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Dryden in Revolutionary England by David Bywaters. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991. Pp. xiii + 196; $25.00.

Although he has "no quarrel . . . with deconstruction, postfreudianism, or neomarxism," David Bywaters believes that "the exclusive application of these and similar theories to past literature has the unfortunate effect of drawing us into a kind of historical solipsism that allows us to see nothing in the past but our own reflection" (x). In a forthright preface, Bywaters explains his own "methodology," one "hardly new to Dryden studies": he wishes "to situate [Dryden's later] works in political and literatry contexts with which Dryden and his readers would have been demonstrably familiar" (ix). Having devoted years to similar projects, I can hardly criticize this goal, and I am in general agreement with the picture of the late Dryden that emerges from this crisply argued and smoothly written study. Unfortunately, an interpretation alert to the veiled political references in the poet's later works is no longer a revisionist innovation, though it may have seemed to be when Bywaters was doing his graduate work under Steven Zwicker; and in choosing to emphasize politics, Bywaters sometimes loses sight of other important aspects of the works he analyzes.

In the Introduction, for example, Bywaters correctly identifies Dryden's tendency "to rate the governments of all ages (including his own) by their sponsorship of the arts" (7). He might have remembered that principle before referring to the poet's "patriotic hatred of the French" (3). In fact, Dryden praised Louis XIV in the *Discourse on the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693) as "the Patron of all Arts," extolling "the Bounty of that King to Men of Learning and Merit: A Praise so just, that even we who are his Enemies, cannot refuse it him." The qualifying disclaimer did not convince Dryden's enemies, who contrasted this praise with the old poet's silence on the death of Queen Mary; undaunted, Dryden stubbornly repeated his praise of the "Magnificence and encouragement of the present *King* of *France*" in "A Parallel of Poetry and Painting" (1695). As this small example suggests, Dryden is slippery: his occasional participation in the satirical sneering at the French so typical of English writers did not prevent him from noticing Louis's accomplishments as a patron of the arts; his need to express his continuing Jacobite and Roman Catholic sentiments by irony and innuendo in his later works did not prevent him from attending to literary and aesthetic concerns in those same works.

In a generally sensible chapter on *The Hind and the Panther*, Bywaters begins by declaring that "most readers of the poem from the time of its first publication to the present have recognized [that] the concerns of *The Hind and the Panther* are mainly political." Seventeenth-century religion and politics were indeed deeply entangled, but that fact does not justify collapsing the distinction between religion and politics, as Bywaters does by implying that Dryden, who wrote this poem to defend the most serious personal decision of his life, was unconcerned with theology: "Transubstantiation had been an object of derision to English Protestants of all kinds long before the Test Act, but this hardly matters to Dryden. He is primarily interested not in the doctrine itself, but in its political consequences, and this is no less true of all the points of dogma under discussion in part II" (16). Yet Dryden's per-

sonal journey with respect to the doctrine of transubstantiation was in fact a serious and painful one. In *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), he treated the Catholic view as "an object of derision":

> Th' *Egyptian* Rites the *Jebusites* imbrac'd;
> Where Gods were recommended by their Tast.
> Such savory Deities must needs be good,
> As serv'd at once for Worship and for Food.

In *The Hind and the Panther* (1687), however, he dramatized his struggle to accept a doctrine contrary to the evidence of sense-impressions:

> Can I my reason to my faith compell
> And shall my sight, and touch, and taste rebell?
> Superiour faculties are set aside,
> Shall their subservient organs be my guide?
> Then let the moon usurp the rule of day,
> And winking tapers shew the sun his way;
> For what my senses can themselves perceive
> I need no revelation to believe.

If he remained an acutely political writer (as such words as "Superiour," "subservient," and especially "usurp" suggest), Dryden was also a man of faith. Properly understood, his religious conversion reveals him as a poet continually engaged with the largest questions of meaning and value. Bywaters recognizes a part of that truth when he argues that *The Hind and the Panther* claims "a different kind of authority drawn from the poet's professed mastery of and participation in a venerable and transcendent literary tradition" (10–11). Though clear and well-informed, his chapter is too short to be a major contribution to our understanding of Dryden's longest and most complex original poem, which still awaits a full-scale reading.

The material on *Don Sebastian* in chapter two was published in *JEGP* in 1986; the idea that the play makes explicit reference to politics was first argued by John Robert Moore in 1958. Here especially, we encounter little that is new. In a parallel treatment of *Amphitryon*, Bywaters extends the argument first offered in James Garrison's influential article of 1980, which constructs a political allegory in which Alcmena is England, Amphitron James, and Jupiter William. Judith Milhous and Robert Hume have pointed to some problems with this sweeping reading in *Producible Interpretation* (1985); their chaper goes uncited here. Although Bywaters is usually cautious about pushing his political readings too far, his treatment of *Amphitryon* does show some strain. Accepting a bribe from the disguised Jupiter, who wishes to gain access to Alcmena's bed, the servant Phaedra asks whether he would "have [his] Mony out of the Treasury, without paying the Officers their Fees." According to Bywaters, "Phaedra bargains with Jupiter as the English nation, which she explicitly represents, bargains with William: he may raid the treasury only after he has bribed its officers" (68). But the context of Phaedra's remarks does not suggest such a large-scale allegory. Jupiter has complained that "Her Sex is Avarice, and she, in One, / Is all her Sex," a conventional piece of ugly misogyny; Phaedra wishes to remind him that male officers in

the treasury engage in similar avarice. Moreover, Dryden knew to his cost the difficulty of collecting a legitimate salary from the treasury; Charles II died owing his Laureate more than £1200. Phaedra thinks that Jupiter is Amphitryon, claiming his lawful conjugal rights as a government employee might claim his lawful salary; she exacts her bribe in the spirit of "business as usual." Jupiter's entry could be construed as a "raid [on] the treasury" only if Phaedra knew his true identity; Bywaters can claim that she "explicitly represents" England only if we are willing to forget that his reading generally identifies Alcmena with England. The play sparkles with local political humor and innuendo, but it will not yield to a schematic allegorical interpretation.

In his next chapter, pairing *King Arthur* and *Cleomenes*, Bywaters provides an excellent account of Dryden's reasons for choosing Halifax as the dedicatee of his refurbished opera. Again, however, some of his thunder has been stolen. Anne Barbeau Gardiner, in an article correcting several errors and omissions in my biography, makes similar points (see "Dryden's Patrons," in *The Age of William III & Mary II: Power, Politics, and Patronage 1688–1702*, ed. Robert Maccubbin and Martha Hamilton-Phillips [Williamsburg: College of William and Mary, 1989], 326–32). As Bywaters delicately notes, his reading of *King Arthur* generally "coincides" with my own shorter treatment of the work in *John Dryden and his World* (1987), but it is bound to seem less urgent for that very reason. Unlike Gardiner and Douglas Canfield, who see the play as another Jacobite allegory, Bywaters believes that *Cleomenes* is an attempt "to show how respect and admiration for James may be reconciled with obedience to William and patriotic devotion to English interests and institutions" (94). This view, for which he mounts a plausible argument, might seem more interesting had it not been adumbrated by Judith Sloman in *Dryden: The Poetics of Translation* (1985).

In his final chapter, which draws evidence from a variety of works in poetry and prose, Bywaters begins by flogging a very dead horse. The view he proposes to correct, which would naively accept Dryden's claims to retirement and disengagement, is now held by no serious scholar; the phrases Bywaters quotes in characterizing that view come from works published in 1962, 1963, and 1967. Thomas Fujimura's last series of articles (1973–1984), my biography, and Cedric Reverand's work on the *Fables* (1988) cover much of the ground traversed in this chapter, but Bywaters engages only Fujimura's argument, which he praises as "quite accurate" (112); he ignores the fact that Reverand and I have quoted and analyzed virtually every passage he cites in the later works. Again, the belatedness of publication robs this chapter of its urgency, especially since the most original argument here is a "periodizing" claim, an assertion that *Cleomenes* marks a turning point in Dryden's political rhetoric: "In the works written between 1687 and 1692, the traditional functions as a norm against which the contemporary is to be measured: the supposed crimes of William and his party are exposed through romance, fable, farce, or tragedy as deplorable aberrations in the common pursuit of truth and justice. In the later works these crimes, though no less deplorable, come to seem inevitable and therefore less urgently in need of correction" (106). The distinction seems fuzzy at best, and Dryden's career resists division into neat periods. His last elegy, "Eleonora" (1692) borrows

phrases and images from his first, "Upon the Death of the Lord Hastings" (1649). His last play, *Love Triumphant* (1694), which Bywaters sees as "perhaps the clearest indication of a change in Dryden's rhetorical concerns" (110) is a deliberately old-fashioned tragicomedy in the mode of *Secret Love* (1667), and even includes a scene in rhymed couplets. Several of the political passages that Bywaters quotes when discussing the *Aeneis* (1697) seem to me to "expose the supposed crimes of William . . . as deplorable aberrations," most obviously the punishment in Tartarus of those who "Expel their parents, and usurp the Throne." And despite Bywaters's correct perception that "the magisterial expertise of a mind enriched by years of literary study" is "an important part of Dryden's rhetorical strategy" (118), his own literary criticism in this final chapter is oddly proportioned. Original poems, including the great verse epistles to Congreve and Kneller and the transcendent ode for music, "Alexander's Feast," are tossed away in less than three pages; extended prose treatises of great interest, the *Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693) and the *Dedication* of the *Aeneis* (1697), are described as "baffling and disappointing," but discussed at considerable length. The tiny Epilogue, quoting attacks on Dryden by George Powell, Luke Milburn, and Jonathan Swift, serves to remind us that this study has paid very little attention to contemporary responses to Dryden, positive or negative.

The fundamental problem with this book becomes apparent when Bywaters describes Sloman's book of 1985 as "a work published since I wrote my own account" (186). He uses the same phrase to describe my biography (184), but fails to recognize that many of his points have lost their force by being so long delayed in publication. The blame for this delay need not be assigned wholly to the author: young scholars face formidable obstacles in getting first books accepted and printed, and university presses, despite the wonderful technological advances offered by the computer, remain unnecessarily slow and wasteful in the way they process manuscripts. I regard Bywaters as a very promising younger scholar: well-trained, tough-minded, and articulate. If circumstances had allowed the publication of this work within a year of its submission as a dissertation, scholars might properly have hailed it as an important and original contribution. Still, accepting Bywaters' claim to have written his account of *Cleomenes* before the publication of Sloman's book gives us a date of 1984 for his compositon of those ages; whatever the reasons, a seven-year delay betwen composition and publication requires an author to make revisions and adjustments in light of subsequent scholarship.

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Byron, the Bible, and Religion: Essays from the Twelfth International Byron Seminar, edited by Wolf Z. Hirst. Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1991. Pp. 196. $28.50.

It seems reasonable that attitudes from the past must become progressively less intelligible. Literary works based on these dated attitudes consequently become more and more obscure, so that a poem which once touched many

people's emotions now cannot be understood, or a joke which once made the world laugh now draws a chuckle from a single scholar in some research library. He cannot tell it to anyone else; it would take too much explanation.

And yet, every new attitude which has, in the course of time, become self-evident, must have started at some point as a rare, peculiar opinion. So, paradoxically, ideas and texts which were difficult to interpret in their own day begin to make sense.

Byron's attitude towards traditional religion is an example: it was so out-of-joint in his own day that apparently almost all his contemporaries got it wrong. For more than a century and a half after his death, the majority of commentators continued to see him as a thoroughgoing denier, who produced anti-theological tracts to scoff at the religion he rejected. Too much of a skeptic to defend any beliefs, he only knew what he disbelieved. Pious critics in his own day condemned Byron for these heretical attitudes; progressive critics in a later age praised him. Nearly all agreed about what Byron stood for. There seemed to be convincing evidence for this view: Byron portrays himself in the gloomy, scoffing heroes of his longer poems. His biblical drama, *Cain*, features as a leading character the blasphemous Lucifer. His *Don Juan* is completely irreverent. These writings are seen as of a piece with his private life, which was a continuing public scandal. For more than a century and a half, this reading seemed convincing.

In recent years, however, all the evidence of Byron's religious antipathy has come under attack, most tellingly by contributors to *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*. Peter Thorslev, Jr., in his *The Byronic Hero*,[1] examines Byron's doomed champions as literary figures, thus beginning to disentangle the author from his fictions so that it was no longer self-evident that Byron meant to be taken as identical with these heroes. Wolf Z. Hirst, in "Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy: An Unorthodox Reading of *Cain*,"[2] carries that project into Byron's most explicitly religious work. Hirst distinguishes between the religious stance of the author and that of his main characters, Cain and Lucifer. The majority of critics, assuming that Lucifer and Cain speak for Byron in denouncing God, have no explanation for the third act, in which Lucifer does not appear and Cain utterly abandons his rebellion. Hirst demonstrates that the structure of the play is coherent if one assumes that the play is "not anti-religious, that it accepts rather than reverses the Scriptural position, and that the hero's attacks upon God are dramatically invalidated" (152). Other recent critics have discovered hints of Byron's religious belief in *Don Juan*, or at least, of "his repeated subversions of skepticism" (Hirst, Introduction, 15); similarly, in the present volume, Gordon K. Thomas argues that each of the central characters in *Don Juan* accepts the doctrine of sin and supernatural punishment. Contributing to the shift in the view of Byron is that few modern critics assume that religious longings are always connected with sexual probity.

Thus, by 1985, when the Twelfth International Byron Seminar was held, leading scholars had a new understanding of Byron's religious views. In *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*, which preserves eight essays from that seminar, Hirst notes that ". . . there is not a single essay that depicts Byron as impious, let alone blasphemous; on the contrary, although no one denies the poet's skepticism and non-conformity, these articles seem to suggest or at least im-

ply that some religious sentiment pervades his work" (Introduction 14). The essays in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion* continue the reassessment of Byron's religious stance. By 1985, Byron's complex religious sensibility, featuring both skepticism and a yearning toward belief, consistent acceptance of some religious doctrines with rejection of others, hatred for smug certainty along with respect for simple faith, had become intelligible. It no longer looked like scoffing.

Byron's complex relationship with the Bible also received attention at the Seminar. Byron criticism had forgotten that the poet continually read the Bible. In 1821, he wrote from Italy to ask a friend to send him a Bible; he had one with him, but that had been a gift from his sister and he did not want to wear it out. He worked biblical images and allusions into nearly all his writings, often ironically playing off the original context in a technique more familiar to readers of Hebrew poetry than of English. Hirst, in this volume (77–79), identifies a brilliant example: In *Childe Harold*, Byron contemplates the succession of religions, which will continue through human history until man learns that his "hope is built on reeds" (2.3). The reed as a metaphor for undependability originates in 2 Kings 18:21, where the unreliability of earthly monarchs is implicitly contrasted with the faithfulness of God. Like his biblical source, Byron invokes the reed as an image of untrustworthiness; but in his most skeptical mood, he turns the metaphor against all religions, including that of the Bible itself; A fuller sense of the complexity of this, as of other passages, depends upon recognizing the biblical source which the poet has ironically reversed.

Several of the contributions to this volume achieve real excellence. Hirst's introduction, besides providing a summary of each of the essays and a history of critical approaches to Byron's religious thought, also constitutes a fascinating meditation on "the link between the concepts inherent in an ancient work [the Bible] and the ideas conveyed by its modern adaptation [in Byron's works]."

Harold Fisch's contribution, "Byron's Cain as Sacred Executioner," locates the source of the heroic Cain of Byron's mystery in subtle hints within the biblical text itself. Accounting for those same hints, a modern scholar, Hyam Maccoby, argues that the biblical record partly preserves and partly suppresses a very different version, told by the people who saw themselves as proud descendents of Cain.[3] In a sharp demonstration of Byron's skill as a reader, Fisch shows how closely the poet anticipates Maccoby's view of Cain.

Ricardo J. Quinones puts Byron's *Cain* in the context of the history of the figure of Cain. The article is valuable also as a road map of Quinones's recent encyclopedic study of the different uses of the story in world literature, *The Changes of Cain*.[4]

Peter Thorslev shows Byron's debt to Pierre Bayle, the French Protestant thinker, whose *Dictionary* was an immensely popular ironic attack on misinformation about the Bible. Bayle is generally recognized as the likely source of much of Byron's knowledge of esoteric religious teachings. Thorslev demonstrates that the affinity between the two writers goes much further than that. Like Bayle, Byron delighted in using irony to debunk cant. Bayle was willing to extend tolerance to all, whatever their religious beliefs, even to atheists if they behaved decently; Byron also championed toleration and indi-

vidual conscience. Byron and Bayle were both fascinated by history, but both refused to impose a system upon it. Bayle, though a hero to skeptics such as Voltaire and Gibbon, protested that he was a man of faith, whose own work was intended only to pare away false beliefs from the true. In their own day, neither Bayle nor Byron could make that protest heard.

Heaven and Earth has often been considered Byron's direct attack on the morality of the Bible. In his contribution, Ray Stevens demonstrates that Byron uses the biblical story of the Flood as a vehicle to meditate on the mystery of divine justice, and to examine the Calvinist doctrine of the salvation of the elect.

The volume as a whole is proof enough that some modern readers have reassessed Byron's religious stance. It is interesting to speculate about why the traditional assessment of Byron suddenly became inadequate now, when it had seemed adequate all these years (a question not directly asked by any author in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*). I suspect that Byron's contemporaries compared his beliefs to complete, confident Christian faith: measured by that standard, Byron was always a doubter. Modern readers, on the other hand, compare his beliefs to complete, thoroughgoing secularism: measured by that standard, Byron was nearly always a believer.

If that is so, it can be argued that modern readers have not made any new discovery or found any deeper insight into the nature of Byron; perhaps we detect his faith because of a change in fashion, to be replaced at some future date by the next fashion, according to which Byron's faith will once again be undetectable. Perhaps modern readers, trapped in our own age, are no closer to understanding Byron than were his contemporaries. But I believe that such thoroughgoing relativism is unwarranted. Byron himself often protested that he was misunderstood, that his critics refused to recognize his faith in God. For more than 150 years, most readers explained away many of Byron's own words in order to arrive at the conclusion that he meant to destroy religion. They typically argued that anything positive he said about religious faith must have been "disingenuous" and "defensive sophistry."[5] The writers in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion* have a more direct way of understanding much of what Byron himself said about his religious stance. I believe that the new consensus on this issue will stand the test of time.

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Notes

1. *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962).
2. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 29 (1980): 151–72.
3. In *The Sacred Executioner: Human Sacrifice and the Legacy of Guilt.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).
4. Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
5. Edward E. Bostetter, "Byron and the Politics of Paradise," *PMLA* 75 (1960): 571–76, 576 n. 10.

Erotic Faith: Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence by Robert Polhemus. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Pp. xii + 363. $29.95.

Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel by Ruth Bernard Yeazell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. Pp. xii + 306. $24.95.

These two books are by respected scholars and critics concerned with the historical and continued moral significance of nineteenth-century English fiction; both argue that language and the literary imagination inform what we think of as reality. Robert Polhemus's thesis is that the novel "rose," as we used to say, alongside a growing faith in sexual love as a mode of transcendence, and that this "erotic faith" replaced an earlier, outworn creed largely on the strength of its counter-testament, the novel. Ruth Yeazell's focus is on the ordinary, not the transcendent. As she sees it, the mutually contradictory fictions and facts of diurnal discourse and psycho-social life seek resolution in narrative: examining the tropes of philosophers and moralists, journalists and scientists, she shows how they framed and intensified the conflicts that novels explored, and how the novels they helped to generate show them up, in the end, as fictions too.

The reviewer is hard put to avoid comparing and contrasting and finally polarizing these studies, in spite of the well-known perils of binary thinking. *Fictions of Modesty* charts the cultural construction of female passionlessness (and therefore passion) from *The Tatler* to Havelock Ellis; *Erotic Faith*, subtitled "Being in Love from Jane Austen to D. H. Lawrence," covers more or less the same swath of time and space. Although Yeazell begins and ends with discussions of para-literary texts, the heart of her book is, like Polhemus's, a series of readings of English novels, chosen from what was once called The Great Tradition (currently known as The Canon) and chronologically organized in the service of a metanarrative. The tradition is sufficiently great to allow ample room for choice: Polhemus departs from the standard syllabus of courses in The Novel to place Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* between works by Austen and Emily Bronte, and Yeazell surprises with a reading of Cleland's *Fanny Hill* after her chapter on *Pamela*; the only novel both discuss is Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*.

Yeazell situates "her" novels in a context of discourse, including philosophical tracts, conduct manuals and advice literature; Polhemus writes in the very different tradition of sister-arts criticism, introducing discussions of opera and ballet and especially paintings (beautiful reproductions enhance his text) to illuminate and reinforce what he says about novels. But my binaries begin to break down at this point. It will not quite do to describe *Erotic Faith* as a traditional aesthetic reading, in contrast to a newer feminist, materialist, Foucaultian, new-historical one. For all its attention to the human sciences, *Fictions of Modesty* is informed by a traditional (and finely honed) literary sensibility; Yeazell reads "for," not "against" her texts. And Polhemus, the author of an earlier reading of the nineteenth-century novel, *Comic Faith*, writes in a very personal voice and a freshened spirit of revaluation, coming back to old texts with a vision informed by, among other things, recent feminist criticism. Not that this is a case of Reading As A Woman. On the contrary.

In one of the early Women's Studies courses I taught in the 1970s, there was a sole young man who read *Pride and Prejudice*—startlingly, engagingly—as Darcy's story. He said he liked its difference from all those books about men who had to leave home and struggle to make something of themselves; he admired the master of Pemberley, who works at nothing but human relationships and lives only for the personal, private life, as only women are supposed (we were protesting this) to do. The first chapter of *Erotic Faith* rehearses a version of the argument that Jane Austen's most admired novel is really about Elizabeth Bennet's lover. For Polhemus, as for my student of long ago, the story hangs on Darcy's falling in love—not the heroine's coming to know herself, and marry him. Austen's account of a haughty aristocrat's fall into the human condition of a lover, he argues, is the first chapter of the new bible—sometimes blasphemous, always fervent—that was written as a gloss on, and a revision and replacement of, the Book of a fading religion. For unlike my student, Polhemus believes that since Jane Austen's time both men and women have lived and imagined themselves to be living for love above all.

Erotic faith enlists language in the service of specifically sexual pleasures, and values all collapses of hierarchies and boundaries (between bodies and "sacred" distinctions, and bodies and words), and breaking of taboos. Polhemus's style is harmonious with the faith he analyzes and advocates: he enjoys switching tones—professorial and intimate, ardent and slangy—and daring genre and gender boundaries. (He must be the first mainstream critic of *Wuthering Heights* to quote Kate Bush's song lyric.) To make his point about a novel, he enlists idiosyncratic, sometimes clever readings of quirkily chosen paintings: a Velasquez is invoked to illuminate Trollope, and Claude Lorrain's *Judgment of Paris* is described as showing the same "balance of forces" and "living, but menaced faith" as Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. An enthusiast of eros in all its forms, Polhemus celebrates the female body as the primary icon of erotic faith, but also admires the allure of a jaunty, sexy boy by Caravaggio; in a stunningly respectful passage, he interprets what goes on in Connie Chatterley's mind, during sex, as a projection of Lawrence's repressed homoerotic desire.

His voice is very engaging. Sometimes he is a little silly ("It's a hard, enchanted world where love's fatality literally gives you the Wilis," he writes of the ballet, *Giselle*); sometimes his anachronisms seem gratuitously startling (the impression of the early graveyard scene works on Pip, he writes, "like the formatting of a floppy disk"); sometimes he is annoyingly proprietary in his grab at chummy intimacy ("Anyone who has ever made love knows . . ."); and as he goes on tirelessly he does sometimes repeat himself. But the cumulative effect of this ardent paean to ardor is bracing. Polhemus's intelligence is keen and lively; he is as interesting on Klimt and Redon as he is on Joyce and Lawrence. *The Erotics of Faith* is pleasingly put together: meditations on the erotics of water, starring Botticelli's Venus, lead persuasively to a fine analysis of *The Mill on the Floss*; the argument that incest is a pervasive theme in fiction, reiterated in the chapter on Eliot's novel, reaches its climax in a bold reading of the scene of the fire in *Great Expectations* when Pip "closes with" Miss Havisham. Carried by the theme of eros and language, the reader moves easily from *The Monk* through the Victorians to Joyce and Law-

rence and even, briefly, to Beckett. Polhemus is an expansive spirit who dares to list the contradictory things a given passage might mean and, in a showy display of critical cool in his last chapter, he recalls his most outrageous interpretation with a sentence that begins, "Among the many things that the burning of Miss Havisham in Dickens's *Great Expectations could be made to* symbolize, one might be . . ." (italics mine).

This book's insistence on fiction as a source of transcendence runs counter to the idea—at present very well-received—that the English novel articulated the harsh, imprisoning ideology of individualism and capitalism. Polhemus, who lists Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* in his bibliography, is too good-humored and love-struck to take issue with this theory, and flexible and subtle enough to agree with some of it. But his emphasis on a succession of brilliant heroic artists responding to a constant human craving to believe is old-fashioned; *Erotic Faith*—the book as well as the religion—is grounded in confidence in solitary genius, universal human need, and high culture. "Amen," his book concludes. "And ah women." Ah well, one adds, shaking one's head.

Ruth Bernard Yeazell is the tonal antithesis to such Polhemusian self-indulgence. Crisply and convincingly, she reads a half-dozen English novels she calls "fictions of modesty"—*Pamela, Evelina, Fanny Hill, Mansfield Park, Villette,* and Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*—as reflections and productions of a culture in flux, where fictions were concocted in an effort to create defining boundaries. Mindful of Dr. Gregory as well as Rousseau, she tracks the lines writers drew, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, between nature and culture, and men and women, and bad women and good ones: her insights are strengthened by ideas derived from Mary Douglas and Erving Goffman. Yeazell argues that the modest woman and her characteristic trait, the blush, were invented and elaborated in order to deny female sexual desire—and that paradoxically, they also served to define it and enable its expression.

Like Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong, Yeazell is interested in the intersections of discourse, desire, and power. But she is more sanguine than they are about the truth value of fiction, and finds in the narratives that were wrought to serve the bourgeois power structure elements that help to deconstruct it. First she analyzes how the fiction of modesty made the innocent young heroines of fiction implausible or worse: however virtuous, a first-person narrator like Pamela or Evelina looks very like a hypocrite when modesty prevents her from knowing her own mind, or recognizing the evils around her. Novelists reiterated the implicit message of conduct books, Yeazell shows, when they depicted modesty as a mixed sign—that a woman's mind and body are chaste, that she is promisingly "*ardent.*" Advice manuals, she reminds us, were directed to women and also to men, who were encouraged to imagine—although "the physics involved remained rather vague"—that "the coquette [was like] an open fire, whose warmth is widely available and rapidly expended, while the modest woman was more like a dependable stove, whose regulated surface temperature might promise a higher heat within." (47) The male or female novel reader who roots for the modest heroine to win in love can be comfortably and respectably on the side of sex without quite knowing so—and will find it easy to read Fanny Hill as a heroine because of her "virgin heart."

Showing how fictions of modesty were developed and altered by women novelists, and how they ultimately enable a subversion of the dominant ideology, Yeazell does useful readings of even familiar fictional passages. Related to fictions of modesty, the dirtiness of Fanny Price's Portsmouth family home, and Jane Austen's unusually detailed description of the place, make a new kind of sense. The passage in *Villette* where Paul Emanuel reads Lucy's outer coldness as evidence of her inner passion is finely analyzed as evidence that Charlotte Bronte was "proto-Freudian." Yeazell's rewarding reading of *Wives and Daughters* as a revisionary fiction beautifully prepares for the short third and last part of this study, which briefly and brilliantly outlines how novels, themselves informed by the discourses of moralists and philosophers, informed "scientific" views of nature and sex. Not only his own Victorian modesty but his well-known love of novels inclined Darwin to focus on courtship rather than mating among animals, she observes, and to characterize female animals as more discriminating and cooler than the parading males they choose from. Recent students of animal behavior have found it more useful to "write not about differences in the passion or ardor of the two sexes but about different degrees of so-called parental investment," she informs us; "an explanatory model based on reproduction has replaced the nineteenth-century model of desire" (226).

Fictions of Modesty is especially valuable on the subject of the blush, which seems to have obsessed Havelock Ellis as much as it did Mr. Podsnap. Yeazell begins her study with a look at "the English Freud," who rewrote as science the English novel's implicit message that normal sexuality was primarily a delaying action, driven by the "preceding backwardness" (the appropriately tortured phrase is David Hume's!) that characterizes a modest woman facing sex. Having followed two centuries of specific and generic heroines whose blushes both belied and proved their modesty, the reader is pleasantly shocked by a phrase in Ellis (attributed by that writer to "an unknown source") that describes an erection as "a blushing of the penis." Sexual desire, Yeazell suggests, was "long-circuited" by the fiction of modesty—denied, projected, and displaced upward, she might have more banally said, were she not too fastidious, sophisticated, and clear-minded a critic to resort to such earnest attempts at "transparent" language.

A project like Yeazell's raises problems of tone as Robert Polhemus's does not. Literary enthusiasm logically lends itself to praising works finely made in the service of eros and faith; the critic who undertakes to show how novels are implicated in a tissue of lies may tend, on the other hand, to sound hostile to literature. Yeazell does not, because her own language is lucid, precise, and graceful, and because she obviously values the perverse linguistic structures she analyzes—paradoxes, oxymorons, plot-retardant fictions of modesty—for their subtleties and their absorbing complexities, which, she argues, are illuminating and finally even enabling. She does not argue for "her" novels' greatness as testimony to the human spirit; she argues that they are a significant and oddly coherent body of cultural work that demonstrates how important mystifications and fixed ideas about sex and gender have been in the development of middle-class identity as we continue to know it, and of the English novel in the dominant tradition we call classical, whose

patterns continue to inform pervasive attitudes and popular fiction today.

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The Office of the Scarlet Letter by Sacvan Bercovitch. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. Pp. xxii, 175. $22.95.

The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life by Lauren Berlaut. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. Pp. 269. $32.00 (cloth); $14.95 (paper).

A new book by Sacvan Bercovitch is certainly welcome by the many readers of *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975) and *The American Jeremiad* (1978). Having proposed in these earlier works that the national ideal embodied in the representative American self is the product of the Puritan myth of a prophetic universal design, Bercovitch turns to Hawthorne and pursues his analysis of a Puritan hermeneutics that precludes choice in the name of consensus, thereby subsuming pluralism under a comprehensive national identity. This theory of consent has proved influential for new historicists, including Lauren Berlant, whose study of Hawthorne and what she calls "national fantasy" intertwines literary history with post-structuralist theory. Both authors examine how American national identity is constituted but differ in their understanding of consensus formation. Nevertheless, they present similar interpretations of *The Scarlet Letter*, reading the disciplining of Hester as Hawthorne's own condemnation of radicalism in the name of liberal individualism.

Both authors argue that "America" embodies the utopian vision of a homogeneous national identity and that the "United States" signifies the reality of historical practices, but they differ in their interpretation of the relation of ideology to literature. For Bercovitch, the process of consensus diverts dissent into individual acts of rebellion, thereby defusing radical individualism by appropriating it for liberal ideology and its utopian consciousness. Berlant adapts Bercovitch's argument concerning the centrality of utopian discourse to American political practice and argues that *The Scarlet Letter* reproduces the dominant ideology but moves beyond representation to a critical relation to the forms of legitimation. Literature, in Berlant's view, shuttles between the public realm and the private, instructing its readers in national identity. This does not preclude Hawthorne's taking a critical attitude toward politics in America, but he does so only to embrace the utopian values that adjudicate the private sphere. In other words, Hawthorne's critical position is that of the subaltern unable to free himself from the ideology of the dominant culture. Therefore, he is unable to conceive of "a positive construction of female political agency" (210). If this sounds censorious, it is so by virtue of its conception of literature as an instrument of ideology rather than as figural representation. For Berlant and other new historicists, not only does the cultural text belong to the public realm and, consequently, ideology, but the work of criticism demands an oppositional reading of hegemonic ideology

that constructs an alternative interpretation of the world, especially by giving voice to the repressed groups present within the text. Hence, Hawthorne is admonished for his representation of women and Native Americans.

To criticize Berlant for being ideologically driven in her reading misses the point of her argument, for it means assuming not only that the text is independent of political culture but also that the critic can be free of ideology. We are not talking about subjective biases but about ideology in the literary text. The question then remains whether the construction of a counter-hegemonic history is not itself yet another version of the American project of constructing a national identity. In other words, her counter-hegemonic reading of National Fantasy constitutes a utopianism that is no less ideological for abandoning the national-utopian frame for citizenship for one that defines itself along material political practices. The failure to investigate ideology as narrative results in the reproduction of ideology. The political or ideological is confined to the referential realm, hence the preference for a symbology of literary representation rather than a rhetorical reading of narrative.

When we turn from Berlant's reading of the coercive force of the National Symbolic to Bercovitch's cultural symbology, we find that the political and historical are read as the horizon of all meaning into which any text may be translated. As he says, "My purpose . . . is to integrate ideological and aesthetic criticism. Ideology in its narrow sense works to empty objects of historical content—particularly, in our time, objects of art. It depoliticizes them in order to refill them with its own timeless and universal claims" (xvii). This is by now a familiar argument in opposition to the so-called aestheticizing trends of new criticism and certain modes of structuralist and post-structuralist theory. Bercovitch uses "ideology" in a rather conventional sense to designate the system of ideas that serve as an instrument of social construction. It is opposed to history, which is taken to be the material practices that bind individuals in a collectivity. In this, he is very close to Berlant. The examination of "cultural symbology . . . the system of symbolic meanings that encompasses text and context alike," suggests that the aesthetic will be attended to in proportion to the ideological; however, the aesthetic is once again an instrument of ideology. The text is political both as representation and as reflection of ideology. The scarlet letter is an instrument for political control and reflects the work of ideology, thereby allowing for the critique of its own office.

This model is not without shortcomings, not least of which are its failure to question the meaning of the aesthetic, confusing it with formal design, and its inadequate treatment of allegory, reducing it to typology. Yet Bercovitch's study remains a useful one precisely because he attaches such importance to aesthetic technique and avoids the moralizing that mars a great deal of Berlant's book. Perhaps the ideological difference between the two lies in Bercovitch's reading of *The Scarlet Letter* as "the liberal example par excellence of art as ideological mimesis" and Berlant's reading of its "nationalist literary project" as eliding Native American and women's histories (55). In her moralistic zeal, Berlant misreads the text in order to reduce it to an example of art as ideological critique. That is, she reads *The Scarlet Letter* as a critique of "'official' national identity" that fails to disengage itself from the patriarchical hegemony in which Hawthorne is a privileged participant. Therefore, if Ber-

covitch reads *The Scarlet Letter* as symptomatic of its historical context, Berlant reads it as both reflecting and contesting American political practices. Berlant's approach is an object lesson in the confusion of history with context. She fails to read ideology in the text because she divorces it from narrative, prefering to repeat the banal condemnation of aestheticism as the desire to void art of history.

Berlant's argument rests upon a structural analysis of the interlacing of the political, juridical, territorial, genetic, linguistic, and experiential "space of the nation" in the National Symbolic. She examines how national culture and identity pervade the local and private realms. Hawthorne's fiction simultaneously investigates the workings of the formation of the American national identity and resituates the official collective identity by recording or registering the individual and community narratives that run counter to this official national identity. She claims that by historicizing "the rhetorical and practical processes by which nationality has been created, secured, and deployed," she can disclose the presence of "counter-hegemonic" communities that a national-utopian fantasy of Americanness attempts to control. The argument is framed in language derived from a mix of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Frantz Fanon, and others. Arguing that national culture works to transform the citizenry into a totality or makes the history of a nation a part of the individual's experience, she investigates the "discursive practices" by which this national consciousness is put into practice.

In "America, Post-Utopia," she analyzes the iconography of the Statue of Liberty as the "legible sex/text, the female body of the American National Symbolic" (27). That the statue serves to welcome immigrants reveals not only her function in nationalizing new arrivals but also the way "the body of the woman is employed symbolically to regulate or represent the field of national fantasy" (28). From the Statue as National Symbolic, she turns to Hawthorne's prefaces as an attempt to recreate his readers as national subjects. She is most convincing when she examines the mechanisms by which national symbols unite the individual, both as body and subjectivity, to the public sphere that constitutes official reality of the nation.

Three chapters of the book are on *The Scarlet Letter*. She first considers "the mechanisms by which Puritan law *intended* to deploy the utopian promises of collective identity" (61) and then the way *The Scarlet Letter* "aims to try out the mechanisms by which individual subjectivities get caught up in progressively more abstract collective identifications" (62). She concludes that in bearing Pearl and, therefore, the A, Hester "bears the law." To say that Hester is the site where civil, ecclessiastical and natural law intersect or that the A serves to suture body and mind is merely to tell us of the scarlet letter's function to punish Hester by transforming her into an object lesson for the community, particularly the women. To charge that the letter transfigures the private citizen into a "juridico-utopian public sphere" is merely to tell us that the symbolic punishment serves its purpose, one noted by other readers attentive to Hester's role as public text.

Having considered *The Scarlet Letter* as symptomatic, she then reads it as critical of national identity. She focuses on "counter-memory" and its corresponding historical narratives that run alongside official memory and history as another "site of actuality and meaning." Counter-memory signifies the

preservation of a private sphere or subjective realm where the individual is not regulated by collective identity or national culture. The site for the struggle between collective and individual identity is the body. Official history demands the regulation of the body, the subjugation of it to discipline, in order to preserve national identity from the dangers that the gendered body represents to abstract citizenship.

For Berlant, *The Scarlet Letter* depicts the disciplining of the body in the name of the national collective. The body must be disciplined because desire represents a threat to official history. The disciplining of women, above all, is necessary to preserve patriarchical privilege. Berlant's study participates in a larger scholarly effort to expose the repressive mechanisms of the formation of a national identity. The argument, however, raises a number of questions. Were she to attend to the text's allegorizing of the body, she would not be able to read it as symptomatic.

If Berlant finds in Hawthorne a challenge to liberal ideology, Bercovitch finds in him the liberal ironist whose "ambiguities function as directives to narrative unity: they teach us to synchronize different layers of history by gathering a diversity of meanings within a single self-enclosed symbol. . . . To see the past ironically is to affirm a design working itself out in such a way that, in Hawthorne's famous adage, 'Man's accidents are God's purposes'" (39). The ironist's perspective is not historical, for the past is complete, a totality that reveals itself to God and the ironist. Appropriately, he names this chapter "The Ironies of A-History," for this ironic perspective is ahistorical. The question remains, is it Hawthorne's? I would say not, for the past is anything but fixed in his works. As "The Custom-House" and such historically embedded tales as "Roger Malvin's Burial" and "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux" suggest, the past is subject to change under the eyes of the interpreter. The meliorist view of history attributed to Hawthorne reflects Bercovitch's reading of Puritan exegesis: "Hawthorne's Puritans are (as it were, despite themselves) a model of gradualist, multivocal interpretation" (47). As practioners of "pluralist interpretation," this "*interpretative community* [enjoyed] over modern liberalism . . . a granite moral code on which to build forms of due process for a community committed to growth" (48). Bercovitch's Hawthorne is a new historicist reading the Puritans as a pragmatic people whose settling of New England constituted "a commercial venture" that would lead to the liberalism of his own society. Where Berlant sees consensus as repressive, Bercovitch sees it as accommodating individualism through sanctioned forms of dissent.

Bercovitch's argument rests in large measure in his reading of allegory in *The Scarlet Letter*. The ambiguities that Hawthorne sets before us brings the reader into the communal activity of interpretation, which culminates in freeing the commentary from a self-binding truth to the acceptance of multiple truths. This theme forms the basis for the first two chapters. There are, of course, numerous commentaries on allegory in *The Scarlet Letter*, and Bercovitch adds to them the dual perspective of reading it, on the one hand, in terms of Puritan exegetical practices and, on the other, in terms of contemporary reader response theory and Stanley Fish's notion of interpretive communities. In his discussion of Hester's decision to resume the wearing of the letter, he argues that the reader is enjoined to participate in the democratic pro-

cess of interpretation. "Hawthorne so veils this epiphany that our multiple perspectives enact the same ideal of liberal community . . . that his novel celebrates and represents" (92).

In appropriating Fish's interpretive communities, Bercovitch provides the perfect critical model for consensus formation. Now the reader is disciplined along with Hester, forsaking the multiplicity of interpretation and the radicalism of an allegorical reading for the liberal ideal of an individuality absorbed into the community of readers. If Bercovitch can say "that the office of the A is socialization," which redirects radical energies "into a continuing opposition between self and society," then we might say that his repoliticizing of *The Scarlet Letter* redirects reading into an institutional form that circumscribes all opposition into a liberal model of consensus, a consensus that begins with the understanding of interpretation as the entertaining of pluralities without choosing. If Berlant's study differs from Bercovitch's, it is in her utopian hope the A can be discarded—that is, that the attachment to an abstract national identity can be overcome. Bercovitch, however, closes his book with the more sobering view that any such freeing of the individual from the coercive power of ideology can only occur by the very agency of that same liberal ideology.

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Ezra Pound as Literary Critic by K. K. Ruthven. Critics of the Twentieth Century, Christopher Norris, Gen ed. London & New York: Routledge, 1991. Pp. 208. $54.00.

Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism by Tim Redman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. x + 288. $34.50.

In order to position these books, I offer some warnings and/or confessional generalizations about reading Pound at the present time. It is too easy to come at Pound with our own desires at once to undo mastery and to masterfully revise or redirect Pound's energetically iconoclastic and, if you will, genre/discipline-clastic impulses into instruments of or against modernism. His political incorrectness and personal peevishness seem the inevitable postmodern corrective weaponry to deploy against their maker and, synecdocally, against all bad fathers and/or phallogocentric criticism. Such a text or field must be approached with skepticism, if not irony, or not at all. Potential dangers, not to mention all Pound's self-justifying detractors, make me want to read him more carefully and, at the same time, to question my own methods and motives appropriated from what ends up being his anti-establishment critical procedure. Despite himself, Pound's poetry and poetics shake notions of authorship and authority as much as they fix these in statal or psychological F/fascism.

In the wake of recent "disclosures"—more correctly, less interested or simply different exclusions—regarding Pound's loudly proclaimed Fascist affiliations and tendencies, it is now possible, even imperative to critically assess

the cultural and political writings of this embarrassing and largely censored modern poet, critic, radio propagandist, and jack of other trades. Just so, these two books employ recent re-editions of Pound's work and current renderings of the de-canonized modernist's career. Indeed, *Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism* makes a valuable contribution as it recovers once quite public political statements from the scattered Poundian archive.

K. K. Ruthven, whose guidebook unfortunately moves to obviate the need to delve into Pound's own "guides" and "abc's," and Tim Redman, who traces the intimate details of Pound's flirtation with Fascism, are both engaged in re-constructing the real [sic] or whole Pound(s). Ruthven too easily dismisses Pound's later work under the fashionable rubric "patriarchal criticism," which he neatly, but without historical or political grounding, equates with Fascism. He re-works the lines by which modernism corrected its own extremists. Redman, by contrast, offers a resume of Pound's economic and political readings and writings directly linked to Mussolini's Italy. Sometimes too anxious to generously forgive his heroically engaged poet's errors, Redman manages to open that poet-critic's texts to further research and critique. He returns readers to (the case of) Ezra Pound.

Both critics treat Pound's critical prose to the near exclusion of the poetry. Ruthven, tacitly accepting a diagnosis of the poet's systemic psycho-political illness, is most interested in Pound as a practicing and "practical" literary critic. His five short chapters are roughly chronological, yet they also map an oddly literal geographical and/or symptomatological determinism behind Pound's allegedly progressive literary and political marginalization and isolation(ism). From Pound's apprenticeship at the University of Pennsylvania to his Italian and penal captivities, Ruthven economically remarks Pound's downward and eccentric trajectory in the adjectives of his chapter titles: 1) "The academic critic," 2) "The metropolitan critic," 3) "The practical critic," 4) "The rhetorical critic," 5) "The vanishing critic."

Following the canonical—and now "decanonizing"—biographies, especially Humphrey Carpenter's *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound*, Ruthven traces Pound's fall from *curious* intellectual (both questioning and oddly posturing) to rigid authoritarian. He implies that changes of venue and media dictated Pound's entropic transformation from close to symptomatic reader, writer of books to issuer of political salvoes, promoter of sophisticated modern art to socio-economic simpleton. Take for example, what Ruthven calls the "material conditions" of the poet-critic's residence in the British metropolis: "when Pound left the academy and became a *metropolitan critic* he found himself among journalists and publishers who were severely constrained by deadlines and who took whatever shortcuts were available" (37; emphasis mine). Here one recognizes an updated version of Wyndham Lewis' epithet, "revolutionary simpleton," intended to point up Pound's misdirected expansion from Imagist to political poet.

One might ask, too: should the poet have remained safely and suburbanly "at home"? Further, are we to assume that reflection and academic reticence might have saved Pound from Fascism? If so, the apolitical or elitist aspect of New Criticism that Ruthven intends to correct by means of exploring the historical Pound should instead be embraced. Of course, this is not what Ruthven (thinks he) wants. Such an admission would endorse the dreary and po-

litically suspect academic provincialism and subjectivism of formalist criticism —not to mention its dismissal of poetry's public/political aspect. Tim Redman is more (self-)conscious about the loss entailed in reading only the acceptable parts of the modernist canon, though part of his agenda is to make even Pound's errors prodigious, positively transgressive. Of the limited poet and poetry rescued by the Bollingen committee's expulsion of politics from the realm of poetry, Redman says: "[T]his retreat into subjectivity, this radical loss of bardic consequence, can be attributed to a large extent to the case of Ezra Pound. . . . the debate is not just about Pound but about the very nature and source of written authority" (13).

Despite—or is it because of?—changes wrought by two world wars and more, in Ruthven's narrative, Pound's critical and personal moral character is a constant—in as much as inevitable and irreversible decline can be thought of as constant. Pound is a representative modern subject, a poet adventurer subjected to a history that Ruthven reads in the poet's style of criticism. Applying something of a double standard, Ruthven reads Pound's criticism "symptomatically"; just as Pound said he could determine the degree of usury in an age by looking at styles of painting, Ruthven can read Pound, the Fascism subject, in his progressively intemperate prose and loss of objectivity. It seems to me that focussing, however critically, on a critic's metonymic relation to the scene around him undercuts yet underwrites Ruthven's and, to a lesser degree, Redman's "deconstructive" [sic] assaults on the subject's (i.e. Pound's) phallogocentric work and turn of mind.

Protests to the contrary notwithstanding, like many a Poundian, Ruthven cannot resist speaking in the master's metaphors or otherwise troping Pound's coinages and shibboleths. My favorite hybrid is "logofugal" for the style of Pound's pseudonymous music criticism, said to represent a potentially critical and liberatory "drift away from logocentric use of language." Ruthven uncovers a nasty misogyny when Pound skirts and represses an adumbration of the Lacanian Imaginary in his sexual/alluvial metaphorics; but rather than analyze the poet-critic, he becomes infected by these questionable figures: "as [Pound] floods his sentences with a mimetically rhythmic babble as yet undisturbed by these differentiations which . . . constitute language" (116). Moreover, for Ruthven, whether Pound was browbeating a female little magazine publisher, i.e. "Harriet Monroe who had the *necessary masochistic temperament* for working editorially with Pound" (emphasis mine, 74) or "vandalizing an accepted name scatologically. . . 'Bloomsbury' was 'bloomsbuggery'" (136), Pound, the "phallocrat" (78), realized his "profoundly authoritarian" (138) potential. Aware of, yet infected by, Pound's style of prose and/or thought, Ruthven goes so far as to caution us away from reading Pound's mature criticism symptomatically—even "closely." He says, "*Guide to Kulchur* is an amazingly open-ended production to have come from a writer usually thought of as at that stage unremittingly authoritarian. And, if nothing else, it points up the hazards of trying to educe political conclusions about writers from the evidence of their literary styles and forms" (139).

It is not exactly that one wants to disagree with Ruthven's comforting dismissal of Pound's Fascist and cracker-barrel theories and affiliations, but his schematic summary often fails to engage the prose it criticizes and to critique

its own deployment of current argot. Ruthven's own stylized turns of phrase appeal to readers used to hearing literary critical tags cleverly employed, and he feels confident in gaining a consensus on his judgments about Pound. Finally, Ruthven is less ironic than self-righteous in his construction of an improved, post-New Critical "*our* Pound" (emphasis mine, since I hear a Poundian "subject rhyme" with such ambiguous figures as Syberberg's "Our Hitler"). He concludes that this transitional figure or "discursive reproduction of 'our' Pound is a consequence of the conjuncture of two interpretive conventions: the privileging of politicizing over aestheticizing reading practices, and the education of an authorial identity out of textual diversities" (170). The book's large price tag and schematic presentation (191 pages at $54) bespeak the marketing strategy of Routledge's Twentieth Century Critics Series which accommodates economic and readerly scarcity. This is likely to be the one book about Pound's criticism that ever smaller library budgets can bear. Against its own claims to disrupt such authority and homogeneity ("criticism by anthologizing is profoundly authoritarian in its assumptions that the very act of selecting. . . needs no justification," 138), it might be the master key—or "master-plot"—the hurried student reads instead of Pound.

This (re-)narrowing of Poundian modernism is especially distressing, given the almost madly rigorous "rhetoric" (as verbal persuasion) in Pound's heterogeneous and heterodox personae in often weirdly self-defeating critical arguments. Ruthven only begins (132–37) to risk an examination of the draw of Pound's prose style, where "Locutions from a variety of discursive domains invade the space. . . and are entertained there in a variety of moods, ranging from seriousness to mockery" (133). So convinced is Ruthven that a book like *Guide to Kulchur* incarnates fascism, that he retreats from his own rhetorical analysis by saying that it "is an amazingly open-ended production to have come from a writer usually thought of as by that stage unremittingly authoritarian. . . . it points up the hazards of trying to educe political conclusions about writers from the evidence of their literary styles and forms" (139). Here Ruthven is on slippery ground; not accidentally, he is most interesting when his own contradictions expose the coincidence in Pound's work of authoritarianism and the interrogation of personal and political identity. Pound's attempts to found and enforce a unified field of humanistic-economic-political-aesthetic citational poetry (*The Cantos*) or a poetics of reading (*ABC of Reading* and *Guide to Kulchur*) can be read as a founding—or floundering—gesture of cultural studies. If such a reading is to be politically correct, Pound is the Caliban who would have to be acknowledged by those Prosperos who recognize his lack of critical "purchase" at this time when critical correctness is achieved by (dis-)affiliation. But that would be a long and justly rejected Enlightenment and imperialist version of the Caliban-Prospero relationship. Pound might offer something of a cautionary tale about the results of fixing ethics in rhetorical "ethos" or self-fashioning.

Ezra Pound and Italian Fascism provides a well-documented micro-history of Pound's abiding enthusiasms and commitments, from his desire to make criticism pay through a misinformed idealization of Salo's Confucian and/or "just and ordered" government and economy. It does less with the documents of Italian Fascism, and almost nothing with its translation onto the American scene, than one might want. Mussolini is seldom cited directly but

re-cited and redirected through Odon Por, the Hungarian economist and principal source for Pound's earliest understanding of Fascism. Since the indirection and/or misdirection of Pound's political engagements is the real topic of this book, the narrowed focus is logical. But Redman nearly reproduces the alleged isolation he refuses to attribute to Pound, while he illuminates the filtering of Fascism and other political and economic doctrines through Pound's wishful thinking and "semantic sense" (167), that is, the poet's close reading technique of proving ideological affinity by impressionistic etymological kinship.

I would prefer a wider focus on Mussolini's and/or Fascism's improvisational and interpretative character, and away from the single author(itarian). Still, I appreciate Redman's attempts to escape the traps of demonizing a host of modern Western cultural evils in the person of Pound (like Robert Casillo in *Genealogy of Demons*) or gently excusing the idealist American naif (like Wendy Flory in *The American Ezra Pound*). Adopting a controversial thesis, only in part to renovate Pound, Redman argues that Italian Fascism can be viewed as a "marxist heresy" (3). Notwithstanding Mussolini's break with Gramscian Communism and his socialist syndicalist past, this makes only limited sense of a broad definition of left socialism. Yet, filtered through a hopeful populism, Fascism can be seen to address workers' interest and needs. And such is Redman's strongest and riskiest point about a certain angle on Il Duce: "[Pound] notes factors that compensated Italian workers for their loss of freedom. . . Mussolini's socialist origins and sympathy for the workers, and the presence of a leftist branch of the Fascist party" (173). The last chapter, "The Republic of Salo and Left-Wing Fascism, usefully recovers the history of "the least documented of [Pound's] adult years" (233)—and one might add that 1943–45 were also the most contradictory and sparsely chronicled years of Mussolini's rule, riddled as they were with Nazi racism and neo-agrarian communalism.

Redman presents a Pound out of touch with both American and Italian audiences. Steeped in Confucianism's retrograde ideals of order, cultural and intellectual hierarchies, Pound came to dream that the government that had underwritten his translation of *Testamento di Confucio* was enacting his preferred monetary reforms. Redman supports his claim that the most coherent, if deluded, statements of Pound's support for Mussolini appear in letters of 1943–44 to Fernando Mezzasoma, the minister of Popular Culture, who supported Pound's scholarly and media efforts. These letters, the text and context of Cantos LXXII an LXXIII and of the pieces that appeared in serious Italian magazines—all analyzed and/or quoted here at length—flesh out our too skeletal knowledge of Fascist mass media's workings and appeal. Redman's book is required reading for Poundians, not all of whom are apologists these days.

Finally, it is usefully chastening to observe, in detail and from a semi-safe distance, the seductive power that fascist revolutionary and reformist propaganda had for modern American "individuals." For Pound, ever the unfixed American or Emersonian self, fascism was just an improved sort of identity politics with the special appeal of Italy's cultural capital. Out of fragments of Mussolini's speeches he fashioned or projected an idealized poet-hero and a bizarrely plausible cultural poetics. Pound's "Mussolini and/or Jefferson"

[and/or Whitman and/or Pound] remains a complex to be reckoned with in the interested self-examination of literature and criticism as machines for producing and critiquing social and political constructions. Redman assists, while Ruthven allows the continued swerve away from, such a reckoning.

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Postmodernism and Its Critics by John McGowan. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991. Pp. xii + 296. $39.95, cloth; $12.95, paper.

Postmodern theorists derive notions of difference and heterogeneity from philosophical forefathers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. But their work, according to *Postmodernism and Its Critics*, devalues the positive unifying principles that appear in the ideas these philosophers espouse. John McGowan sets out to recover what unites post-structuralism, Marxism, and neopragmatism, and concludes by suggesting that it is their commitment to democracy, as a unifying agent, which should draw postmodernists away from differences that criticize unity in order to privilege a unity that sanctions difference.

Using Isaiah Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty, McGowan presents a lucid and competent discussion of postmodernism's debt to this philosophical precursors. As the exploration of philosophers and theorists marches toward his "postliberal" manifesto in chapter 4, McGowan valorizes positive liberty and chides postmodernists for saying "both/and" instead of "either/or." Approaching the paradoxical relationship between positive and negative liberty in postmodern thought as a problem that can, or needs to, be solved, McGowan twists the premise that difference implies relational totality to suggest that this universality necessarily precedes difference, displacing negative liberty and privileging a grand Habermasian fiction of positive freedom.

McGowan criticizes postmodernism for its persistent love/hate relationship with its own philosophical roots. In chapter 3, he examines poststructuralism (Derrida and Foucault), Marxism (Jameson, Eagleton, and Said), and neopragmatism (Lyotard and Rorty) to resurrect a subtext of universality that, for many students of postmodern theory, was never dead or buried. *Postmodernism and Its Critics* indicts postmodernism because it values difference and heterogeneity, which are linked to a desire for pure negative liberty—a freedom that postmodernists desire at the same time that they admit its impossibility. Instead, McGowan wants postmodernists to embrace—and be embraced by—positive power, and to resign themselves to certain "contextual constraints as the conditions of freedom" (86). That the postmodern critique is complicit in the system that it criticizes is old news. Linda Hutcheon's notion of the complicit critique that postmodernism engages in as it attempts to de-naturalize culture from within (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge, 1989) comes closer to a fair analysis of the relationship between positive and negative liberty in the postmodern world than McGowan's "postliberal" call for a positive power directed toward maintaining a social

consensus (270). McGowan's belief that he can simply "solve" this defining postmodern paradox of the complicit critique by privileging positive freedom is as fallacious as a vulgar postmodernism's idealistic desire for pure negative liberty.

Postmodernism and Its Critics concludes by proposing a "politics of postliberalism," where democratic norms legitimate the procedures for critical action under a holistic social theory. McGowan calls for postmodern intellectuals to surrender their desire for negative freedom entirely and to shift their energy towards "a practical politics of heterogeneity" (21). The politics he advocates are aligned with conservative forces attempting to smooth the ironic edge of postmodernism's critique and to draw it into the complete complicity canonization and positive freedom imply.

This book's main value lies in its reiteration of the philosophical underpinnings of postmodern critical theory, though, from beginning to end, the complexity of a paradox that defines postmodernism gets slighted as the author charges towards his conclusion where postmodern intellectuals are positively subsumed by the "capitalist monolith." McGowan's representation of postmodernism and his concluding section, "What's an Intellectual to Do?," are sure to provoke intense and interesting debate. However, he valorizes positive freedom at the expense of an effective examination of how specific theorists juxtapose conflicting ideas about liberty, and the book suffers. Ultimately, McGowan is frustrated trying to squeeze postmodernism into the frame of modernity. The issues reiterated in *Postmodernism and Its Critics* cannot even be competently addressed until we learn to speak of postmodernism and *post*modernity.

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