

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. 3, Article 6.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol36/iss3/6>

*Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation and Marlowe* by Emily C. Bartels. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. Pp. 221. \$29.95.

For the modern academic, institutionalized and yearning for possibilities of "subversion" or its more recent relative, "resistance," Christopher Marlowe offers attractive subject matter. Famously identified by contemporaries as atheist, spy and sodomite (charges that seem to link Marlowe to the heroes of his own plays), Marlowe embodies much that could threaten the dominant ideologies of his time. In *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism Alienation and Marlowe* it is Marlowe the subversive with whom Emily Bartels is concerned. Whereas in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* Stephen Greenblatt (the precursor with whom Bartels is most closely engaged) found in Marlowe's heroes an inherently transgressive subjectivity, a "will to absolute play" (which he attributed to the sodomitical, atheistic playwright as well), Bartels locates Marlowe's resistance in his plays' systematic critique of the process of othering, whereby authority imagines such a subversive will and then finds it in those it marks as different from itself. In his violent, willful, heaven- and law-defying heroes, Bartels argues, Marlowe gives us not subversive selves brought into being against "a neutral and unresponsive void" (as Greenblatt would have it) but the exposure of a cultural fantasy of otherness against which a self can be ironically constructed. "What finally is most subversive" in Marlowe, she argues, "is not the characters' or the playwright's identification with *the alien* but the insistence that such an identity does not, of itself, exist" (13).

This account of the "other" as a cultural fantasy rather than an identity is indebted to Edward Said's analysis of European colonial discourse in *Orientalism*, and Bartels attributes the period's discursive interest in distinguishing "others" to England's incipient participation in European imperialism. She follows Homi Bhabha's critique of Said, however, in insisting on the ambivalences which necessarily beset the process whereby the European imperialists mapped their worlds. The fact that the "other" is not real, that he is an effect of the struggle to define a coherent self which can never be fully achieved, means that such representations of the "other" are fissured and contradictory, exposing moments of identification or desire which disrupt any simple oppositional scheme. At the same time, however, the multiplicity of meanings which any given "other" can bear (barbarous Turk, militarily masterful Turk, usurious Jew, scapegoated Jew) produces an abstraction that ensures the single difference between this other and the self. Bartels asserts the historical importance of imperialism for understanding othering as a discursive strategy but argues that this imperial way of seeing also functioned to construct and demonize potentially transgressive selves within England—including, crucially, the sodomite. And yet, it is precisely the other's lack of geographical fixity that provides the central maneuver in Marlowe's attack: "an insistent incorporation of the strange within the familiar—an incorporation that proves geographic bounds arbitrary measures of difference and insists that spectators suspend categorical assumptions about what is ours and what, theirs" (17). The chronology of Marlowe's canon, which affords the structure for the book, can thus be seen to deconstruct the defensive edifice othering produces, moving us from the peripheries of empire to the English throne,

from African queen in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* to sodomitical English king in *Edward II*.

Bartels pursues her argument through readings of the plays and important intertexts, such as the *Aeneid*, Boemus's *Fardel of Facions* (1555), Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589), Whetstone's *English Mirrour* (1586), Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), producing an inventory of early-modern othering strategies. The book offers textured, revelatory accounts of this often contradictory material; its analyses of the shifting concerns that mark Holinshed's view of the Jew, and of the nature of Edward II's transgression are especially fine. In her readings of the plays, Bartels is concerned to demonstrate that the rhetorics and mechanisms of othering (including contradiction itself) are not simply deployed or inhabited by Marlowe but revealed to be a knowledge which can be consciously used by players on the field of power to construct their own identity and the identities of others. Thus for example, the contradictions which Whetstone's text betrays in its account of the Turk, "a barbarous, infidell people" who nevertheless show worthiness and wonderfull prowess" in war (57), furnish Marlowe's Tamburlaine with a repertoire of self-representations which he exploits, and finally exhausts in his career of conquest. In contrast, in the chapter on *Dr. Faustus* it is not Faustus, with his will to knowledge, who embodies imperialist energies but Mephostophilis and Lucifer who demonstrate their power by coercing Faust into a position of transgression "appropriating him as a convenient and necessary other" (116). Unlike more explicitly imperialist appropriations, however, this one is played out in terms of interiority reaching into the self, the soul and the mind of man" (117), linking Marlowe's devils to Protestant authority; they destroy Faustus by inducing in him a desire for beauty and transcendence (in fact, for redemption) that makes him know himself in hell. Like Protestant divines, Marlowe's devils "impose a limited subjectivity," defining the individual in terms of redemption and thus "den[y]ing] the mind its own place outside of heaven or hell" (138). If Faustus is destroyed by this process of subjection, however, Bartels argues that in *Edward II* Marlowe would put the sodomite ". . . in charge of his own otherness, allowing it to authorize the self in the way that perhaps Marlowe himself adopted as he wrote himself into the spectacular role of the atheistic sodomite" (172).

These are deft and original readings which make the book a valuable contribution to the field. The theoretical foundations of the book, however, seem problematic or at least underdeveloped. In Bartels's treatment of them Marlowe's plays constitute a critique of a cultural dynamic rather than a manifestation of one, a formulation which implicitly posits an author more or less in control—hence the book's focus on an author-based canon that shows development of thought. The problem with this approach is not simple heresy against the death of the author. In fact, Bartels's work suggests the usefulness of the author, at least as a heuristic device, for imagining resistance to hegemonic discourses. Rather, the difficulty lies in the absence of theoretical engagement with the question of how culture or history might work to produce (and constrain) not only the "dominant" othering discourses, but also Marlowe's own position in relation to them. "Imperialism" (with its domestic analogues for colonizing the inner life) stands as the efficient cause of the stereotyping which Marlowe opposes, and, despite the book's complex rendering

of its c  
less, p  
which  
clearly  
spy, p  
probab  
his sov  
of the  
himse  
respor  
conclu  
ment,  
Marlo  
beyon  
strate  
effects  
relatio  
tentio  
well i  
critiqu  
self-re  
cially  
respo  
The  
cated  
trodu  
did n  
concl  
it is  
they  
othe  
can  
ing  
erva  
help  
spor  
ever  
cism  
both  
ful  
Que  
Sup  
tion  
199

of its discursive contradictions it remains a frustratingly abstract force, agentless, presumptively "dominant" (not the same thing as inherently *dominating*, which it certainly was) and always othering. "Marlowe" on the other hand, is clearly an agent and a critical consciousness, resisting this force because "as a spy, possibly an associate of the freethinking School of Night (if it existed), probably a homosexual, and certainly a playwright, [he] was alienated within his society and demonized by accusations that are by now a well-known part of the Marlowe myth" (11). Of course, it is not impossible that Marlowe felt himself alienated by his society, and developed a critique of its discourses in response to this experience. But there is no particular reason why we need to conclude that his plays constitute a critique (as opposed to rhetorical experiment, say) or that, on the evidence Bartels adduces, they can be connected to Marlowe's experience. For instance, if, as Bartels argues, Shakespeare too saw beyond the stereotypes of earlier plays and travel literature, then perhaps the strategies of resistance she ascribes to the othered Marlowe might in fact be effects of the representational codes of the new theater. (Questions about the relationship between the plays and the institution of theater receive little attention. How, for example, does the persistent popularity of Marlowe's plays well into the seventeenth century complicate an account of their function as critique?) Alternatively, if we assent to the biographical connection, might the self-representations of other "aliens," Jesuits, witches, even, and perhaps crucially, professional writers, have provided resources to historicize the critical response to his position ascribed to Marlowe?

The Marlowe who emerges here is acted upon by history, but is finally located outside it, or more precisely, ahead of his time. Bartels writes in her introduction that "racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and the like, though they did not yet have a local habitation or name had their beginnings here." She concludes with the claim that "though identity politics will always be politics, it is this idea of self-determination that Marlowe's plays finally support as they expose the constructs and oppose the authorities that would have it otherwise" (172). That such a resolutely presentist appropriation of Marlowe can generate power and excitement is evidenced by Derek Jarman's exhilarating film of *Edward II*; in a critical and scholarly work, however, it can be enervating, rendering the playwright too familiar, even as the skillful critic helps us see the plays anew. But Bartels should not be made to carry the responsibility for these theoretical problems alone; they indicate the difficulties every critic who seeks to reconcile a progressive politics with literary historicism must confront. *Spectacles of Strangeness* offers rich and nuanced readings both of Marlowe's plays and their intertexts; it should furnish not only a useful tool for teaching Marlowe, but also an incentive to do so.

Queen's University, Canada

Elizabeth Hanson

*Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternal Landlords in British Fiction, 1770-1860* by Beth Fowkes Tobin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. Pp. ix + 195. \$25.00.

*Superintending the Poor* is far more interesting and comprehensive than its narrow title and drab cover indicate. In fact, while the title suggests a limited focus—charitable activities in fiction at a particular historical period—the book provides insights for historians and policy makers as well as students of literature.

Tobin's range is revealed in her familiarity with an impressive range of primary and secondary materials—novels, Evangelical tracts, works on estate management, history, philanthropic guidebooks, economics, biography, contemporary literary criticism, and material from periodical literature. Not only does she move gracefully among her sources, but her work provides insights into the cultural history of England during the period that she examines, a period characterized by "the social and economic upheavals resulting from the transition from paternal to capitalist relations in the rural economy" (1).

Tobin's main point is that men and women of the middle classes attempted to "undermine the landed upper classes' control over the rural economy of early industrial Britain" (1). Demonstrating this point requires her to move beyond the canon to examine works not generally regarded as literary. Use of numerous sources provides readers with insights into the intellectual and political activities of the time and also encourages them to see standard texts in new and exciting ways. Examining "ideological and cultural contexts defamiliarizes the familiar classics by Austen, Bronte, and Dickens" and encourages readers "to rethink assumptions about these canonical texts" (4).

The organization of the work, which is largely chronological, reveals the way that attitudes toward the poor and toward charitable activities developed. The first part of the book examines the "middle-class male critique of the upper classes" (5) while the second half "shifts its focus to middle-class women's critique of the gentry and clergy as failed paternalists and the promotion of themselves as the proper inheritors of this endangered paternal tradition" (6). Thus Tobin's work touches on issues that continue to confront readers today—the relationships between class and gender.

The movement that Tobin traces begins with a human problem that began when capitalist agricultural practices, including enclosure of common grounds and the consolidation of small farms, resulted in large numbers of displaced workers and the awareness that older methods of poor relief were no longer adequate. The first group to respond to the problem were primarily middle-class men. While some, like Arthur Young, positively embraced the new agricultural technology, others, like Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, present positive aspects of the old system of paternalism. According to Tobin, the first group was followed by middle-class thinkers (among them Godwin in *Caleb Williams* and Bage in *Mount Henneth*) who were determined to wrest power from the upper classes both by undermining the authority and power of the gentry and by celebrating "the talents, skills, and intelligence of the men of the middling classes" (29).

Following her discussion of middle-class men are two chapters that put Jane Austen into several important contexts. In the tradition represented by Alistair Duckworth, Marilyn Butler, and Raymond Williams, Tobin examines the political context of Austen's novels (the pauperization of small farmers, the food riots of 1810, the Luddite rebellion of 1812, and the passage of the Corn Laws), though she often disagrees with her predecessors in subtle but

important  
of the Eva  
After ex  
the Evang  
randum b  
gain pow  
organized  
supervisi  
the Bront  
women's  
The last c  
Bleak Hou  
that the  
spheres a  
grancy ge  
Superin  
helped m  
Grey in n  
culture en  
gest prob  
into an e  
that Tobin  
moveme  
Property  
This o  
of her w  
fessing  
working  
needs o  
examine  
courses  
any crit  
activity"  
Not o  
phy are  
such as  
For exa  
the diff  
historia  
various  
"Chapt  
of actio  
with w  
perspec  
Tobin  
charity  
texts. E  
Countr  
been p

important ways. Perhaps more important, she also examines Austen in terms of the Evangelical tradition, most clearly represented by Hannah More.

After examining *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* in detail, Tobin then considers the Evangelical redefinition of womanhood and suggests that clocks, memorandum books, and account books became the middle-class woman's way to gain power, first over herself, then over others. Next, Tobin focuses on more organized forms of social control, such as Sunday Schools and philanthropic supervision, suggesting that this movement was not terribly successful, for the Brontës and other writers of the hungry forties were less confident of women's ability to change the world by examining the hearts of individuals. The last chapter deals with Dickens's satiric portrait of charitable women in *Bleak House*. In Detective Bucket and Esther Summerson, Dickens suggests that the police and the housewife can exercise control over their different spheres and thereby reduce or eliminate the problems of poverty and vagrancy generated by the agricultural and industrial revolutions.

*Superintending the Poor* works on a number of different levels. Reading it helped me to see familiar works, including *Bleak House*, *Emma*, and *Agnes Grey* in new ways. Moreover, the material from economics, history, and agriculture encouraged me to grapple with less familiar materials. In fact, my biggest problem with the book was that it didn't suggest how this period fits into an even larger social context. In other words, did the disenchantment that Tobin discerns in the Brontës have anything to do with various feminist movements later in the century or with legislation like the Married Woman's Property Act?

This omission is all the more disturbing since Tobin is obviously thinking of her work's contemporary relevance. Tobin ends her introduction by confessing that her book, like the works that she examines, doesn't give the working classes an opportunity to speak for themselves. More sensitive to the needs of the "regulated" than are the Mrs. Pardiggles and Emmas that she examines, Tobin suggests her work's importance: "Understanding how discourses of regulation work to manage lives is crucial therefore not only to any critique of regulation but also to any program of sustained subversive activity" (7).

Not only is the text enlightening, but the chapter notes and the bibliography are also extremely useful. While some notes merely provide information, such as the location of a particular idea, many of them clarify complex issues. For example, footnote 6 to "Chapter One" provides a lengthy discussion of the difference between commerce and capitalism, including the way various historians have treated the subject; footnote 3 to "Chapter Three" summarizes various interpretations of Austen's political views; and footnote 22 to "Chapter Six" discusses Dickens's representation of women's "limited sphere of action." Each of these notes provides readers with an overview of the issue with which Tobin is wrestling at the moment and puts her own views into perspective.

Tobin's bibliography suggests that she has read everything written about charity between 1770 and 1860 as well as more recent responses to these texts. Beginning with Arthur Young's *A Six Weeks Tour, Through the Southern Countries of England and Wales* (1768) and including works that haven't yet been published, Tobin has covered the field well.

One negative aside: I detected several errors that might make Tobin's bibliography problematic for other scholars. Janet Todd is, at least once, identified as Jane Todd; and, a more personal note, my essay on *Bleak House* was published in 1983, not 1973. I didn't verify every single citation, but such problems seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Nonetheless they detract slightly from what is otherwise an exceptionally interesting work on an entire era.

*The Georgia Institute of Technology*

Carol A. Senf

*A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* by Daniel P. Watkins. Gainseville: University Press of Florida, 1993. Pp. 261 + xiii. \$39.95 (cloth); \$16.95 (paper).

Students of romantic drama have been awaiting a book by Daniel Watkins. As the author of a series of articles on the drama of the period and of two books of historical literary scholarship (*Social Relations in Byron's Eastern Tales* [1987] and *Keats's Poetry and the Politics of the Imagination* [1989]), Professor Watkins is particularly well situated to approach late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century drama through what he calls a "materialist critique." His book is an important contribution to a growing body of scholarship on the drama of the romantic age.

Watkins defines his place within this scholarship by labelling earlier work—concerned with subjectivist issues, with the role of the imagination or the struggle of the alienated individual—as "idealist," caught in the "romantic ideology." Going beyond such studies, Watkins offers a "materialist critique" that seeks the ground—the foundational economic, political, and social structures—for the particularly romantic configuration of the subject.

Watkins first offers a materialist explanation for the "failure" of romantic drama. He argues that the rise of a bourgeois ideology rendered impossible the particular form of British drama that flourished within the aristocratic culture of Renaissance England. The traditional drama was able to participate in the construction of an aristocratic culture, for that culture's ideology—with its sense of character as arising within social, familial and religious hierarchies and its treatment of life as a series of social exchanges—was immediately susceptible to display on stage. The bourgeois ideology, however, argues that the aristocratic social order has collapsed, creating space for a private, subjective realm. Since, according to Watkins, this bourgeois private sphere is not representable on stage, romantic drama is doomed. There is, however, abundant recompense for this "dramatic inadequacy" (19), for the historical tensions that tear apart romantic drama are thus displayed for the materialist critic more fully than in other romantic works.

Watkins offers two complementary explorations of romantic drama's engagement with the massive economic, political, social, and cultural shifts of the day. He first surveys a series of individual plays by different authors and then offers, in a chapter that occupies almost half the book, a much fuller account of the dramas (except *Cain*) of Byron, "arguably the greatest English

dramatist since Shakespeare" (134). The plays treated in the first part of the book are Coleridge's *Osorio*, Baillie's *DeMonfort*, Lamb's *John Woodvil*, Milman's *Fazio*, Maturin's *Bertram*, Beddoes's *The Bride's Tragedy*, and Scott's *Halidon Hill*. While each play considered is given an entire chapter, the procedure here is not that of either close reading or new historicist thick description; the level of analysis occurs at the level of neither textual nor historical detail but instead at that of larger structural class conflicts, "the structural transformation of British society that culminated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (xi).

Watkins is interested in the ways in which romantic dramas are forged by the pressures of the shift from an aristocratic to a bourgeois ideology as well as by the tensions arising from the conflict between traditional patriarchalism and a rising feminist vision. In the chapter on *Osorio*, for example, Watkins finds in particular plot details—Maria's reluctance to marry her aristocratic father's choice, the struggle between the aristocratic brothers *Osorio* and *Albert*, and Catholic Christianity's involvement in power politics—signs of a deeper social disease, "infecting the entire aristocratic state apparatus" (26–27). Here, as in *DeMonfort*, *Bertram*, or *The Bride's Tragedy*, the tensions found within the play are read as indications of the collapse of the aristocratic world these dramas—with their debts to Renaissance models—would seem to want to evoke. Whatever the surface plot of a particular play—that might, as in *Bertram*, for example, seem to stage a struggle between two aristocrats—the "political unconscious" of these plays reveals the inevitable victory of a bourgeois ideology. Of course, as Watkins shows in some of the most interesting discussions in the book, the moment of bourgeois liberation is gendered in these plays, as the female characters find that the patriarchy survives even massive shifts in class power.

Throughout the book, but particularly in his treatment of Byron, Watkins argues that the Gothic or Byronic villain-hero is the product of the age's ideological shifts. Baillie's *DeMonfort*, for example, is presented as a titanic individualist, but he becomes psychologically interesting only because the aristocratic order that should have provided him with a structure for his identity is being challenged: he has fallen from an aristocratic type into bourgeois subjectivity. Focusing on the importance of criminality to Byron's plays, Watkins shows how the apparently free-standing Byronic hero, as a criminal, is always already constructed by his social relations, by the order—whether aristocratic or bourgeois—against which he rebels: thus we have *Faliero* whose identity arises from his roles as Doge and then rebel, *Sardanapalus* who wishes to define himself against his nation's tradition but who is thus nonetheless defined by it, and even *Manfred* who appears as the embodiment of an aristocratic refusal to accept the demise of the old order.

Such issues—the representation of the inevitable victory of a bourgeois ideology, the revelation that the bourgeois embrace of the individual is itself socially conditioned, the exploration of the tension between bourgeois liberation from the aristocracy and women's continuing subjugation by the patriarchy—are also found in other dramas of the period. Lamb's *John Woodvil* uses its Restoration setting to explore the rise of the bourgeoisie that would be triumphant in Lamb's own 1790s. Maturin's *Bertram*, which would seem to provide the period's ultimate rebel of absolute individuality, reveals that so-



cial structures are always already there, that both aristocratic and romantic individualism are ideological constructs. Beddoes's *Bride's Tragedy* again reveals the difficulties in dreaming of a past world, its ideology and drama, when the dramatist is fixed by a bourgeois political unconscious. Scott's *Halidon Hill* is read as an interesting attempt to locate in an early event from Scottish history the structure of the subsequent absorption of an aristocratic Scotland within a bourgeois Great Britain. I was particularly glad to see Milman's *Fazio* included a very successful stage play that has received little attention and that allows Watkins an opportunity—given the play's obsession with alchemy, money lending, commerce, and theft—to discuss the role of money in the social transformations he has been tracking.

These readings offer an account of a shifting ideological reaction to the structural changes taking place within British society, from Coleridge's *Osorio*, which can still embrace a radical message as it identifies the emergent bourgeois ideology with universal liberation through various anxious representations of the collapse of an aristocratic order and the rise of a new bourgeois hegemony, to Scott's conservative reaction to the changes that had taken place by 1822. Byron, who receives the fullest and most fulfilling treatment, is found to go beyond his contemporaries in that the other dramatists remain trapped within the emerging bourgeois ideology while he provides the means to analyze the limitations of that order even in its moment of victory.

*A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* accomplishes a great deal, and thus it is perhaps unfair to wish that it had given us even more. In part, this may just be a reflection of my wish that there was more work done here at what Watkins calls (in dismissing it) the "conjunctural" level of historical literary study where we examine the ways in which texts are embedded in particularized historical contexts. I would be interested in hearing about Maturin's *Bertram* not just as another exemplar of a privatizing bourgeois ideology but perhaps as a reflection upon the Napoleonic stance, at once a culmination of a bourgeois revolution and a nostalgic recreation of an aristocratic order. I find Watkins's account of the role of money in Milman's *Fazio* fascinating, but I wonder whether it would not have been even more powerful had there been an attempt to connect the play's obsession with gold to the contemporary debate over the use of paper money rather than gold, a debate engaged by Shelley, Cobbett, and Hone. More generally, I would have liked to have a fuller sense of the place of these plays within their immediate institutional context, that of the theater. Watkins accepts the conventional view that there is no "great" drama and theater produced during this period. He states that the supposed drama-theater split found during the period should be the subject of historical literary study rather than a given, but he does not seem particularly interested in the split. It is perhaps emblematic that the book opens with Coleridge's *Osorio* and never discusses its transformation into the successful stage play *Remorse*. It strikes me that a materialist critique of romantic drama might be interested in the fact that Byron's *Marino Faliero* could reach the stage only in a censored form or that Shelley's *The Cenci* (an important work not discussed here) could not find acceptance on the London stage because of the power of the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays. Watkins calls Baillie's plays "utter failures on stage" (39), but something

about *DeMonfort* led both Kemble and Kean to stage it. While Watkins quotes with approval the notion that the only successful "legitimate" drama of the age consisted of revivals of Shakespeare and Sheridan (7), is it not part of the material life of these dramas that an "illegitimate" play such as Matthew Lewis's *Castle Spectre* could save Drury Lane from a debt brought on in part by these revivals? Should not a materialist critique question the entire notion of "legitimate" drama—with its legal and political as well as aesthetic ramifications? Is it not possible that the story of the drama of the romantic age is as much one of "illegitimate" success as that of a failure of "legitimate" forms?

Such questions suggest lines of inquiry that go beyond the mission of Watkins's consistently interesting book. *A Materialist Critique of Romantic Drama* encourages such questions in opening up a new approach to the drama of the period. The wait for Daniel Watkins's book has been worth it: future work on romantic drama will be indebted to this ground-breaking examination of the ideological structuring of these plays.

Texas A&M University

Jeffrey N. Cox

*On the Museum's Ruins* by Douglas Crimp, with photographs by Louise Lawler. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993. Pp. xx + 348. \$29.95.

"My theory of postmodernism is internally contradictory, positing both a rupture with modernism and a continuity of one of modernism's most salient features [avant-gardism]" (21). More than Douglas Crimp may have realized, the contrast between the preciousness of his book's form and the critical aims of its textual contents reproduces this contradiction with noteworthy accuracy.

Aside from the introductory essay, *On the Museum's Ruins* is a collection of previously-published journal articles and exhibition catalogue essays. The journal articles all appeared in *Parachute* or *October* between 1980 and 1987. Douglas Crimp was an editor for *October* during its formative years and his own work, like that of the journal's, helped lead the application of new critical theories to the interpretation of modern art and its institutions. Crimp primarily used Marxist theory, especially the work of Benjamin, along with the philosophical writings of Foucault to formulate a materialist archaeology of museums and exhibitions. By attempting to unveil the interpretive positions of these powerful art institutions—positions which to most earlier critics were all but invisible—Crimp made a significant contribution to a body of related critical and historical writings published in the past fifteen years. Among the more notable works by his contemporaries are Carol Duncan's and Alan Wallach's articles, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis" (*Marxist Perspectives* 4, 1978) and "The Universal Survey Museum" (*Art History* III, 1980), and critical histories such as Andrew McClellan's "The Politics and Aesthetics of Display: Museums in Paris, 1750–1800" (*Art History* VII, 1984; expanded in his *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in 18th Century Paris* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994]) and Daniel Sherman's "The

Bourgeoisie, Cultural Appropriation, and the Art Museum in Nineteenth-Century France (*Radical History Review* 38, 1987; treated more fully in *Worthy Monuments: Art Museums and the Politics of Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989]). The originality of Crimp's criticism lies in his argument that the acceptance of photography as a significant expressive medium in art "foreclosed" or at least disrupted the discourse of modernism in the art world. "Art world" is used here and in the following discussion as framed by Arthur C. Danto: the network of artists, collectors, dealers, curators, historians, foundation officers, and critics which constitutes the material and intellectual circuit of art valuation, exchange, interpretation, and patronage. *On the Museum's Ruins* contains useful and stimulating insights about site-specific sculpture (specifically Richard Serra's work and the *Tilted Arc* controversy) and contemporary exhibitions (especially the installations of Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke, and *Documenta 7*) during the 1980s. But Crimp's essays diagnosing the interanimations of photography and its institutional contexts for symptoms of postmodernity warrant particular attention.

Despite the efforts of Alfred Stieglitz and others, photography was generally considered by the art world to be an interesting but minor phenomenon of modern visual culture. That changed when, in the 1970s, museums began to exhibit and acquire photographs, hire photography curators, and establish departments of photography. In the title essay Crimp argues the art world's embrace of photography signaled "The End of Painting" and one of its principal institutions, the art museum. The appearance of photographs and photomechanically-produced media in the art world interrupted modernism's discourse on originality and the irreducibility—the aura—of the unique object, forming a fault line along which the sensibility called postmodernism began to coalesce. One site of this rupture is Robert Rauschenberg's photographic reproductions ("appropriations") of paintings from the canon of western art which he serigraphed on a series of canvases. Leo Steinberg's interpretation of the series, first articulated in 1968, includes what Crimp believes to be one of the earliest uses of the term "postmodernism": to characterize "the most radical shift in the subject matter of art, the shift from nature to culture" (47). By juxtaposing those flat, monochrome photomechanical images alongside, covered by, or printed over vividly expressionistic brush strokes of paint, Rauschenberg intensified awareness of what, in the discourse of modernism, constituted the essence of art as high culture: the texture and mass of paint deposited by the brush stroke, material evidence of the artist's hand—the artist's signature—in a work's creation. The tactile, worked media of art had become not only the preeminent signifier of the artist's presence in late nineteenth and twentieth century art theory, but also a foundation upon which the modernist epistemology of aura was in part erected. Moreover, by joining the photomechanical image and brush stroke on the same surface, Rauschenberg augured the use of photography as a counter-discourse to modernism. When the art world found in the photograph an artistic "there" there, despite the absence of the artist's hand-wrought mark, the discourse of modernism was breached. The art world's, and specifically the museum's, valuation system, based as it is on a currency of aura, was suddenly destabilized.

The appropriation of earlier images and compositions by subsequent gen-

eration  
since  
essay  
Boue  
the di  
ernist

Dé  
pai  
to  
kn  
[af  
ne  
of  
en  
his

Fouca  
the g  
sur l'  
spect  
of Un  
Activ  
pora  
ern,  
Sher  
Sher  
Law  
caul  
ticut  
of a  
they  
Law  
of c  
R  
On  
ous  
inte  
age  
gra  
etc  
cre  
cor  
tex  
fa  
arr  
al  
no  
ju

erations of artisans/artists has been a regular phenomenon in visual culture since the beginning of civilized societies. However, Crimp quotes Foucault's essay "Fantasia of the Library" (*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Bouchard and Simon [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977], 92-93), to map the difference between simple emulation and the self-consciousness of modernist appropriation:

*Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and *Olympia* were perhaps the first "museum" paintings, the first paintings in European art that were less a response to the achievement of Giorgione, Raphael, and Velázquez than an acknowledgment (supported by this singular and obvious connection [appropriation], using this legible reference to cloak its operation) of the new and substantial relationship of painting to itself, as a manifestation of the existence of museums and the particular reality and interdependence that paintings acquire in museums [and, one might add, art history].

Foucault's awareness of Manet's reflexivity is triggered by his knowledge that the group portrait of two clothed gentlemen and a nude woman (*Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*), and that of a nude courtesan (*Olympia*), are appropriations, respectively, of Raphael's dignified *Judgment of Paris* and Titian's solemn *Venus of Urbino*. But Crimp argues in several essays, including "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" and "Appropriating Appropriation," that contemporary photography used appropriation to create a multiplied, or postmodern, reflexivity in art. Crimp cites the self-portrait photographs of Cindy Sherman costumed as movie idols and other cultural icons and stereotypes, Sherri Levine's photographs of photographs by Edward Weston, and Louise Lawler's photographs of museum displays to extend the boundaries of Foucault's map of self-relations. However, in the photographs by Lawler in particular, the mirror of reflexivity is not placed within the museum's discourse of art history where works of art reflect upon each other, but outside where they reflect upon the institutionalization of art per se. No doubt that is why Lawler's photographs are used in Crimp's book to serve both as illustrations of certain essays and an artistic counterpart to the entire book.

Reproductions of Lawler's photographs, which are distributed throughout *On the Museum's Ruins*, provide details and more general views of the various discursive spaces of art: auction house interiors, museum exteriors and interiors (including works of art on display, general gallery views, and storage rooms), corporate offices, and the interiors of collectors' homes. Photographs illustrating essays are captioned with Lawler's name, the site, date, etc., in a fine caption-style typeface, just like other photographs in the book credited to other sources. But photographs meant to be seen as her artistic contribution to the book are reproduced, one per page, with brief descriptive texts (apparently composed by Lawler), printed in a bold typeface, on blank, facing pages—a characteristic "high" art display technique. The generous amounts of blank space surrounding Lawler's photographs-as-art and their alternate style of labeling distinguish them from the other reproductions. The not-so-subtle difference instructs the reader that the other photographs are "just illustrations" (an art-world pejorative); Lawler's photographs-as-art are

more. The difference reinforces the modernist fetishism of art that has, to a large extent, transformed photography from a subversive element within modernism to yet another avant-garde stage in modernity's progress.

The binding of *On the Museum's Ruins* deserves special mention. It is enclosed in a dust wrapper made of clear acetate printed with nearly transparent inks. The title, author, and photographer information is superimposed over a muted reproduction of one of Lawler's photographs of classical Greek statuary wrapped in transparent plastic sheeting and apparently stored in a museum vault. (192) The sheeting is bound to the statuary with a horizontal strip of masking tape. Highlights on the folds of sheeting are dramatized by the gloss of the dust jacket creating an illusion of light reflecting off the book itself. Removing the acetate wrapper reveals a plain paper over hardback covering, printed only with the image of a horizontal strip of masking tape mimicking the image on the dust jacket. The dust jacket photography is continued over the spine of the book as well, and another detail of the same image is reproduced on the front and back endpapers. In other words, this book is fancy. The design and production values of *On the Museum's Ruins* signal its debt to one of the art world's most important institutions: fine art publishing.

In an intriguing twist, the relatively low cost of this book, by current academic press standards, was made possible with a publication grant from the Getty Trust, the arts and humanities philanthropy established by J. Paul Getty. The cultural logic of this late capitalist arrangement—the creation of a luxury object for critics studying the political economies of art—deserves a separate essay. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, Crimp did not apply his formidable understanding of postmodernist theory to the topic. Nonetheless, *On the Museum's Ruins* is a collection of valuable essays by an original and skillful critic. Despite some repetitions of arguments inevitable in a selection of its kind, the book is a convenient presentation of Crimp's still very useful writings. Those who are beguiled by the haptic as well as optic experiences of visual culture, however, should not postpone seeing the book until it appears in the local library. By then, a librarian will have removed the dust jacket and pinned it to a bulletin board somewhere. The book without its dust jacket is like a photograph of a painting; much information is still there, but the challenge of this modern/postmodern/post-postmodern conundrum will be significantly diminished.

Wayne State University

Jeffrey Abt

*After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America*, by Vernon Shetley. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993, Pp. xiv + 209. \$13.95 (paper); \$39.95 (cloth).

Why has literary theory replaced poetry as the center of debate in English Departments? Why was Robert Lowell the last poet to have been mandatory reading for the wider intellectual culture? Why do Creative Writing and English departments politely suffer each other's presence?

Vernon Shetley answers these questions in *After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America*. The questions he fails to ask or dismisses, and the poets he either ignores or lambastes are as interesting as his well-constructed, definitive argument. Why, for example, in a book about the demise of poetry, does he not at least in passing discuss the work of popular poets, or at least examine the phenomenon of their popularity? Adrienne Rich, Mary Oliver, Seamus Heaney, and Gary Snyder all command substantial audiences. Their poetry has, in some instances, changed how our culture thinks of itself.

Shetley anticipated this charge. In his introduction he defines his book's narrow focus: to diagnose the historical and theoretical causes of poetry's weakened pulse among intellectuals. His prescription: poets should write more difficult poems. Shelley cites T.S. Eliot's essay on "Metaphysical Poets" to justify the necessity for difficult poetry: "Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results." Thus, "Eliot implies" and Shetley seems to agree that those who don't write difficult poetry—who in Shetley's opinion include the Beats, most contemporary poets and all MFA candidates—lack a refined sensibility and their work fails to reflect the fragmentation and complexity of modern life. If more contemporary poets followed Eliot's injunction, poetry could once again "make itself a vital part of intellectual culture."

Shetley refines Eliot's definition of difficulty in order to analyze the work of three poets: Elizabeth Bishop, James Merrill, and John Ashbery, and to compare their work to the state of contemporary poetry. "Difficulty," according to Shetley, is subjective. It is a reader's response to a text, a response which has been shaped by the reader's "training, expectations, and knowledge." He distinguishes difficulty from "obscurity," which he defines as those "elements of language that resist easy semantic processing." Shetley clarifies these terms only to drop the term "obscurity" from use for the remainder of his book. As is the case in this review, he uses "difficulty" to refer to both the obscurity of a text and an audience's grappling with it.

His understanding of difficulty leads Shetley to conclude that the initial "outcry over modernists' difficulty" was because the culture was no longer training readers to comprehend a complex literature. In Shetley's view, therefore, difficulty with the modernists' work, and by extension difficulty with certain contemporary poetry, was an "effect, not the cause of the disappearance of the common reader." This reasoning seems inverted and convoluted. It releases writers from the responsibility of making sense to a broader audience by privileging difficulty as the standard by which poetry should be judged.

According to Shetley, the modernists assumed the responsibility of "educating their readers" about how to read the difficulty of their texts, a task that was assumed by the academy once modernism had moved "from the margins to the center of literary life." Once that had occurred, the academy assumed the role of teaching "techniques of reading" modernist texts "to a new generation of readers."

Poets who came of age after World War II could, in Shetley's view, either choose to write to the ready-made audience of "institutionalized modernism,"

as Richard Wilbur and Anthony Hecht did, or to rebel and "champion romantic or prophetic traditions" to a bohemian audience, as Ginsberg did. Bishop, Merrill and Ashbery, Shetley believes, occupy a middle ground. They resisted the prescriptions of the New Critics—the academic heirs of modernism—as well as the unexamined subjectivity and "cultural heroics" of the Beats. However, only Shetley's analysis of Ashbery's work can be easily linked to his initial theoretical discussion of difficulty and modernism.

In order to analyze Merrill's and Bishop's work, and to relate it to contemporary poetry, Shetley expands his theoretical basis to include a discussion of "lucidity," and "lyricism." He borrows these terms from Charles Altieri and uses them to define the split between English and Creative Writing departments. English departments practice lucidity, an enterprise in which theorists draw upon reason to examine (skeptically) or to "demystify" the "subjective, emotive value-laden discourse" of poetry. The result of their efforts are "general laws," i.e. literary theories. Lyricists, or poets, resist the "reduction of experience to general laws" by asserting the "value of the personal and particular" against the abstract. Shelley praises Bishop, Merrill and Ashbery for acknowledging the "competing claims of lyricism and lucidity" in their work. He believes that all three are "skeptically self-conscious," i.e., lucid, "about the strategies they employ to translate subjectivity into form," i.e., lyrical.

The ability to be skeptical thus becomes, in Shetley's view, the distinguishing mark of "difficult" or valuable poetry. In Shetley's words: "Poetry ought, then, to present its readers with exempla of the kind of mind that continually guards against passing fictions upon itself, that reflects on the operations of its own language and weighs them against a tough standard." In including an additional set of binary opposites, that of lucidity and lyricism, with his earlier set, that of academic modernism and Beat poetry, Shetley both clarifies and simplifies his argument. Further defining his terms allows him to categorize contemporary poetry and compare it to the work of his selected poets. He defines three approaches to contemporary poetry and their relation to subjectivity, i.e. lyricism:

1. Language Poets, who expose "subjectivity as an effect of language, reducing the self to a trope or figure that is more properly unmasked than expressed."
2. MFA Poets, who share "an unexamined belief in the power of subjectivity to shape meaningful poetic forms."
3. New Formalist Poets, who "have faith in the power of traditional poetic forms to give valid shape to subjectivity."

His categories, although useful, limit the kinds of poetry he discusses, causing his analysis of contemporary poetry to be markedly less than comprehensive. However, his analysis of the relationship between subjectivity (lyricism) and skeptical reason (lucidity) in the work of Bishop, Merrill and Ashbery is illuminating.

Shetley focuses on Bishop's use of similitude to demonstrate her skepticism about her own poetic technique. In his words, "Bishop's similitudes point to

gaps and difference and encourage the reader to focus on elements of unlikeness as much as on elements of sameness; metaphor itself becomes an instrument of skepticism as the poet uses it to question the mind's appetite for analogy." He begins his discussion with an analysis of "The Monument" and "The Map," poems in which symbolism and impersonality create self-contained, "aesthetic worlds," which conform to the "then-reigning New Criticism paradigms." He then traces how she developed her poetry into more anecdotal or narrative forms, such as "At the Fishhouses" and "In the Waiting Room." His analysis of "At The Fishhouses" demonstrates how Bishop uses similitude as a means to explore herself in relation to others and to the external world only to arrive at the understanding that her knowledge of them is relative as opposed to absolute.

Shetley praises Bishop's later work for "straightforwardly presenting scenes or narratives whose significance the poet resolutely refuses to reveal." He views her refusal as an acknowledgement of the limits of poetry's truth-telling ability. While such a reading of Bishop explains readers' difficulty in paraphrasing the exact meaning of her poetry, one has to question whether her reputation and broad readership stem from this difficulty, or from the lyrical, haunting way in which she precisely renders her experience of the natural world and with which she creates imagined worlds.

Shetley traces, as he does with Bishop, Merrill's transition from writing impersonal, formalist poems to writing formal poems in a colloquial style whose deceptive openness is indicative of Merrill's skepticism and "distrust" of the "common idiom's" ability to express his subjective experience. In his analysis of "An Urban Convalescence," Shetley shows how Merrill's style establishes an intimacy with the reader through its familiarity, only to distance itself from the reader by inverting or linguistically playing with its colloquialisms.

Shetley identifies several other strategies that Merrill uses throughout his work to develop the "tension between the public and private modes of expression." For example, in "Childlessness," Merrill uses metaphors that have no identifiable correlatives in either the external world or in an inherited body of cultural knowledge. In the course of a poem, he refers to the original metaphor, thus making his own work the source of its allusions. Shetley defends Merrill's tactics, claiming they indicate that "there no longer exists a shared ground of culture between poet and reader," an assertion that makes him very much an heir to the high modernists.

Of the three poets, Ashbery's poetic most neatly corresponds to Shetley's prescription for difficult poetry. Shelley believes Ashbery's alienation from academic modernism led him to consciously develop a poetry that foiled the reading strategies of the New Critics, and thus made reading poetry difficult again for those same critics. In so doing Ashbery was faced with the special problem of how to be progressive, or avant-garde once the avant-garde had become the establishment.

Shetley is determined to prove that although Ashbery was "disaffected" from the academics, he cannot be allied with those other academic rebels—the Beats, especially Ginsberg. In the course of his book, Shetley twice includes the following observation Ashbery made in "The Invisible Avant-Garde," a lecture he gave in 1968:



In both life and art today we are in danger of substituting one conformity for another, or, to use a French expression, of trading one's one-eyed horse for a blind one. Protests against the mediocre values of our society such as the hippie movement seem to imply that one's only way out is to join a parallel society whose stereotyped manners, language, speech and dress are only reverse images of the one it is trying to reject.

Shetley spins an elaborate rationale to show that, although Ashbery won the Yale Younger Poets Award and all three major literary awards in 1976, he writes neither for an academic, nor an avant-garde audience, but for a small "coterie." Does Shetley's need to make such a distinction arise from a longing for a time when reading and writing literature was reserved for small coteries, when there wasn't an abundance of poets writing for diverse audiences? Or does Shetley need to believe that the high esteem in which he holds Ashbery's work has nothing to do with how it lends itself to contemporary academic literary theory?

Shetley believes Ashbery makes reading difficult again by using poetic techniques that baffle New Criticism's reading strategies. Specifically, Ashbery evades the New Critical maxim defined by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren that "every poem implies a speaker of the poem, either the poet writing in his own person or someone into whose mouth the poem is put, and that the poem represents the reaction of such a person to a situation, a scene, or an idea."

In his analysis of "Soonest Mended," Shetley shows how Ashbery manipulates pronouns to obscure the speaker, and how instead of "naming a specific situation," Ashbery creates "an encompassing condition that the poet cannot stand outside of and, for that very reason, cannot formulate discursively." Shetley also analyzes the syntax, diction and endings of Ashbery's poems to demonstrate how he creates an illusion of coherence, which on closer examination cannot be known or located. Shetley believes Ashbery remains an essentially lyric poet because of his endings, which "create a satisfying finish to poems that might otherwise feel deprived of closure given the tenuousness of their internal structure." Thus Ashbery remains lyrical while "avoiding the charge of sentimentality the skeptical consciousness stands ready to make."

In attempting to revive poetry solely for intellectuals, Shetley excludes other standards for valuing poetry such as its capacity to sway its readers emotionally; to mirror and create experience through the intensity of its language; to instruct; and to transform the ordinary language of speech and discourse into music. Unfortunately, no book can be all-inclusive. By fully articulating one standard for contemporary poetry, Shetley will invite a more thoughtful debate than those in the recent past, which have tended to assign blame for poetry's diminishment. At times, his maligning of MFA programs, specific contemporary poets, and the Beats suffers from this same inclination.