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Volume 33 | Issue 3 Article 6

1991

# Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

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Recommended Citation
Editors, Criticism (1991) "Book Reviews," *Criticism*: Vol. 33: Iss. 3, Article 6.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol33/iss3/6

*Critical Writings, 1953–1978* by Paul de Man, ed. Lindsay Waters. Minneapolis, Mn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. Pp. lxxiv + 246. $39.50, cloth; $14.95, paper.

To read this collection of articles from Paul de Man's career is to be forcibly reminded of how brutally the fashion-driven world of literary criticism can displace styles and approaches, not to mention individual reputations. One can buy a copy of *Representations* and see at a glance how the profession has changed in one short decade. Can our present day stars of gender studies, culture critique and socio- and psychocriticism even be practicing the same craft as the author under review? Like the return of the repressed, the panoply of anthropological interests scorned by de Man now have possession of the debate. Although its most recent piece is less than fifteen years old, the volume has an antiquarian feel, in tone and sensibility as much as in theoretical purport. The past from which these pages come is indeed another country from the one most critics now inhabit.

True, the *émigrés* have kept many of the old customs: many an article whose ostensible topic is radically other still ends up looking, in its techniques and its way of proceeding, very like de Man (or more usually Jacques Derrida). Nevertheless, a sea-change in critical activity has occurred; and it takes more than a controversy over a collaborationist youth to explain the full extent of that shift.

It would not, however, be possible to confront such a massive question directly. The most this reviewer can do is to indicate the terrain de Man's critique habitually visits, and give a rough topography of the foreign country that was recently so familiar and is now so faint.

The terrain is surprisingly easy to map. Oddly enough, de Man's occasional pieces may be more revealing of his critical agenda than his more famous, elaborate efforts. Like any reviewer, he must assume the guise of the fox, who knows many things. But taken together, these essays sketch more the profile of the hedgehog, who knows one great thing: the essence of the literary.

It may seem presumptuous, of de Man or of me, to say that he purports to "know" the literary. But at the very least, the essays show the persistent striving for an "ontology" which is to demonstrate "the being of the poetic as such" (p. 58). De Man's ontology uses the terminology of German philosopher Martin Heidegger: he cites more than once from the famous essay on the origin of the work of art, and uses a review of William Barrett's *What Is Existentialism?* to explicate Heidegger's masterpiece *Sein und Zeit*. Yet Lindsay Waters' comment, in his very fine introduction to this book, that early de Man "could be seen (uncharitably, I think) as a set of variations upon a theme of Hegel's" is not uncharitable at all but apt (lx). The incontestable conclusion the reader reaches from these essays is that de Man was a critic for whom the modern predicament was preëminently the legacy of Romanticism (the three literary or cultural periods de Man permits himself are "preromantic," "romantic," and "postromantic"), and for whom the essence of Romanticism was Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness.

Contrary to the impression he sometimes fostered, de Man is not averse to periodizing of a certain sort. Most appropriate for these purposes is what he

says in "The Inward Generation": "If one extends the historical perspective [of postwar thought] far enough to include romanticism, the present-day state of mind appears in a much clearer light. This awareness of a deep separation between man's inner consciousness and the totality of what is not himself had certainly existed before 1800, but it becomes predominant around that time. . . . We must remember that the inwardness of our age has its origin in what Hegel called the *unhappy* consciousness" (14–15).

This fundamental belief is one he shares with Jean-Paul Sartre. De Man may give the impression in this volume of being the Frenchman's enemy twin. His review of Sartre's *Les mots* is only the most blatant attack in a collection whose implied interlocutor, as with Albert Camus's *La chute*, Sartre seems often to be. But he shares with the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* the assumption that Hegel's notion of the Unhappy Consciousness, first broached in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, is a key text for modern Western thought. Briefly, the spirit in the state of unhappy consciousness is one estranged from its own situation, and ultimately from itself. It seeks, this spirit, to escape its own inconstancy, its own "experience of a temporal order" (175), by seeking that which claims eternal substance: God, nature, perhaps the Tribe, for some moderns the destiny of History itself.

Unhappy consciousness emerges in Heidegger as a conflict between mankind's nostalgia for the earth on the one hand and its striving for sky on the other (31). Sartre inscribes our nostalgia for nature's integrity as the yearning of people who must exist *for* themselves (*pour soi*) somehow to merge with that which only subsists *in* itself (*en soi*). De Man also writes with such primordial estrangement ever in mind, from the first essay in the collection, on Montaigne, where he declares "contradiction" to be "the mind's law" (11). A later de Man than the one writing in 1953 would perhaps have said "rhetoric's law" instead; but I am doubtful that what he described was ever much different from this.

The value for de Man of the poetic, then, resides principally in its capacity to render the movement of a mind as it confronts its own limitations, and negotiates the mutabilities to which that timebound mind is itself subject: "Our pain comes from our knowledge that we are temporal creatures" (73). The impulse behind artistic creation—in Romantics de Man favors such as Friedrich Hölderlin and, by extension, all true artists—is double. On the one hand, the poet enacts a longing for the eternal status of a sensuous object: "immediate being is identical with oneself, that things can be only what they are" (22). At the same time, in creating an object in turn, the poet hopes to transcend temporality and its attendant estrangement: "The resulting unbearable tension has to materialize into a form in order to be surmounted" (15).

De Man's excellent essay "Process and Poetry" builds upon this fundamental drama to use Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé in order to "distinguish two kinds of poetic attitude: the first would be that of a poetry of process, maintaining itself as consciousness at the expense of the sensuous object [described in the poem], whereas the other would be a poetry of substance, maintaining the sensuous object at the expense of consciousness" (71). In other words, one poetic attitude is more nostalgic for the earth, whereas the other strives more mightily for the Parnassian sky, although a "genuine poetics has to be able to include this oscillation" within it (idem.).

But the same ontological predicament accounts for both tendencies, however opposing: the poet's desire that "the poetic" be "a privileged action" by means of which "the possibility of a new innocence and of a possible future, beyond negation, can still be conceived" (27). It is for this reason that poetic creation appeals to the poet for whom "any existence within the framework of accepted reality can no longer satisfy him" (15).

The poetic act is also something written down, as de Man notes in explicating a Mallarmé poem: "it leave[s] a trace, the work's memory suspended in an ideal space and revealing that an action has occurred" (26). In addition, though, the poetic result is also the record of a failure. No human being can achieve the impassive solidity of nature, and no mortal can attain the eternal realm of spirit; and yet the longing for both is constitutive of the "being of the poetic as such" (58). On account of this inevitable failure of the poetic, "poetry becomes a mask, a constant dissimulating through which we attempt to hide from ourselves" (73). The poetic record is then both the memory of the artist's striving after a unity posited outside of the self and also the spiritual wreckage left by the failure of such striving. We can see in this conception of poetry's "ontology" the argument in de Man's famous essay "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," and arguably its poetics of failure continues to imbue that later work as well. For de Man is clear very early on that for him poetry teaches not by edifying but by presenting the most dramatic evidence of how man, in attempting a monument, achieves instead a ruin. In the passage above comparing poetry to a mask, de Man goes on to clarify the sort of value judgment he draws from this comparison: "This is a form neither of weakness nor of hypocrisy in Western poetry, but rather its profoundest necessity" (idem.). It is a necessity of a "poetry" that he defines as "the putting into language of the failure of the true to found itself" (66). Without embarking on an exegesis of *Allegories of Reading* or *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, I would assert that, in its essentials, that is the story he continues to tell—of spiritual striving and, above all, of spiritual failure—right up to the end.

De Man is surely not unaware that language is also an intersubjective, even an anthropological matter, not just an ontological one. But it is fair to say that de Man sees this sort of awareness as secondary to the central drama of his unhappy consciousness. He emphatically tells us that retrieving "the autonomy of the literary work . . . from the onslaughts of crudely deterministic systems" has been the "great contribution of New Criticism" (110), and Waters properly points to his frequent gibes at so-called action intellectuals of the André Malraux type. It pleases de Man that in Keats' *Fall of Hyperion*, "the sacrificial act of historical commitment" is one in which the poet himself does not join. "[T]he poet is merely the one who has *seen* the sacrifice," thus assuring that the "role of the poet" is "distinct from that of the Savior" (57). (He likes Keats' allegory of sacrifice and witness so well that he invokes it again later on, by way of lecturing a renegade Harold Bloom [95].) The *engagé* intellectual of the 'thirties and 'forties, whose stance he knew well (having at least briefly struck a comparable pose himself), was an affront to his concern with "inwardness," whereas Waters points out he follows Maurice Blanchot rather than Sartre (xxx-xl).

One begins, in reading these essays, to understand why, when he moves

away from earlier emphases, de Man goes in the direction not of rejecting inwardness for intersubjectivity, but of rejecting metaphors of the mind for figures of rhetoric. Even the psychologistic potential of the unhappy consciousness is one he chooses not to explore; indeed, his horror of the psychoanalytic rivals his distaste for the sociological. Clearly, one of the worst sins in his bill of particulars against Sartre's *Les mots* is that it is "an act of self-therapy that, as such [that condign phrase again], does not belong to literature" (122). He then goes on—oddly, given that those veteran self-therapists Proust and Rousseau are among the examples—to counterpose other "writers [who] have been concerned with interpreting, and not with curing, their own predicament" (idem.). The distinction may seem without a difference to some readers, but it does not prevent de Man from pronouncing Sartre that most damned of specimens, "an unliterary man" (118).

It is less interesting whether de Man's judgment upon Sartre is considered and just (to be honest, I suspect it to be neither) than what are the grounds on which he seems to stand in making it. He makes a similar complaint against André Gide for sullying the purity of the literary by a preoccupation with his erotic identity: to Gide's bad example (which de Man fears for its effects less on the morals of youth than on the practice of literature) he counterposes Valéry and Rilke, whose "long explorations . . . have to do with the nature of poetic language rather than with interpersonal relations" (136). It is as if "interpersonal relations" were the tawdriest sort of thing imaginable, especially when compared to "poetic language."

Definitely one confronts in de Man a critic who sees any recognition of the particulars of human psychology, history or cultural identity as merely a barrier to the accession of consciousness to the essential contradictions that are the mind's law. As with the project of his guru Heidegger, de Man's ontological concern with the spirit and its quest for authentic being is forever threatened by the looming shadows of the merely "ontic," or thinglike, concerns of the petty everyday world. Even Heidegger, much as he seems not to know quite what to do with it, includes *Mit-Sein*, or "being-with" other people, as one of the doorways to his fundamental ontology. But de Man treats interest in society in any mode as on a par with nostalgia for brute Nature: "When [political] systems claim their ability to solve . . . problems, they are in fact appealing to a temptation that exists in all of us: a desire for serenity that tries to forget and to repress the original anxiety [of unhappy consciousness]" (15). Insofar as he treats such matters at all in his earlier writings, he progressively flees any such "anthropologism" as he proceeds, until finally any attempt to connect the linguistic with any "outside," however defined, becomes deluded aesthetic ideology.

Waters is right to align de Man "with those who had been seeking since the 1930s to understand interiority in an impersonal sense" (xxxvii). What psychological features de Man permits are there, it seems, primarily as heuristic means to grasp the invariant antinomies of our temporal being: time itself is our eternal predicament, whether this entails (as in early de Man) the failure of poetic intention to found its own truth or (as in later de Man) the inability of language to coincide with itself. As with Heidegger, this "temporality" is itself a transcendent category. In other words, it is not subject to empirical flux: the temporal is decidedly *not* historical here. It leads

one to suspect that the inwardness de Man posits as that which we all flee rather than face up to ourselves gradually becomes the inwardness of language "as such," into which he himself is able to flee in order precisely to escape an "outside" in which he is all too entangled.

It is perhaps inevitable to read the essays herein collected in the light of the posthumous (for most) revelations about the author's early collaborationist writings for *Le Soir* at the outset of World War Two. And indeed, some of his arguments solicit the reader's cautious consideration in light of the recent controversy. Foremost among them would have to be his 1966 essay entitled "The Literature of Nihilism."

The occasion for his remarks is the publication of books by Erich Heller and Ronald Gray on the German literary tradition. Much of the essay is devoted to defending German culture against the charge that it led to the Nazi era. After first making the obvious point that the Nazi movement was chiefly populist rather than intellectual in origin, de Man proceeds to make a curious claim: "The problem is not that a philosophical tradition could be so wrong but that it could have counted for so little when it was most needed. The responsibility [for Nazism] rests not with the tradition but with the manner in which it was used or neglected, and this is primarily a sociological problem" (163).

I pass over the clear implication that a proper understanding of the German philosophical tradition would have hindered the rise of Nazism, to say nothing of the way the neglect of this tradition at the crucial hour (by whom? It is unspecified) is relegated to the presumably subordinate status of a "sociological problem." (Seldom has the abdication of Germany's intellectual class before Hitler been put more primly in its place.) He does assert that for him, it "is not in the power of philosophy or literature to prevent the degradation of the human spirit," nor is its job to "warn against this degradation" (164). He clarifies this idea as follows: "This does not mean that philosophers and poets have no moral or political responsibility even when their work is apolitical. But it means this responsibility should be evaluated within the full philosophical or literary context of their work, not their lives, still less the effect that their work may or may not have had on other people" (164).

The phrasing of de Man's disavowal is ambiguous at the least. Is it because one cannot discern the precise effect of someone's work on "other people" that such a criterion cannot be used to judge them? Or because considering the effect of such work on others for any reason is itself some sort of impertinence, an ethical overreaching? However read, this reluctance not merely oneself to judge but even to permit others to hazard judgment in the name of anything beyond the "context of the work" is of a piece with de Man's early and consistent horror of the intersubjective sphere, indeed of history in general. "True wisdom," he says, claiming only to be explicating Hölderlin, "begins in the knowledge of its own historical ineffectiveness" (212). Yet even if this quietistic viewpoint is valid (a dubious assumption), the stridency of tone with which de Man promulgates it in response to Gray and Heller bespeaks a fear lest the inwardness of a writer's work not be respected. Even de Man's late use of the notion of the "performative" aspect of language can be seen as a way of placing the "responsibility" for language's effects—on language itself and not its users. At that point, not even a work's "philosophical or literary context" indicates its author's responsibility.

Such a question returns the reader to those few sections where de Man confronts the interpersonal and the historical. When he does, his attitude looks rather different from Heidegger's *Mit-Sein*. He speaks, as if with mounting distaste, of "those semi-herdlike reactions of shapeless impulse, sometimes generous, always gregarious, which make up human behavior in times of collective crisis." He adds that writers such as Malraux, where "a masochistic anti-intellectualism causes this abdication of the mind," follow "the typical pattern from political activism, to an avowed antihistoricism and to a nihilistic conservatism" (16). It takes a de Man to see activism as the necessary progenitor of nihilistic conservatism; but in Malraux's case, he discerns someone who has entered the field of action for much the same reason other Frenchmen are said to join the Foreign Legion: "as a protection that shielded them from their real problems" (14). Therefore, once the *nostalgie de la boue* of activism proves ineffectual, the person reacts by retreating into the "fatigue" of which elsewhere he accuses Malraux (33).

The great sin of figures such as Malraux—the "abdication" he assails—is the reverse of the abdication he defends in his review of Heller and Gray. Here the abdication is of the life of the mind in favor of some notion of the political: the capitulation to shapeless impulse, as insidious in its generous guise, evidently, as in its merely gregarious. The ethically charged language with its imputation of psychic aberration shows de Man again in an unusually harsh mode. To what could one ascribe these perturbations of the critical spirit?

De Man's defense of the German tradition and his attack on Malraux's political engagement share two important features: both passages treat the effect of writing and politics on each other, and more specifically both take World War Two as their governing instance. The fuller context of his remarks on Malraux makes this clear, as does its position within the "Inward Generation" essay whose topic is intellectual life since the war. It may signify that having begun an article about the intellectual situation following the war, de Man proceeds to attribute the alienation of the 'fifties intellectuals not to the war at all but to the inheritance of romanticism. This is the place where the year 1800 is brought in, although the years 1939–45 get short shrift. Clearly de Man prefers to diagnose the inwardness of his generation as flowing not from some crisis within the life of "interpersonal relations" or their political forms but rather from the metaphysical situation of the mind, a metaphysical estrangement whose romantic phase he feels we are all still in. This is not the place to claim he is wrong. But de Man's haste to attribute a fairly specific cultural sensibility to unhappy consciousness betokens an impatience with historical contingency, and an almost breathtaking capacity to evade the traumatic events of his own recent past, and that of his generation.

The impatience and the evasion have a certain logic, to be sure. They doubtless go a long way toward understanding why de Man views outward action as betrayal of the mind rather than objectification of the mind's concerns (he does *not* follow Hegel this far, evidently). Again, de Man clearly explicates more than Hölderlin when he writes about "the transitory nature of all historical achievement, about the difficulty for the mind to maintain its balance in view of the ceaseless erosion of the historical world [why only erosion? is history not also made?], and about poetry as a medium in which some degree of lucidity can prevail" (212).

But it is also fair to surmise that were it not for de Man's own hesitancy in confronting this recent event, his thought might have been less able to forego so much of the richness that comes from contextualizing the works of culture, and perhaps more skeptical of a method that moves so swiftly from the particulars of a work's historical setting and concerns (all of those "sociological problems") in order to pave the way for yet another ontological morality play. (It may matter less than some de Manians think that the *dramatis personae* change from Time and Consciousness to Grammar and Rhetoric: the drama itself endures.)

The claim made for de Man by so many of his disciples that his critique shows exemplary rigor is no doubt true; and part of the rigor lies in the pessimism itself, his refusal to end the soul's torment by positing a heaven other than fictional for unhappy consciousness to seek. Like every inheritor of Romanticism, de Man understands that Enlightenment alone was never enough; but to his credit he is never compelled to conclude that something else therefore is. Still, the rigor of his concern—a constant demonstration from different angles of what he considered the nature of the literary—is bought at a price. It is undeniable that his conception of the properly poetic project has scarcely more room for humankind than for God or Nature. Put another way, God and Nature, neither of which is attainable by the poet, are both still more crucial to de Man's rendition of the literary act than is the intersubjective sphere.

It is, again, less a question of whether de Man's mode of depicting literary art is true. Unquestionably, for me there is much truth in the drama he enacts, with all its variations. The more interesting problem is why (apart from his training in the Romantics, that is) he finds this drama the overriding one, to the exclusion of socio-, psycho-, or anthropological concerns? Even though he does not eschew social or political action as being significant to poetry, he sees it solely as a threat to the mind's lucidity, as a snare and a delusion. The intersubjective sphere, which Heidegger and Hegel before him put somewhere within the realm of spirit, de Man banishes to the extraliterary hinterlands. When he attacks easy representatives of political action such as Hemingway, for whom being *engagé* meant "liberating" the Ritz just before the Allies did, one sees his point. Further, de Man's edginess at imputing "organicist" national characteristics to texts is understandable: it is not an approach that led to happy results in his own early journalism. But to most critics working now, and certainly to me, the foreswearing of any attempt to investigate a work of art as if it came from a country, a society, or even a family looks willfully narrow: "rigorous" perhaps, but in an unflattering sense.

As de Man would be the first to point out, the possibility (which I think probable) that his way of defining the literary was in part a defensive reaction to his experience with the larger, scarier realm of political actions and consequences does not make the definition incorrect. However, he is willing to treat data such as language and the poetic act as if they were not manifestations of human social agency, when obviously they are; and one has the right to establish whether what is gained in the way of metaphysical rigor is worth forgetting about a work's social context in order to concentrate solely upon the poem's dialogue with its own soul, its own mortality, or its language "as such." De Man's hastiness to endorse this "ontological" view of all

literary activity should not keep the reader from seeing the other textual dimensions he is declaring out of bounds. It is likely that his own experience of history, not to mention the role he himself played in it, made him seek a realm which lacked the messy compromises of the great world.

The nostalgia of the Romantics for ancient Greece, which he notes several times, anticipates the allegorical ruin he invokes in his later writings, after "The Rhetoric of Temporality." Unlike those who saw their philo-Hellenism as the Romantics' belief that this world could be recaptured, de Man with Walter Benjamin comprehends that the "neo-Hellenic theme is for the romantics a special version of the theme of mutability and contingency, not the description of an actual state of being that could be brought back if we only had the strength to do so" (169). Perhaps de Man's never-wavering faith in the literary was something like the Romantics' love of ancient Greece: the longing for a space where he could reside uncompromised by the things of everyday human life and history. Perhaps, for all its anguish and failure, the literary drama nourished his unhappy consciousness in a way that the great world (which was in fact not distant from de Man but far too much with him) never could. Perhaps the literary "as such" was finally his salvific fiction; and too late one begins to see just what it would have had to save him from.

De Man mentions at one point how "certain writers" achieve notoreity "because they can be easily turned into examples behind which we hide our own shortcomings. Rimbaud's decision to stop writing, for example, provides a fine pretext to those who were never able even to begin" (131). When I saw this I laughed, but brought myself up short. What if this diagnostically inclined review were to do the same for its readers? Could the example of de Man's collaborationism give a pretext to "abandon" a study of his work to people either unable or unwilling to undertake it? For as I said at the outset, the critical landscape is already far different from the one for which, as late as a decade ago, literariness was still a central issue. De Man's project, whatever its motivations, is one of the most thoroughgoing attempts to define the literary (which was for him the poetic) activity. At such time as the proponents of a newer, more anthropologically informed approach to cultural critique (whose number no doubt includes this reviewer) decide to try to institutionalize this approach as the guiding one, and not merely another amusing way to "do criticism," they will not be able for very long to ignore the critique implicit in de Man's project, any more than his project (and, yes, his life and his effect on other people) will be able to avoid them.

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*Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination* by David Loewenstein. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. x + 197. $34.50.

David Loewenstein's book offers "a study of the figuration of history in Milton's revolutionary prose and major poems" (1). By the phrase "figuration of history" Loewenstein means primarily the ways in which history is figured or represented in Milton's writings; he does not mean, for the most part, the ways in which history itself might possess the figurational power to "author" Milton or his work. While Loewenstein traces Milton's double career as poet and prose controversialist against the unfolding of political and cultural events, his book is predominantly formalist in method, focusing on the complex literary and conceptual construction of history in Milton's writings. Hayden White's theories on the literary "emplotment" of historical narrative provide Loewenstein with a means of articulating literary genre with historical process. Throughout, the book emphasizes Milton's turbulent, divided, and often tragic sense of history, and highlights Milton's (often frustrated or pessimistic) sense of the ways in which his own writing might intervene in or transform the course of English history during the pre- to post-revolutionary eras.

Chapter One, "The Drama of History in the Early Revolutionary Prose," sets the tone for much of what follows in a study of the five antiprelatical tracts that Milton published in 1641 and 1642. Loewenstein traces the influence of radical millenarian thought, as instanced in the work of apocalyptic commentators Thomas Brightman and Joseph Mede, on Milton's vision of history. This millennialist strain, argues Loewenstein, imbues *Of Reformation, Animadversions,* and *The Reason of Church-Government* with their aspiration toward complete and imminent Reformation. Yet at the same time, Milton is plagued by a contrasting sense of Christian history as a tragic narrative of prelatical backsliding. Images of diseased or disfigured bodies figure the spiritual and political degeneration of England in these early tracts, and reflect an antagonism between millenial expectation and historical frustration that fuels Milton's virulently iconoclastic, antiprelatical rhetoric.

The following two chapters, on *Areopagitica* and *Eikonoklastes* respectively, further develop these themes. *Areopagitica* addresses Parliament as the hoped-for historical agent of Reformation. Milton depicts the recovery of divine Truth as attainable only through the continual friction of "neighboring differences," not through a forced uniformity of opinion imposed by prelatical government, and he attempts to waken the members of Parliament to their revolutionary work in fostering this ongoing production of difference. *Eikonoklastes* similarly emphasizes the role of discord and discontinuity in Reformation, as it tries to demolish both the idolatrous images generated by the "martyrdom" of Charles I and the conservative vision of history, grounded in the continuous lines of monarchy and episcopacy, which this royalist iconography tried to reinforce. Milton accomplishes his iconoclastic work not simply by destroying the king's image but by imaginatively reforming or "re-emplotting" the materials of royal propaganda, so that Charles appears no longer as tragic hero but as figure in a satirical anti-masque. Chapter Four, on the later revolutionary prose, traces Milton's growing pessimism to-

wards his reformational and iconoclastic project as he becomes increasingly alienated from an English nation which seems on the brink of relapsing into monarchy and prelacy.

The final two chapters of the book turn from Milton's prose to his poetry, yet repeatedly emphasize the continuities between them. Chapter Five looks at Michael's presentation of future history in Books XI and XII of *Paradise Lost* and finds there the same tensions that characterize Milton's vision from the time of the early antiprelatical prose—tensions, that is, between a linear and progressive narrative of history and a merely circular, repetitive, and tragic one. Loewenstein successfully argues against any easily optimistic reading of human history in *Paradise Lost*, insisting that the tragic elements of Michael's presentation cannot simply be subsumed or cancelled by a typological or salvational progression.

The sixth and final chapter, on *Samson Agonistes*, sums up the themes developed in the book thus far. *Samson* both embodies the frustrations that inhere in Milton's divided vision of history and fashions a final, iconoclastic, yet theatrical response to them. Loewenstein reads *Samson* as a "displaced and tragic version of the heroic national poem that [Milton] had hoped to write" (132), and finds in Samson's confrontations with Dalila and Harapha an image of the polemical Milton of the prose tracts.

The major virtue of Loewenstein's book is its ability to trace a set of continuing historical concerns throughout Milton's career and to draw valuable connections between the poetry and the prose. Sometimes these connections take the form of overarching thematic patterns, and sometimes they concern more local but interesting details. For instance, Loewenstein suggestively juxtaposes the vision of the lazar-house in *Paradise Lost* XI, 477–93, with the images of a diseased body politic that appear in the early prose tracts. Or again, he reads Michael's narrative of Nimrod (*Paradise Lost* XII, 24–62) against Milton's use of Nimrod as an image of prelatical power in *Animadversions* and *Eikonoklastes*.

While such internal connections are useful, however, they also tend to foster a conception of Milton's writings as largely self-enclosed. Despite Loewenstein's intention to demonstrate Milton's troubled *interventions* in the historical arena, his formalist approach has the effect of reducing history to just another literary "theme" or topic. To be sure, Milton's writings are placed in an historical context, but Milton himself is conceived of as an autonomous, if morally and politically engaged, subject—one who grapples with the "problem" of history but who is not himself either constrained or produced by social forces. A more dialectical sense of historical agency, one in which subject and historical field are mutually constitutive, might have produced a study whose virtues were less "fugitive and cloistered."

Indeed, the book is largely vitiated by it own intellectual timidity. While it is certainly well-informed on matters historical, it gives no sense that the period it discusses has been the subject of especially intense debate in recent years. Loewenstein resolutely avoids any detailed reading of Milton's historical or social situation, a decision which inevitably renders his sense of Milton's "response" to that situation rather abstract. The book eschews any theoretical commitments as well; despite the occasional reference to Hayden White, its approach is basically new-critical and formalist. Of course, Loew-

enstein states from the outset that he intends to read Milton's literary *figurations* of history; hence it is unfair to berate him for not having written the kind of book he had no intention of writing. Furthermore, a close if restricted study of "the interplay between historical consciousness and literary expression, political vision and textual effects" (2) is a necessary prelude to any historical reading of Milton—missing, for instance, from Christopher Hill's otherwise masterful studies. Unfortunately, Loewenstein doesn't succeed very well even on his own terms, because his readings aren't especially incisive or bold. As a result, nothing in the way of a new or provocative interpretation of Milton emerges from this study, which is notable more for its diligence than for its originality.

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*A Form of Sound Words: The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* by Harriet Guest. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. Pp. 312. $69.00, cloth; $55.20, paper.

Harriet Guest's *A Form of Sound Words: The Religious Poetry of Christopher Smart* is a major addition to the modest but expanding body of significant work on Smart. Like Patricia M. Spacks' *The Poetry of Vision* (1967), *A Form of Sound Words* helps us better to situate Smart in a poetic milieu; like Christopher Devlin's *Poor Kit Smart* (1961), Arthur Sherbo's *Christopher Smart: Scholar of the University* (1967), and Moira Dearnley's *The Poetry of Christopher Smart* (1968), Guest's book attempts a synoptic view of Smart's literary career; and, like earlier important articles by W. H. Bond, W. M. Merchant, Robert Fitzgerald, and A. D. Hope, it helps us better to understand Smart's aggressively experimental poetic form in *Jubilate Agno*. Finally, *A Form of Sound Words*, like more recent articles by Geoffrey Hartman, Alan Liu, and William Kumbier, demonstrates the fruitfulness with which new critical approaches and vocabulary can be brought to bear on Smart's challenging religious poetry.

The heart of *A Form of Sound Words*—the difference it makes to scholarship in approach and emphasis—is three central chapters on Smart's book-length poem *Jubilate Agno*, much of which was written during Smart's confinement for supposed madness. Guest's unusual focus on the *Jubilate* bolsters her call for a reappraisal of Smart's poetry. Where previous critics have often treated *Jubilate Agno* as, at best, preparation for the more widely known "A Song to David," Guest devotes her most sustained critical attention to Smart's notorious "mad" poem. Her prolonged focus seems to imply—accurately, in my view—that Smart's future reputation way well depend on *Jubilate Agno* as much as, if not more than, on "A Song to David." Guest emphasizes that the *Jubilate* has many continuities with Smart's previous work, pointedly avoiding the mythic narrative of Smart's development as a sudden change from merely ingenious poetaster *before*—that is, before supposed madness—to lightning-struck genius and culture-hero *after*.

The introductory chapter of *A Form of Sound Words* takes up the poetic problem of representing God's creation in an increasingly scientific and phil-

osophical age. The poetic problem is, as Guest argues, that "the systematization of variety as order may be incompatible with religious reverence" (41). This formulation—precise and useful, if not startlingly original—allows Guest to place Smart along a spectrum that moves from poetic system-builders to poetic explorers. Smart, firmly in the explorers' camp, can be seen as helping to invent a new kind of poetic voice and function:

> Smart defines the role of the religious poet as the reviver of adoration in England, as the prophetic psalmist of a sense of national identity that collapses the distinctions between high and low, polite and vulgar. But the ambitious attempt his poetry represents, to unify and address a mixed congregation of the faithful, demands that it create a new audience for itself. . . . (67)

It is the sustained focus on the poet's role and relations with a mostly imaginary audience that makes Guest's three chapters on *Jubilate Agno* the first attempt at a full-scale reading of the poem.

Chapter 2 gives the most detailed reading we have yet had of the early odes Smart wrote for a university prize at Cambridge. Already, as Guest shows, Smart is finding his way towards a disjunctive "poetry of exploration" that begins to redefine the poet's cultural role. Guest's concluding chapter seeks to demonstrate that Smart's revised notion of the poet's role should also be central to our grasp of his "A Song to David" and his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.

*A Form of Sound Words*, while making its broader argument, intervenes crucially in the question of the editorial arrangement of *Jubilate Agno*. Guest shows that the recent and presumably authoritative Clarendon edition of *Jubilate Agno* cannot supersede the older standard edition by W. H. Bond. Indeed, Guest makes clear that the Clarendon edition does considerable violence to the *Jubilate*. In the Bond edition, the poem can be read in two directions at once, as if it were a cross-word puzzle. Reading horizontally across two facing pages, one sees connections between "antiphonally" related lines beginning with the words "Let" and "For." Reading vertically, one likewise sees a formal and thematic parallelism connecting one "Let" line to the next. In Karina Williamson's edition for Clarendon, one reads down only, from one vertically paired doublet of "Let:For" lines to the next. This arrangement, as Guest points out, effectively eclipses the crucial parallelism between the "Let" lines, obliterating an entire dimension of the poem. Guest's emphasis on the connection between the "Let" lines eventually pays off with a fresh way of seeing the whole poem, including the argument that we may not be missing as many fragments of it as has hitherto been assumed.

The methodology of *A Form of Sound Words* seems, at first glance, to be a very traditional sort of historical background study. However, since Guest coauthored an article that appears in the polemically titled *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* [(ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York and London, 1987)], she appears to be engaged in subtle negotiations with the new scholarship. And *A Form of Sound Words* is in fact best described as a subtle blending of traditional and "new" historicism. Many of the book's liveliest points revolve around a vocabulary that includes

such terms as "appropriation" (50), "demystification" (32), "destabilization" (27), and "negotiation" (4). Pope's *Essay on Man*, for instance, "cuts the ground from under its own feet by destabilizing the terms of reason, right, and argument on which its success depends" (27). Such terms, however unobtrusively used, belong to the vocabulary of the newer historical scholarship.

Certain conspicuous absences, it must be said, point to a conservative element in Guest's approach. For one thing, the whole problematic of Smart's "madness"—the meanings the eighteenth century gave to madness, the way confinement might have conditioned his poetry—is simply evaded. In her firm repudiation of the so-called biographical fallacy—often egregiously reductive in Smart studies—Guest unfortunately narrows and reduces the notion of culture operating in her theme of the poet's "cultural role." Guest also omits from her analyses of religious discourse many of its connections to the antagonistic political histories, including a civil war, in which it has been enmeshed. It is hard to think of a more complacent way to discuss class oppression than in the genteel terms of a contrast between the "polite" and the "vulgar."

The most conservative element of all in Guest's approach—her playing down, at every turn, of Smart's eccentricity—surely has effects that she does not intend. Guest clearly wishes to avoid the betrayal of Smart's poem by means of an arrogant medical language that defines social deviance as mad "Otherness." The danger she fails to recognize is that an overly familiar language of "Sameness" may likewise betray the poem's disruptive qualities, its rough edges. She scarcely acknowledges the distance between the sobriety of her own prose and the fantastically pun-laden, alternately hilarious and ecstatic poem that Smart wrote. The scandalous audacity of his intellectual project—an attempt, as a second "David" or "Ezra," to rewrite the Anglican liturgy—hardly seems to make her blink. There is a serious danger that her discussion of the *Jubilate* tends to tame it, to assimilate it too easily to a bland and bloodless normality. Far from redeeming Smart's text, moreover, such an insufficiently earned domestication of its actual strangeness in effect reduces its interest and value. Her formidably researched book can leave one with the final impression that the *Jubilate* is a rather ordinary poem composed under rather ordinary circumstances: hardly the reappraisal the poem's originality deserves.

Many of Smart's critics have not been eager to spell out the ambiguous political and religious affiliations of his revisionary project. Guest's recuperation of Smart's difficult strangeness, as with several previous critics, takes a High Church coloring. In Guest's case, we are repeatedly informed that Smart's "apparent unorthodoxy" (103) poses no real difficulty for seeing him as a staunch Anglican. Thus the fact that Smart wrote in the Dissenting genre of hymns—and even hymns focused on the evangelical concept of "Grace"—is explained away, with a certain embarrassment, in the final chapter. That certain strains in *Jubilate Agno* indubitably recall 17th-century "enthusiastic" sectarians is simply not discussed. Smart's Quakerish wish to reform the "pagan" names of the days of the week and his Adamite praise of dancing naked in the rain, to name only a couple of blatant examples, link Smart's poem to seventeenth-century discourses that cannot easily be termed "orthodox."

*A Form of Sound Words*, if not the last word on Smart, is one of the best so far. Any student of Smart will welcome the provocation of Harriet Guest's work on a poet whose reputation her important book further enhances. *A Form of Sound Words* belongs on the shelf of any library where literature is studied.

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*Keats's Poetry and the Politics of the Imagination* by Daniel P. Watkins. Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses. 1989. Pp. 228 $36.50.

Through the years Keats's poetry has proven notoriously resistant to historical criticism. With the exception of a few tentative forays (which seem to appear every two decades or so: see Thorpe [*PMLA*, 1931]; Ward [*PQ*, 1955]; and Koch [*JEGP*, 1972]), Keats studies has been much more taken with language and psychology than with history or politics. If there have been attempts to contextualize the poetry, they have been in terms of words rather than worlds; Keats scholarship is rich in influence studies, in essays that trace and cross-trace literary echoes and borrowings. Indeed, critics have labored to situate Keats, as he himself wished, "among the English Poets." Helen Vendler's massively detailed *The Odes of John Keats* (1983), however, seemed at once to mark the apotheosis and prefigure the doom of the aesthetic school. One felt, in reading Vendler's Odes, that she had exhausted the Keats of sensuous effect and verbal dazzle. Emerging from hyper-explication, the odes appeared depleted, wan, like the knight at the end of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. What more had they to offer? More importantly, perhaps, what more could we find? "Vendler's critique," as Marjorie Levinson observes in her own recent book on Keats, "leaves no rift unfilled" (30).

It was not until the "Keats and Politics" issue of *Studies in Romanticism* (Summer, 1986) that the subject of history was again revived, partly because of the critical climate, the renewed sympathy with historical approaches, but partly, I think, because of Helen Vendler. The "Keats and Politics" issue, along with the two most recent full length treatments of the poetry—Levinson's *Keats's Life of Allegory* (1988) and now Watkins's book—constitute a persuasive and timely reaction to Vendler's totalizing study. Moreover, they are both transitionary works that experiment not only with new approaches to Keats, but with new languages for critical inquiry. In this sense, both represent a revolution in Keats studies and should promote a welcome and lively debate.

Whereas Levinson is nothing if not forthcoming and self-conscious about her role as subversive ("The doctrinal insults are obvious and need no explaining" (37)), Watkins is always polite and apologetic, sometimes excessively so: "Without denying the importance of these interpretive problems, and without questioning the very real contributions of critical efforts to come to terms with them, I want to stress that previous critical focus has been largely centered on the text . . ." (136). One of the phrases that runs through the book like a motif, in fact, is "This is not to say." Where Levinson is often

impetuous and brilliantly (if alarmingly) rude, Watkins is always calm and diplomatic.

Despite their obvious differences in strategy and style, however, both studies are inexorably shaped by Vendler's book. Neither examines the odes, and Levinson avoids them expressly because of Vendler (to be sure, Watkins devotes a chapter to the *Grecian Urn*, but in isolation). One of the weaknesses of *Keats's Poetry and the Politics of the Imagination*, in fact, is its failure to confront Vendler or the critical problems raised by her work or that of the other Harvard Keatsians. Its primary strength is that in place of a poetic influence study it offers an historical one. Watkins's Keats is shown to be a poet who relies more heavily than we had imagined on reference works like Robertson's *History of America*, Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, Tooke's *The Pantheon*, and John Brand's *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*. One of the unspoken premises of Watkins's book is that Keats spent more time reading *The Examiner* than reading Milton and Shakespeare, or at least that he might have been more influenced by what he read in Hunt's periodical than what he found in Cowden Clarke's library.

If he is less aggressive than Levinson in challenging the assumptions behind the critical literature on Keats, or interrogating our commitment to the aesthetic Keats, Watkins is by no means unaware of the place of his study in the current reassessment of the poet's work, as he points out in the acknowledgements and preface (regrettably, Levinson's book appeared too late for him to engage it). He is also conscious of Jerome McGann's warnings in *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) that we should resist becoming too enthralled by romanticism's own definitions of itself: "More often than not we unquestioningly accept the poet's own self-representations and fail to consider that the very intensity of his statements and the degree of his commitment in certain poems to a transhistorical ideal might be a desperate response to the pressures descending on him from the world he inhabited" (9). His aim instead is to shift critical focus from "poetic consciousness to the political unconscious of poetry" (10). By employing what he calls a "historical materialist criticism," (11) Watkins attempts to show how Keats's formulations of aesthetic categories like beauty and truth are caught up in a complex relationship of historical conditions and assumptions. What is interesting here is that Watkins describes a Keats ridden with *historical* (rather than psychological) anxiety, a Keats who both criticizes and at times succumbs to the prevailing ideological forms of industrial capitalism.

In this light, Watkins reads the extreme individualism and subjectivity of Keats's poetry as "a sign of the bourgeois fragmentation of human life" (25). The breakdown of preindustrial and agrarian forces helps spawn a nostalgic view of the past and of nature and is at least partially responsible for what Watkins calls Keats's "poetry of consolation" (37). In *Endymion*, for example, the poet constructs a quest for redemptive individual power as a response to social disintegration. This entails the active denial of the communal world portrayed in Book I and the ensuing sacrifice of history, society, and women for the designs of the private self. Much is "elided" (a word Watkins often invokes) in other poems as well: in *Isabella*, the relations of production and human experience under capitalism; in *Hyperion*, "the true complexity of the social and historical conflict that threatens the Titans" (97); in *Lamia*, the real-

ities of existence in a market economy; and in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* just about everything: history, politics, imperialism, the oppression of women, rape, and the despoliation of Greece.

A large portion of Watkins's argument rests on precisely such a poetics of elision—so much so, in fact, that we are reminded of Wallace Stevens's snow man, as we behold the "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." This is not at all to disparage his investigations, but simply to note what is a recurring problem in this work as well as in others of the new historicist movement (though I hesitate to locate Watkins's work in this school because much of his analysis harkens back to Christopher Caudwell and the early British Marxists, and remains largely unravished by the structuralist and semiotic upheavals of the '80's): namely, the degree to which we can establish a connection between history and poetics. Is it appropriate or necessary to hold every poem historically accountable? Should we not draw distinctions between selectivity and elision? To be more specific here, although it is clearly important to recognize that the assumptions about beauty and truth in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* are patriarchal, is it fair to say that a "critical excavation" of the poem "expose[s] the bones of the dead and the blood of the beaten" (119)? Or that we can appropriate the poem "for purposes of exposing human atrocity"? To argue this may be to overstate the case for an historical approach, especially if we realize that patriarchal values are just as embattled as feminine ones in the ode: after all, the marble men never do "ravish" the maidens, and the feminized urn not only "can[st] thus express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme," but pronounces the last words in the poem.

I take issue with these points only because I believe *Keats's Poetry and the Politics of the Imagination* is an important book and will need to be discussed and debated at greater length. Watkins is at his best when elaborating Keats's sources and when examining the ways in which gender figures prominently in such poems as *Lamia, The Eve of St. Agnes,* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. The book's meditations on Keats's use and misuse of history are also provocative, but need to be more specifically located in the exact circumstances of the period 1815–1820. That is to say, at times the Marxist machinery of Watkins's argument looms too large and Keats's politics are viewed through a paradigm governed by reductive oppositions (such as feudalist/capitalist, preindustrial/industrial), broad definitions of the bourgeoisie, and unchallenged ideological presuppositions about the idyllic conditions of the precapitalist agrarian world.

My greatest concern, however, lies in the way the book's Marxist critical orientation flattens Keats's language and style; it is here that the reaction against Vendler has been total, and perhaps too extreme. At times the Keats who appears in these pages seems too much like an essayist, a journalist, a commentator, and not enough like a poet. The author's approach requires that we read through Keats's style, as if the richness and beauty of his language were just one more sign of his commitment to patriarchy. Although Watkins would probably argue that I myself am a part of the dominant white-male academy that fetishizes aesthetics and valorizes linguistic complexity, I cannot help feeling that his analysis, acute though it often is, takes the fun out of reading Keats.

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*Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* by Richard C. Moreland. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. Pp. ix + 259. $37.50, cloth; $14.75, paper.

The paperback edition of Richard C. Moreland's *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting* comes caparisoned with praise. One commentator speaks of "[Moreland's] impressive intellectual rigor. . . . [and] sensitivity to recent structuralist, Marxist, and deconstructive writings." The other, more lavish, says, "I have never been more sure about the worth and impact of a new publication . . . nor . . . more excited about the direction Faulkner studies will take as the result of a new book."

The reasons for the praise are evident. Moreland's study is a theoretically and intellectually sophisticated examination of an issue central to our understanding of the shape and meaning of Faulkner's career. In part, though only in part, the book is a Marxist-materialist rejoinder to John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge*, which still, after nearly twenty years, offers the regnant reading of the meaning of repetition in Faulkner's fiction. In contrast to Irwin's view, that Faulknerian repetition enacts a psychological and cultural drama of failed Oedipal resolution, Moreland argues that Faulkner moves, in mid-career, toward an ameliorative vision of repetition's possibilities—toward, in Moreland's terms, "revisionary" rather than "compulsive" repetition.

At stake in this argument is an attempt to position Faulkner favorably in relation to postmodernist critiques of High Literary Modernism. Using Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" as his primary orienting text, Moreland interprets modernism as a cultural equivalent of melancholy, which Freud describes as a compulsive repetition of a scene of trauma or loss, in an attempt to gain control of it. This attempt is always vain because, unlike mourning, melancholy does not work through and relinquish the core experience of pain or loss. Unlike mourning, that is, melancholy does not *grieve*. Modernism's cultural version of melancholy consists of a refusal to accept the inherently political nature of human existence—or, in a more general sense, to accept change and death. The characteristic intellectual and literary responses this refusal engenders are nostalgia and irony—nostalgia for a personal or cultural Eden somewhere back before history, and "a Mandarin-like disdain," in Hayden White's characterization of irony as a world view, "for those seeking to grasp the nature of social reality in either science or art" (*Metahistory*, 23).

In an argument bearing some resemblance to Eric Sundquist's in *Faulkner: The House Divided*, Moreland sees Faulkner as gradually freeing himself from modernism's world view. Focusing on the repeated rewritings of the "primal scene" of young Thomas Sutpen's rejection at the plantation door, Moreland shows how Faulkner moves beyond the nostalgia and irony of his earlier fiction, largely by extending imaginative sympathy to an increasing range of marginalized groups—poor whites in "Barn Burning" and *The Hamlet*, blacks in *Go Down, Moses*, women in *Requiem for a Nun*. Moreland's argument also explores a significant shift in the mode and method of Faulkner's fiction—a discovery, in Moreland's words, of how "humor, mourning, and different voices" provide "three openings for critical escape from *Absalom's* compulsive primal scene" (9).

Much of this is fresh, challenging, and exciting. Although the notion of revisionary patterns of repetition in Faulkner's fiction has been around since at least 1980, when it was explored, though incompletely, by David Wyatt in *Prodigal Sons*, no one has examined the idea with Moreland's thoroughness, intelligence, reach, and theoretical rigor. Yet when all due praise has been given, Moreland's book must be said to be deeply unsatisfactory, so much so that if the choice were limited to reading Faulkner Moreland's way or to not reading Faulkner, one might well choose not to read Faulkner.

A pervasive problem is the book's downplaying of the tragic dimension of Faulkner's vision, particularly in relation to the groups of marginalized characters at the center of its argument. As the son of an immigrant father and a hill-country mother, neither of whom received more than an eighth-grade education, I would be the last to deny that class, race, and gender inequality victimizes large numbers of Americans. But Moreland seems reluctant to acknowledge the further truth, that this victimization, when internalized, results in a self- and other-laceration not directly accessible to political forms of redress. Moreland's reluctance results in an oddly-skewed series of readings: 1) an interpretation of "Barn Burning" in which a brief and grudging acknowledgement of the pain Ab Snopes causes is separated by over one hundred pages from the main discussion of the story; 2) an interpretation of *The Hamlet* in which criticisms of Flem Snopes's chicanery are always interpreted as scapegoating on the part of the residents of Frenchman's Bend; and, most strikingly, 3) a view of *Requiem for a Nun's* Nancy Mannigoe and Temple Drake as a hardy band of proto-feminists, dedicated to "radical breaks in certain habits of thought and practice surrounding sexual and gender issues" (238)—including, evidently, a highly unusual reconceptualizing of the notion of female responsibility for infant nurture!

A larger difficulty is the book's Reaganite moral economy, its easy assumption, in both artistic and political terms, of inflationary solutions to the psychic and social dilemmas it discusses. At one point, Moreland quotes Irving Howe's 1952 challenge to Faulkner to "examin[e] Negro consciousness from within, rather than as it is seen or surmised by white characters" (162). The objection to Howe's challenge that immediately springs to mind—that of the unbridgeable alterity of black experience—measures the critical and political distance we have travelled since 1952. Moreland disregards this objection, instead arguing that the "strategic *non*articulateness" of Faulkner's blacks is a form of speech. This disregard, when combined with a similar disregard on the fronts of class and gender, produces a vision of Faulkner as serenely and imperially appropriating to his own uses provinces of marginal discourse. One wonders how black and female and lower-class readers will respond to this interpretation. However they do, it should be clear that the interpretation avoids confronting an essential problem of a multi-racial, egalitarian democracy—the problem of how to negotiate accommodations among the varying, often incommensurate, political agendas of different races and classes, and of the two sexes. (Moreland's view seems to be that no negotiation is necessary, that we can simply endlessly diversify, in both psychic and social terms. This is not, I think, Faulkner's view, nor that of most responsible social critics.)

Moreland's inflationary economy has other unfortunate consequences. For

one, it seriously distorts the shape of Faulkner's later career, by ignoring his evident dismay over the disappearance of a traditional, pre-modern south. For another, it declasses, deracinates, and degenders Faulkner himself. David Hume says somewhere that there is a little testicle in everything we do. Contemporary feminist theory alerts us, if a warning indeed be needed, to the restricted reference of the pronoun in this statement. It also demonstrates, through the agency of *écriture feminine*, the hymeneal quality inhabiting everything women do. But neither these cautionary observations, nor the evident permeability of the two identities, the presence of the female within the male and the male within the female, overturns the truth—the essential truth —of Hume's observation. William Faulkner is a white male southern bourgeois writer. Many people are willing to argue that this is no very bad set of identities for him to possess. But one would rather see him excoriated for possessing them than see them ignored in the way Moreland ignores them. His doing so gnosticizes a very considerable, and quite refractory, artistic talent. It creates a Faulkner without ego, without personal, artistic, or familial ambition, without pride of sex or region, without conflict, without anguish—a Faulkner, in short, profoundly and irretrievably boring.

*Faulkner and Modernism* also leads one to meditate on the sad fate literary appreciation has suffered in recent years. The book is grammatically correct, precise and clear in its argument, rigorous and self-consistent in its use of analytic terminology. But it is largely indifferent to the delights of language, either Faulkner's or the author's own. Consider the following example:

> But lest such mistaken belief seem to be finally corrected and replaced in *The Hamlet* by a simplistically innocent (structurally anti-Semitic) scapegoating of a newly demystified, delegitimated liberal capitalism—or by a simplistically ironic acceptance (and remystification) of that same capitalism—Faulkner in "The Fire and the Hearth" rewrites again Flem's apparently pure, bloodless capitalism in the effectively critical context of its relation to that more complex, reciprocal, symbolic exchange which it attempts but fails to reduce altogether to token counters or alibis within its own systematization of exchange. (168)

Faulkner had some highly idiosyncratic ways of relating to the systematization of exchange. When asked how he managed to sit through seemingly interminable Hollywood story conferences, he said, "I just keep saying to myself, 'They're going to pay me on Saturday. They're going to pay me on Saturday.'" Academic reviewing is not a paying profession, but as I worked my way through Moreland's theoretically rigorous, determinedly unliterary, seemingly interminable sentences, I found myself thinking that it ought to be.

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*Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: The Contemporaneity of Modernism* by Charles Altieri. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. 529. $49.50.

Elizabeth Bishop concludes the long, miscellaneous travelogue of "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" with a complaint: the sights that seemed so full of significance when pictured in the family Bible appear trivial and mundane when visited in person. The aching desire with which she ends the poem is that significance might make itself plain to the eye; her ambition is to look so hard, so deeply, as to look "our infant sight away." This ambition is a common one among modern poets, who often call upon eyesight to transcend its dumb condition and speak, or, as Charles Altieri puts it in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*, "to marshal the necessary responding intelligence that leads it far beyond the immediate moment of vision without ever turning the object into symbol or sign" (186). According to Altieri, the modern poet's emulation of the modern painter begins with the apparent ability of abstract art to accomplish this seemingly impossible task, to push the resources of vision so far they yield a significance as powerful as that provided by history or theology. Seen with such an eye, the sites of Bishop's travelogue would have brimmed with the sort of meaning her Bible provided by adding words to the picture.

In Altieri's account, the gap between the Bible illustration, with its load of significance, and the empty site itself is expressed as a set of contradictions that have become peculiarly acute in the modern period. These "insuperable gaps" between fact and value, judgment and subjectivity, the public and the private, have been opened up by "the increasing reliance of Western culture on empiricist criteria" (1). Empiricism has left the modern writer stranded before a scene once full of significance and meaning but now revealed as a mere sand pit, grubby and ignorable. The allure of abstract art comes from its power to transform sand into spirit without adding any ingredients.

Altieri calls the sort of art that can accomplish this difficult trick "constructivist abstraction." Manipulating the canvas in such a way as to reveal its own powers of construction, abstract art creates what Altieri calls a "metaphysical theater" (34) on whose stage physical relationships mime the imagination behind them. Working with the purely literal, with materials as plain as Mondrian's lines and squares, the abstract artist creates out of the syntax of shapes an allegory of the shaping spirit. The literal is lifted above itself by this allegory, which, unlike traditional allegory, does not promise anything beyond the site itself. Instead, constructivist abstraction lends significance "by making the composing energies [of the artist] exemplify possible dispositions of mind with which an audience is invited to identify" (396).

In this way, constructivist abstraction leads the arts past the contradictions of modernity, linking the empirical to spirit without asking it to surrender any of its literal meanness, linking individual passions and energies to "transpersonal and law-governed states" (103) by objectifying in spatial relationships the potentialities of the individual imagination. This solution is obviously and openly Kantian: "The inner coherence that in Kant depended on fidelity to the form and content of the rational law is available for artists through the coherence that they give their compositional act" (121). In fact,

Altieri re-introduces us to an old friend, "purposiveness without purpose," that "undefinable inner lawfulness of the work" (104) that has been from the very inception of modernism its peculiar claim to seriousness and moral probity even when its content has seemed idiosyncratic or depraved. Thus Altieri boldly returns to the debate on modernism a whole set of concepts whose stock has fallen so low it has virtually dropped from sight: formalism; autonomy; aesthetic idealism. To say these words nowadays is to risk having one's mouth washed out with soap, but even readers who may harbor their own sneaking admiration for one or the other of them might wonder at their effect on the argument of this book.

Altieri declares at the outset that he does not intend to connect poetry and painting in any of the usual ways, not by exposing a cultural or intellectual context that contains them both, nor by describing specific influences and borrowings. Nor does he intend to follow in the tradition begun by Jean Hagstrum and continued by W. J. T. Mitchell and Wendy Steiner by proposing an aesthetic theory that can link language and visual images. Instead, the argument relies on analogy, which is to say on the idealism of aesthetic idealism. The analogies themselves are somewhat circular, dependent as they are on terms like "semantics" or "syntax," applied without explicit justification to painting and then loaned back, as it were, to poetry. This kind of analogical reasoning removes all the resistance between the arts created by their very different material realities. Writers closest to the visual arts often have a far livelier sense of these differences, which is why Frank O'Hara wrote "Why I Am Not a Painter," and why Gertrude Stein, for all her admiration of Picasso, bristled when he tried to write poetry. The ease with which Altieri's argument slides from painter to poet even when there are no specific connections to be made suggests one danger of aesthetic idealism, which can bleed the individual fact of all its specificity and relieve the critic of the need to theorize the relationship between very different arts.

It may also be worth noting that Altieri calls on Kant to resolve contradictions that at least some later philosophers, notably Hegel, thought were *caused* by Kant. When Altieri defends the concept of a subjectivity "so fundamental to certain recurrent human experiences that it is impossible to bind to the practices of a specific society" (374), he resurrects a transcendental ideal often blamed for the very split between subject and object, private and public, he begins by lamenting. Though Altieri tends to blame this split on empiricism, it has been common since Kant to see his ahistorical formalism as equally, if very differently, to blame.

Similar reservations might be based on the criteria Altieri establishes for himself at the outset, when he says he wants to show how an understanding of modernist abstraction "helps us to read concrete works of art closely" (8). To this end, after four long chapters of background, the argument turns to a series of poets: first Eliot, who stages certain problems without being able to solve them; then Williams, Stein, Stevens, Moore, and Yeats, who illustrate various modes of abstraction; and then Pound and Stevens again, who stand as the most successful translators of constructivist abstraction into poetry. Interestingly, the freshest readings are those of Eliot, whose failure is described as an unresolved "struggle between metonymy and metaphor" (149). These readings refresh precisely because Altieri need not defend Eliot by making

everything in his work cohere, so that instead of standing as modernism's ideal example of "purposiveness without purpose," *The Waste Land* indicates instead the nagging absence of the ideal. This is not because the poem fails to synthesize, but rather because it synthesizes so relentlessly and on so many different levels that synthesis overwhelms itself and collapses in confusion. In contrast, Altieri describes the success of Pound and Stevens in much more conventional terms, as the discovery of "relational principles that can be direct testimony to some basic truth or possible value" (314). The ethical success of art has been measured by the quality and extent of its internal relations at least since Pater, and the only thing that distinguishes Altieri's version of this standard from, say, Kenner's patterned energies, is its level of abstraction.

Altieri has another ambition besides offering new readings of the major modernist poets. The sub-title of this volume is a purposely provocative gesture aimed at the post-modern anti-modernist consensus, which, Altieri suggests, has not overcome modernism but merely recreated its antinomies at another level. Despite its reliance on widely discredited concepts like autonomy, the sort of aesthetic neo-liberalism offered here is, Altieri claims, much more seriously engaged in the political than most post-modernisms: "We find ourselves affirming lyric desires and modes of creative activity that rely solely on powers in ourselves that we realize, as we exercise them, are also available to everyone else" (213). What Altieri attempts to do, then, is to begin an aesthetic version of the post-Rawlsian project to drag from liberal formalism some fundamental moral or ethical principles. The very need to formalize, to generalize, becomes in this version an ethical guarantee: "If we can project what constitutes the full intensity of our individualizing energies, and if we have articulate public testimony for the emotional engagements such energies mobilize, we have strong grounds for insisting that a political system is legitimate only to the degree to which it makes those maximal conditions of experience available to an entire populace" (376). Thus the autonomy of the individual mind, with all its constructivist energies and powers, becomes by analogical extension the basis of the polis.

The engagement of this book with specific works of art and literature may be a bit shallow, its attempts to theorize the concrete connections between the arts fitful and incomplete, because its real interests are political. Altieri intends to mount an argument for modernism that will confound its many antagonists by showing that aesthetic modernism provides a sounder basis for solving the basic political problems of the contemporary period than any of its successor movements. What he calls "aesthetic idealism" is what post-structuralism has denounced under the name of "aesthetic ideology," and he intends to argue, in the very teeth of the opposition, that such widely discredited concepts as subjectivity, autonomy, coherence, reconciliation, are in fact the building blocks of an emancipatory politics. Where most contemporary critics follow Benjamin and denounce any attempt to resolve political issues by translating them into aesthetic terms, Altieri bases his entire claim for modernism on precisely this translation. *Painterly Abstraction* thus takes its place among other recent volumes, by writers as drastically different as Leon Chai and Terry Eagleton, that attempt to begin the rehabilitation of the aesthetic itself.

At the most basic level, both the weaknesses and the strengths of this book come from the militant position it must assume if it is to grant any value to the aesthetic at all. The writing is characterized by a restless proliferation of needlessly oblique terms for the same basic constructivist qualities: "imaginative attitudes"; "figurative energies"; "legislative energies"; "mobile lyric energies"; "constitutive intensities." These, and another set of terms having to do with scene and agency, which recall Kenneth Burke and could benefit from some reference to him, give the impression that Altieri is painfully and elaborately inventing his own language. This hardly seems worth the immense effort, since many of the basic concepts in this argument are old and familiar. Yet, in a time when the aesthetic itself needs defense, it may be necessary to mount a strategy that laboriously reinvents the wheel. The doggedness of the argument will also daunt many readers, though it is most extravagantly protracted in a series of prodigious footnotes that can be skipped. But the author may very well lay his reasoning out at such length because he feels that he is taking an uncommon and unpopular position, and it is the real strength of this book that it does not shrink from entertaining ideas usually dyed with the deepest dye. To defend abstraction, modernism, liberalism, aestheticism, formalism, and idealism all in one book has at least the virtue of courage. If the book does not succeed in rehabilitating these terms, if it does not make us forget why they have fallen into disrepute, it may still revitalize the debate by recalling why they once had such persuasive power.

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