic representation.

Further, in the last chapter, she chooses authors and texts that never break fully free of the stereotypes she describes. Her choice of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton as two representative female writers "whose imagined own death makes up the inspirational source and the thematic content of [their] poetry" (401) risks denying their creativity or trivializing their actual deaths. Not all the writers in the last chapter represent their deaths in the same biographical way that Bronfen suggests Plath and Sexton do. But even the fiction discussed, for example Maggie Gee's *Moira* and Fay Weldon's *Ruth*, implies that the first-person, female narrators derive their voices from self-annihilation. Although these texts take the western stereotype of female death to extremes so as to destabilize the trope, they lead to a question of when a resisting complicity simply becomes complicitous.

Bronfen addresses the problem of complicity when she explains "[I] hoped

to resist  
repertoir  
a certain  
critique"  
that dea  
the chap  
and givi  
male at  
Bronfen  
en's wr  
shows t  
existing  
close to  
identifi  
As I  
they ar  
work th  
sentati  
psycho  
would  
Overall  
ranging  
ful wo

Wayne

ABC  
Chris  
279.

Ezra  
York

The  
Cam

Ez  
alm  
Pou  
repr  
as s  
to f  
or r  
cou  
los  
as  
liti  
Re

to resist the gesture of mere identification with the referred-to cultural image repertoire, though admittedly my own readings were never entirely devoid of a certain fond complicity with the representational corpus I sought to critique" (433). This problem points to an aporia inherent both in any project that deals with women's literary production and, too, in precisely the leap of the chapter's title, from muse to creator. Given women's traditional silence, and given woman's place as the source and vanishing point of language, female authors are often caught between silence and a complicitous voice. Bronfen suggests that woman's death may itself become the ground of women's writing. While this self-reflexive moment is potentially productive, it shows the difficulty that feminism has encountered in its attempt to reframe existing trends. Like many feminist cultural critics, Bronfen remains caught close to the grey area where revisionary reading shades into complicitous identification.

As I hope is apparent, these concerns are more endemic to feminism than they are specific to Bronfen. *Over Her Dead Body* is an important theoretical work that should prove useful to scholars interested either in aesthetic representations of women or applied psychology. Indeed, it is the power of her psychoanalytic readings that led me to expect, perhaps unfairly, that she would probe feminism as impressively as she examined psychoanalysis. Overall, though, Bronfen has produced a text, as thoughtful as it is wide-ranging, that successfully probes western culture's dark imaginings of beautiful women.

Wayne State University

Laura Wyrick

*ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* by Christopher Beach. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. Pp. xii + 279. \$35.00.

*Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* by Vincent Sherry. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Pp. xi + 228. \$45.00.

*The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* by Michael North. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. viii + 241. \$49.95.

Ezra Pound's gravestone in Cimitero S. Michele, Venice is difficult to find, almost overgrown with thick, green-leaved plantings. Now twenty years after Pound's death the process of exegesis, annotation (see Carroll Terrell's newly reprinted *Companion to the Cantos*), and evaluative commentary on the poetry as such appears to have passed its mature flowering. The critics have begun to follow one another through the Simplon pass of ideology, getting around or through the imposing heights of Pound's verse (as Bunting said they never could) to address themselves to matters of aesthetic influence, political philosophy, or plain rant. Recent Pound criticism has turned to the poetry only as an exhibit in arguments concerned with charting his canonical stock or political economy. Christopher Beach, in *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition*, reads the force of Pound's work

through its impact upon New American poets such as Charles Olson and Robert Duncan; the measure of Pound's importance is taken indirectly by the respect accorded his progeny as they form a counter-tradition to the adherents of Stevens or Eliot. Vincent Sherry, in *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism*, recounts the collaboration of Pound and Lewis in the short-lived Vorticist movement, but especially attends to the relation of their aesthetic practice and political precepts. In their preference for the sculptor's visual acuity over the musician's suave seductions, Pound and Lewis are drawn to an authoritarian rather than democratic political system. Michael North, in *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*, sees in the art of all three poets an attempt to resolve political contradictions and social problems; the failure of their poetry to resolve political conflict nevertheless results in a politicized aesthetic of greater power and relevance.

Of the three books under review, Beach's pertains most closely to Poundian poetics and the manner in which Pound marshalled his poetic theory into a "tradition" among younger writers. Beach briefly acknowledges Pound's less savory political ideas and prejudices, only stating that as a "renegade," as a "politically and intellectually disreputable 'traitor,'" Pound was more "attractive to a group of poets who sought an anti-establishment stance." This attitude of bohemian opposition to the mainstream of American letters may account for the exculpatory efforts of Creeley, Olson, and Ginsberg, even though they were personally repelled by many of Pound's political pronouncements. But Beach's book directly addresses itself to the politics of the canon, the relative stock and importance—largely designated by critical appraisal—that an author holds within the pantheon of writers. Beach's major contribution is his challenge to Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" and the case Bloom makes for "major poets" such as Stevens, Merrill, and Ashbery residing exclusively in the romantic tradition. Beach argues convincingly that Pound's search for a "live tradition" leads to an "incorporative poetics" that assumes "an active, positive, and mutually illuminating relationship between the poet's work and that of both predecessors and contemporaries." Pound's incorporative attitude toward Propertius, Virgil, and Blunt, and his sponsorship and critical support of Williams, Zukofsky, Bunting, and Creeley, stands in contradiction to Bloom's Oedipal paradigm of a repressive and antagonistic relation of a poet toward predecessors and progeny as necessary for major achievement. The Pound tradition thus calls Bloom's theory of influence into serious question; it can be validated only by denying Pound the status of a "major" modernist poet; hence the political stake in admitting Pound and his epigone to the canon. Beach's rebuttal is enhanced by his engaging readings of Olson, Duncan, Levertov, Snyder, Dorn and Charles Bernstein. The chief observation that he makes is the degree to which Poundian epigone seem not to suffer the dreaded effects of "belatedness" as do the contemporary followers in Bloom's tradition of the Romantic Sublime. That is because, as Beach points out, "belated" poets are "reduced to misreading ever weaker predecessors," with each generation suffering a gradual diminution of poetic powers. The Poundian model fosters a "branching out of poetic practice to an ever larger group of writers" with each era producing one or two "donative writers" capable of generating a new poetics.

Beach's attention to Pound's poetry as such seems less useful on the whole than such books as Laszlo Géfin's *Ideogram: History of a Poetic Method* (which traces the ideogrammic method through virtually the same group of Objectivist and Black Mountain poets as Beach's study) or Michael Bernstein's *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (with its exceptional reading of the *Cantos* and Olson's *Maximus Poems* as epic, a topic that Beach curiously evades). But Beach's analysis of Pound and Olson's shared commitments to an historically-based poetics makes for compelling reading. His treatment of Robert Duncan's ability openly to embrace both Objectivist and Romantic credos also does much to reinforce the value of a poetics based on the admission, rather than the exclusion, of conflicting influences. Beach's book also suffers slightly from limiting its focus to American poets, since Pound's substantial influence on British poetry from Basil Bunting and David Jones to Charles Tomlinson and Eric Mottram deserves equal attention. And among Americans, Beach focuses overly much on the Black Mountain school, whose allegiance to Pound is already well known. Despite a provocative conclusion in which he extends Pound's circuit to the Language poets with a particularly fine analysis of Charles Bernstein's work, Beach would cause more consternation among Bloomian Romantics by demonstrating the by now very broad range of Pound's influence, including the image- and memory-based poets collected in *American Poetry Review* on a bi-monthly basis. Even so, *ABC of Influence* stands to become a central document of the Poundian counter-tradition in American poetics.

Vincent Sherry's *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* ventures across the blasted turf that connects aesthetic theory and political ideology in the modernist period. He treads carefully between those critics who would excuse the social elitism of the modernists as irrelevant to their literary accomplishments and those who would condemn modernist art as wholly shot through with an authoritarian ideology, making admiration of that art tantamount to an endorsement of fascism. From the median, Sherry tries to resolve a central paradox of the modernist movement: how do artists such as Pound and Lewis, remarkable for progressive and experimental aesthetic achievement, come to adopt such regressive and autocratic political programs? Although occasionally fustian in style and annoyingly slow in the development of its arguments, Sherry's book manifests substantial research in European intellectual history and Anglo-American literary history to provide the complex response that his question deserves. Sherry discusses the political aesthetic of Julien Benda, Wilhelm Worringer, and Rémy de Gourmont, especially in their preference for a visual acuity and discernment with its appeal to an elite social class and superior intelligence over a "musical empathy" with its emotional seduction of the masses. This endorsement of the visual over the oral significantly influences T. E. Hulme and the Imagist movement, and the subsequent Vorticist alliance of Pound and Lewis. The aural blandishments of meter and melody are associated with the sentimental, symbolist aesthetic of the late nineteenth century, as well as with the vulnerability of the democratic masses to easy rhetoric and popular song. In Sherry's terms, "the modernists' new standard of visual immediacy in words led them to esteem (what they saw as) a superior directness in the political cultures of Nazism and fascism." If the "ear locates the intellectual weak



point in the body politic," the eye represents incisive intellect, the ability to separate the crucial image from the undistinguished mass of the background; ultimately, the eye promises authoritarian mastery of the subject.

Sherry charts the development of Pound's visual prosody through several stages, beginning with the essentially pictorial concept of the ideogram. The ideogram offered Pound the promise of an irreducible radical that achieves "unquestioned power," and the ability to select only the salient detail from the welter of cultural information. In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Pound adopts the sculptural method of intaglio that raises the worthy image to the viewer and excises the unimportant. The "agglutinative" method of collage, in which the discriminating intelligence of the artist selects from various materials those items to be cut and pasted, becomes the chief prosodic accomplishment of the *Cantos*. As thorough and intriguing as Sherry's treatment of Pound's visual prosody may be, one suspects that his portrait of Pound may be incomplete. Surely Pound's interest in the visual arts was abiding, but Sherry's thesis regarding his political aesthetic requires that Pound cast off all ties to music and aural prosody—with its base appeal to the masses. It is hard to imagine that Pound, whose gift for *melopoeia* is present in all but the flattest historical portions of the *Cantos*, and who made a notable contribution as critic, composer, and impresario of "serious" music, would be ideologically opposed to the aural basis of poetry. In fact, Pound states his conviction of the purity of his ear early on: "I believe in an 'absolute rhythm,' a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shades of emotion to be expressed." An "agglutinative" *Cantos* without such emotive rhythm would have all the appeal of library paste and press clippings. It is not that I would overhaul Sherry's thesis entirely, but in pressing his dichotomy of eye and ear, fascism and democracy, he may be overstating the case for Pound's adherence to the one and not the other. So when Sherry follows Lewis's lead in repeatedly criticizing Gertrude Stein's prose as "baby babble" or an "anthem to the comfortable nonsense sounds of democratic culture," one suspects that his thesis, or his personal temperament, demands the rejection of an experimental prose based on the aural-temporal method of incremental repetition. Though Sherry's book is full of astute observations on the political aesthetic of modernism, it falls victim to a too sure dichotomy that does not fully represent the complexities of modernist poetics.

Michael North's study, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*, also confronts the "seeming contradiction between the revolutionary aesthetics of Pound's modernism and his reactionary politics." But in his more expansive treatment of Yeats's cultural nationalism, Eliot's conservatism, and Pound's fascism, he discovers that such contradictions are fully embedded in modernism and its reaction to liberalism. "The difficult truth about all three of these poets," North argues, "is that there remain bits and shards of freedom even in their most totalitarian fantasies, but we cannot separate these fragments from the totality that contains them." Yeats, Eliot, and Pound cannot fully resolve the disparity between the sheen of aesthetic surface and the turmoil of political conflict. Nor can they resolve "the dream of a form that would balance fragment and totality, immediate experience and abstract form, personal voice and impersonal conduct." Their attempt to effect political solutions in their poetry—thus violating the aesthetic autonomy supposedly bequeathed

by ror  
sulis  
contra  
sary ti  
ing of  
more  
and ic  
eye an  
Nor  
eral s  
with  
confli  
Innisl  
libera  
state  
new  
ished  
ment  
medi  
Prufa  
broke  
twee  
terec  
'fact  
Pou  
beli  
cour  
aest  
tha  
tho  
soc  
—I

Str

L.  
O

A  
C  
w  
P  
c  
g

by romanticism—would ultimately fail; but the politicized aesthetic that results retains “some measure of critical power.” The desire to resolve political contradictions and the failure to do so are, North contends, “in a way necessary to one another; together they prevent mere complacency.” North’s reading of Hegelian dialectics in both the political and aesthetic contexts seems more successful in accounting for the backsliding and reversals of the critical and ideological stances of these poets than the straightforward dichotomy of eye and ear, fascism and democracy, presented by Sherry.

North sees the tensions in Irish society, as it decided between “being a liberal state, with a citizenship based on abstract natural right, and a nation, with a citizenship based on historical and cultural identity,” as the central conflict of Yeats’s politics and poetry. In readings of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and *The Tower*, North shows how Yeats vainly tries “to resolve the liberal contradiction between right and duty, individual and community,” state and nation. North’s reading of Eliot’s “Prufrock” opens a significantly new line of discussion: Prufrock’s torments result not merely from his diminished capacity as a fragmented being but from his suspension between fragmentation and generalization. Prufrock’s agony derives from his inability to mediate between fragment and whole. Reduced to a series of metonyms, Prufrock suffers equally from his “sense of an oppressive totality” and the broken “one” that he is. Turning to Pound, North addresses the conflict between the rights of the productive individual and the demands of the centered, collective good. Pound’s methods of the “luminous detail” and the “factive personality” are attempts to resolve the particular and the general. Pound’s infatuation with Mussolini and fascist Italy stems from the mistaken belief that a single, mercurial individual would bring an organic unity to the country. As compelling and engrossing as North’s discussion of the political aesthetic and public personae of these three poets may be, there is not finally that much here that causes the reader to return to the poetry as such. For those already immersed in the poetry, further appreciation is gained by the social and political insight afforded by these chapters. But the poetry retains—fortunately perhaps—something of its irreducible value.

*State University of New York at Buffalo*

Joseph Conte

*Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Pp. 224. \$19.95, cloth; [1993] \$9.95, paper.

If every generation has its fathers to kill, then among the future African Americanists’ targets—the grand men of this age—will be Henry Louis Gates, Jr. I choose patricide as an opening image purposely because of the violence that continues to be directed at Black parents, both literal and metaphorical. Yet, it is the Black mother who continues to be the principal object of vilification in the arts and the Academy, and the scapegoat of policy moguls in need of a push at the polls. Still, despite the hysteria about Black women’s large and looming influence, and the subsequent attacks on ‘domineering’ authors who generate best-selling novels that supposedly reinforce

images of abusive black beasts—all at the behest of white feminists and publishers—Gates stands (with Cornel West) unequivocally as one of the two most recognized African American intellectuals of this era. If Black women are largely responsible for the post-70's creative outpouring in Black arts, producing novels, one can imagine their detractors complaining, like welfare mothers birth babies (too many, too often, for profit, at the expense of images of black men), African American men in large part still dominate the public and critical discussion and context of this work.

Only a cursory familiarity with Gates's work makes it clear that he belongs to a very different group from those who proclaim Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker or Terry McMillian to be enemies of the race, and others, like Stanley Crouch, who throw in Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison for good measure.<sup>1</sup> Gates consistently speaks out against both sexism and homophobia, despite his expert witness defense of the unabashedly misogynist rap group *Two Live Crew's* freedom of expression. Moreover, he publishes what he preaches. Gates's organizational and intellectual enterprise made the forty-volume *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Women's Writers* possible and McMillan Publishers has agreed to issue a thirty-volume series of writing published between 1910-1940 as a sequel; in resurrecting this almost forgotten material, Gates is building on the work of historians and early literary scholars to make a whole new field of study possible. In addition to the primary texts, Gates's *Reading Black, Reading Feminist* (1990), a critical anthology, and the newly introduced *Amistad Literary Series* (1993) which Gates and Anthony Appiah launched with critical collections on specific twentieth-century authors (four of the six address women writers), are further evidence of Gates's commitment to what he calls Black women's studies. Moreover, Gates consistently includes African American women's voices in the broader canon building projects in which he is engaged—the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1994) or the widely sold pocket book *Three African American Novels* (1990) and *The Classic Slave Narratives* (1987), for instance—and never condescends to introduce women writers without formal considerations of the workings of their texts.

Gates consistently deconstructs the very patriarchal system from which he nonetheless simultaneously benefits. When folks comment that as the primary editor of the vast quantity of newly published original and critical work by and about Black women, Gates maintains a patriarchal position of over-seeing power and privilege, they also must concede that he has facilitated one of the most significant contributions to the body of African American (women's) literature in this century. If Gates argues that "any human being sufficiently curious and motivated can fully possess another culture, no matter how 'alien' it may appear to be" (xv), if, referring to western theory, he contends that "any tool that enables the critic to explain the complex workings of the language of a text is appropriate" (79), then one might extrapolate that any person who brings these texts to light to be so examined is a welcome critic. Or, Gates might argue, the cavils of Black women about appropriative male privilege assume an essentialist position from which he respectfully demurs. If bell hooks appreciates Robert Hemenway's admission that the definitive biography of Zora Neale Hurston "remains to be written, and by a black woman,"<sup>2</sup> we should expect no such apologetic tone from Gates

for it woul  
fallist posi  
Yet, the  
age of "Th  
little Skipp  
church rec  
want to be  
my voice,"  
follows thi  
For me.  
to learn  
er's voi  
quence  
to begi  
culture,  
rather t  
last fro  
Master  
voice c  
ing a d  
Finis. And  
word whi  
Julia Coo  
quite put  
holy exp  
Woman."  
and then  
of alteri  
Bloom's,  
derstand  
appropri  
Never  
knowlec  
tation a  
previous  
them in  
pieces,  
been pr  
modifie  
Differen  
this on  
Gate  
womar  
dimin  
integra  
"Writin  
gin," e

for it would admit an authentic "black femaleness" that Gates's anti-essentialist position would deny.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, the shadow of the essential black mother creeps in as the closing image of "The Master's Pieces," a 1990 article included in *Loose Canons*. After little Skippy (the young Gates) forgets the words of "the Piece" of his first church recital, a voice proclaims "Jesus was a boy like me, and like him I want to be." His mother stands up, stands in, for him. "Having arisen to fill my voice," he writes, she "smoothed her dress and sat down again." Gates follows this narration with his closing paragraph which I quote in full:

For me. . . much of my scholarly and critical work has been an attempt to learn how to speak in the strong, compelling cadences of my mother's voice. To reform core curricula, to account for the comparable eloquence of the African, the Asian, and the Middle Eastern traditions, is to begin to prepare our students for their roles as citizens of a world culture, educated through a truly human notion of "the humanities," rather than—as Bennett and Bloom would have it—as guardians at the last frontier outpost of white male western culture, the Keepers of the Master's Pieces. And for us as scholar-critics, learning to speak in the voice of the black female is perhaps the ultimate challenge of producing a discourse of the critical Other.<sup>4</sup>

Finis. And the beginning. Enter the Black mother of the Earth. In the foreword which opens every volume of the Schomburg series Gates quotes Anna Julia Cooper: "As our Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot quite put themselves in the dark man's place, neither should the dark man be holy expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact Voice of the Black Woman." Yet, in the "Master's Pieces" the black mother speaks another Piece and then "sits down again": "Jesus was a boy like me," a distorted shedding of alterity which too closely sounds a Master's voice—not Bennett's or Bloom's, and this is Gates's point—but certainly not her own. One can understand how folks have a hard time differentiating between appropriate and appropriate.

Nevertheless, in *Loose Canons* Gates displays his considerable breadth of knowledge while focusing not only on gender and literature but also on education and multiculturalism. For the most part the volume brings together previously published essays and talks from 1985 to the present and organizes them into three sections, "Literature," "The Profession" and "Society." Two pieces, "Integrating the American Mind" and "The Big Picture" have never been published, while an important critical volume Gates edited takes its modified name from his widely-cited essay, "Writing, 'Race' and the Difference it Makes," included in that book of essays and reprinted again in this one.<sup>5</sup>

Gates's rich and nuanced voices remind me of Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman-shows.<sup>6</sup> Gates inhabits multiple narrative personas, few of which diminish or minimize those that precede, but that rather come together in an integrated whole. Gates the academic is represented in this volume by "Writing, 'Race' and the Difference it Makes" and by "Trading on the Margin," essays that first appeared in leading literary journals and that are char-

acterized by a stunning breath of sources and citations from African, Western, African American and feminist philosophy, letters and arts. Pieces that were published previously in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times Book Review*, the *Voice Literary Supplement* and *Dissent* represent Gates the public intellectual. In articles like "African-American Studies in the 21st century," he considers issues of public policy, and discusses functional illiteracy, teenage pregnancy and violence. In a cross between a lighter Derrick Bell and less coarse *Hollywood Shuffle* detective, Gates's Sam Slade adds an allegorical voice to *Loose Canons*. In "The Big Picture," when a Senior editor at Random House hires Slade to look into who has pulled off the canonical scam of the century—buying the rights to all of the editions of the U.S.'s foremost authors and sanitizing from them anything that detracts from "a clean, wholesome product for a new America" (163)—Slade responds "you thinking politics maybe? The IRA, the PLO, the MLA?" (156). Gates uses this Ted Turneresque nightmare to create a double-edged allegory of "commerce corrupting culture." If the reader only catches half of the specific references planted to make insiders laugh, the piece is very funny indeed. Rarely does Gates get credit for the humor in his writing and for the sheer pleasure, on a formal level, encounters with his writing often bring. Gates's multiple tonalities add complexity and depth to his overall vision: that to dismiss multiculturalism is to diminish intellectual quality and integrity and that to refuse to engage diversity encourages warring nationalisms of various sorts.

In the most important of *Loose Canons'* more recent academic contributions, "Trading on the Margin: Notes on the Culture of Criticism,"<sup>7</sup> readers have to be well-versed to be literarily well-heeled. This essay is labyrinthine—you must be familiar with Barbara Pym's late novels, Pierre Bourdieu and Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Swannee* to follow the right angles. An additional familiarity with Benjamin, John Guillory, Kobena Mercer and new historicist essays on the English Renaissance helps you not to get lost, but isn't essential.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even if you have read all that, you might lose your way. If, as Gates paraphrases Guillory, the 80's resurrection of the author was contingent upon a need for a representative of a social constituency, then something more than the "relation between the politics of theory and the politics of politics" which Gates so adeptly unmasks is being "indefinitely deferred or finessed" in this essay. Where, exactly, I find myself asking, does Gates stand and which social constituency does he represent in the debate over strategies for political and theoretical engagement, the nuances of which he himself delineates in the embodied manner of a Deavere Smith turned critic.

After arguing, rightly I think, that the prime motivation for multicultural change should be intellectual rather than demographic, Gates goes on to counter the arguments of the cultural right. We might not recognize that he himself is in character until the following section opens "Or so argues the liberal pluralist." Later in the paragraph he refers to "we Liberal Reformers," then differentiates them from The Left, and subsequently slips into an unembodied third person narration of the stakes of the hard left and right. If you've made a wrong turn Gates's "so argues the liberal pluralist" sentence tells you so; it creates Gates the Narrator, not to be confused with Gates the Author—any good undergraduate English major should know—and is at odds with the "we Liberal Reformers." Or are liberal pluralists different from

liberal  
ated p  
fying r  
By t  
—or t  
tones'  
tional  
Gates  
switch  
moral  
logica  
false-  
wrong  
tural  
is enc  
point  
the w  
shoul  
ment  
his re  
could  
work  
valer  
Fe  
must  
pus?  
ing  
indi  
to g  
moc  
vers  
Gat  
juss  
ene  
eve  
see  
ale  
An  
an  
ant  
tit  
po  
Lur  
Nv  
in  
rig  
B  
te

liberal reformers? Or is that splitting hairs? If I'm still wondering about situated positionality and social constituencies it's because there may be a signifying monkey in this labyrinth.

By the middle of the essay it's getting murky whether Gates is objecting to—or better said, whether he's expressing an objection to—the “authoritarian tones” of moral claims made in the “politically bankrupt” arena of oppositional theory or if he's asserting that the issues themselves are problematic. Gates describes a struggle for the moral high ground that is getting tired, to switch to the vernacular. “This return to a gestural sort of politics reflects a moralizing strain in contemporary criticism that has lost faith in its epistemological claims,” Gates asserts. “If we can't tell you what's true and what's false—the thought goes—we'll at least tell you what's right and what's wrong,” he goes on. “What's wrong? Racism, colonialism, oppression, cultural imperialism, patriarchy, epistemic violence. . . .” This offhanded listing is enough to tighten the jaw of most of us on the “cultural left.” Yet it is a point of Gates's critique that shrill and contentious expression can cheapen the very agenda it's trying to advance; so any one familiar with Gates's work shouldn't be too lost or offended here. Indeed, that is why this essay's placement—the final contribution to *Loose Canons*—is important.<sup>9</sup> All he asks from his reader is a bit of subtlety. But the danger lies in the fact that Booker T. could have made that claim—if not as well—in 1895. The Wizard's machine worked, in part, because of Washington's mastery of language, and his polyvalenced appeals to varied audiences.

Few need to be more aware of the dangers of appropriation than Gates must be. John Higham's understanding of the thrust of “Good-bye Columbus?” illustrates this point: “While events in the larger world are demonstrating the value of ‘liberal pluralism,’ within the left academy a routinization of indignation is replacing critical rigor. . . . In ethnic studies critics are expected to gesture ritualistically their unending victimization. Most especially, an outmoded ‘colonial paradigm’ encumbers American studies,” is his paraphrased version of what he takes to be Gates's point; and this, to steal a line from Gates responding to another *ALH* respondent, could be inserted, without fuss, into a chapter by Roger Kimball or Dinesh D'Souza.<sup>10</sup> It's true, to silence autocritique within oppositional movements, because the Man, whichever Man, is listening is hardly, let's say, productive. Yet, in this last essay it seems to me that Gates gets caught up in the maze of his own considerable talents and linguistic turns. In the plainest words, he is straddling the fence. And to suggest that he need not have, is not to ask him to flatten his nuanced readings or to make straight the turns of his analysis. Of course, Gates anticipates this response, for he is signifying once again when he changes the title to “Trading on the Margin” which both describes his critique and the possible interpretation of his own critical activity in this essay itself.

Gates's skills of anticipation, his ability to place his close readings of culture and literature in the complexity of broad and multiple interconnections without diminishing their specificities is in large part what makes him a leading scholar. His projects of literary recovery and his challenge to the cultural right are what, to me, make him a great critic. If Gates the Narrator sometimes overwhelms “Trading on the Margin,” by the end of the volume every reader should know that a large part of his project is to counter racism, cul-

tural imperialism and patriarchy—both as they affect institutions and our formal considerations of texts—using the tools of the master's house. Indeed, that is the message, expressed again and again in different voices, through multiple registers, of the collected pieces in *Loose Canons*.

Wayne State University

P. Gabrielle Foreman

### Notes

1. See Deborah McDowell, "Reading Family Matters," in *Changing Our Own Word* ed. Cheryl Wall (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 75-98 and Ann duCille, "Phallus(ies) of Interpretation: Toward Engendering the Black Critical 'I,'" *Callaloo* 16 (Summer, 1993): 559-74, for further explanation of the content and context of these exchanges.

2. Robert Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), preface.

3. Of course, Gates qualifies such a stance; "race" matters, he often reminds those readers who haven't been caught in the taxi cab dilemma themselves—"Please sir, it's only a metaphor," the "Black" professor yells at the passing NYC taxis (38).

4. What space prevents me from fully delineating here is that Gates recalls his childhood story while listening to Hortense Spillers's deliver her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" in which, as Gates puts it, Spillers calls for "a revoicing of the 'master's' discourse in the cadences and timbres of the Black Mother's voice." The first sentence of the paragraph I quote reads in full: "For me, I realized as Hortense Spillers spoke, much of my scholarly and critical work has been an attempt to learn how to speak in the strong, compelling cadences of my mother's voice." See both "The Master's Pieces" and Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," *Diacritics* 17 (Summer, 1987): 65-81, for a fuller reference.

5. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Editor's Introduction," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn, 1985): 1-21. Also see Gates, ed., "Race," *Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

6. Anna Deavere Smith's most famous play is "Fires in the Mirror" from *On the Road: A Search for American Character*. In it she takes on the voices of twenty different characters as they explore their complex feelings and reactions to the Crown Height murders/accidents/riots/expressions of outrage. It was first performed at the George C. Wolfe Festival of New Voices at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in 1991.

7. This essay was previously entitled "Good-bye Columbus? Notes on the Culture of Criticism." See *American Literary History* 3 (Winter, 1991): 711-27. Also see the responses of Myra Jehlen, Jerry G. Watts and John Higham, and Gates's reply in the same issue.

8. If you are willing to look up the citations the message is that you are already tardy. You should already be familiar with these references; there are no notes in this edition. For notes, see the essay in *American Literary History* 3 (Winter, 1991).

9.  
quo is  
Good  
overfl  
dering  
Gates  
an au  
dozen  
certai  
is mor  
10.

9. In his response Jerry Watts writes that "Gates' critique of the status quo is grossly inadequate" (*ALH*, 734). *Hearing* the piece, then entitled "Good-by Columbus" the first time it was delivered, however, in an overflowing room which held about five hundred people, I remember wondering too, whether this was the healthy critique of a caring insider or if Gates was sounding his own goodbye. And I was not alone; the talk caused an audible stir. In his own written *ALH* reply Gates refers Watts to the half dozen articles he has written in which he critiques the status quo in no uncertain terms. With these as backdrop, as they are in *Loose Canons*, the piece is moored, so to speak, in more recognizable waters.

10. *ALH*, Higham, 744; Gates, 749.