

1987

Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

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

Recommended Citation

Editors, Criticism (1987) "Book Reviews," *Criticism*: Vol. 29: Iss. 2, Article 6.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol29/iss2/6>

Book Reviews

Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola by Rachel Bowlby. New York and London: Methuen, 1985. Pp. 188. \$25.00, cloth; \$9.95, paper.

Modes of Production of Victorian Novels by Norman Feltes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Pp. 125. \$18.95.

Just what are commodities, and why are so many literary critics suddenly interested in them?

The traditional answer to the first question, the answer given by the classical political economists and then elaborated by Marx, is far from simple:

Commodities come into the world in the shape of use-values, articles, or goods, such as iron, linen, corn, &c. This is their plain, homely, bodily form. They are, however, commodities, only because they are something twofold, both objects of utility, and, at the same time, depositories of value. They manifest themselves therefore as commodities, or have the form of commodities, only in so far as they have two forms, a physical or natural form, and a value form. (*Capital*, p. 55)

Ambivalence is, thus, the essence of the commodity. It is composed of what Marx here calls two forms, but what he elsewhere calls two values; moreover, the elementary form of the commodity is the *contrast* between these two values. That is, the commodityness of the thing appears only when the two values diverge: "the elementary form of value of a commodity is the elementary form in which the contrast contained in that commodity, between use-value and value, becomes apparent" (p. 71). The conditions under which this divergence takes place are those of commodity exchange; hence exchange value is closely related to what Marx in the above sentence simply calls the commodity's "value" as opposed to the use-value of the thing. However, the commodity value of a thing and its exchange value are not identical, for the latter is merely the phenomenal form of the "value." In trying to say what a commodity is, therefore, we immediately find ourselves trying to grasp a set of differences between forms. Moreover, there doesn't seem to be a substance in sight; the physical object is the "bodily form" of the commodity, but the commodity can only be apprehended as the difference between two forms, not as a substance with definable properties.

There are, of course, other ways of talking about commodities, but variations on these Marxist themes are what currently intrigue many literary critics. And we can see why if we notice similarities between Marx's discussion of commodities and structuralist/post-structuralist accounts of language. In the latter, we find once again a "thing" composed entirely of differentials, for a word, like a commodity, has both a material form and a "value," or meaning, and the wordness of the word manifests itself only as the difference between these two forms. Moreover, as in the case of commodities, exchange is the condition under which this divergence appears. That is, the relationship of difference between signifier and signified, the relationship which constitutes the sign, is only seen when the relative meanings of words are in play,

just as the divergence between utility and value is only apparent when commodities are exchanged. Literary critics, then, are noticing that economics and semiotics have a great deal in common, and, of course, a number of French thinkers in the late nineteen-sixties and seventies made these and other links explicitly. Now that American critics, schooled in deconstruction, seek ways of integrating political and historical issues with literary analyses, certain French social theorists of the last decade seem especially pertinent.

Hence we have here two books considering literature and commodity exchange, one inspired primarily by Jean Baudrillard and the other primarily by Louis Althusser. Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking. Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*¹ attempts to renew an interest in the economics of literature by noticing that economics is itself a semiotic system just as language is a system of exchange. Similarly, Norman Feltes's *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*² invokes Pierre Macherey's Althusserian description of the text and its economic context as an extended "structuration . . . a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces" (p. 8). Moreover, both books seek to historicize this subject, to tell us how the literary and economic histories of the Nineteenth Century affected each other. They take as their starting-point increases in commodity production that altered literature as much as any other commodity. Bowlby's book is far more concerned with the structural parallels between linguistic and commodity exchange, but both are interested in the concrete social interpenetration of the two kinds of exchange, especially through the commodification of works of literature.

This initial point of departure, however, is almost all the books have in common. Bowlby's is a comparative study of six naturalist novels, all of which treat commodification as an important theme. Bowlby tends to regard the commodity simply as a thing-in-the-marketplace without a history; that is, she regards commodities primarily from the positions of the distributor and the potential consumer. In contrast, Norman Feltes investigates how the Victorians fabricated "commodity-texts" and "commodity-books," reconstituting the literary marketplace in the process; he scrutinizes commodities from the point-of-view of the producer. The peculiar angles of vision of both books help account for their weaknesses as well as their strengths.

One finds in Rachel Bowlby's book certain confusions that typify and seriously impair semiologically-inspired analyses of commodity exchange. Such analyses often start from the premise that exchange and production are simply opposed categories both in reality and in the nineteenth-century imagination. Here, for example, is a section of her historical-theoretical framework:

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a radical shift in the concerns of industry: from production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires. The process of commodification, whereby more and more goods . . . were offered for sale, marks the ascendancy of exchange value over use value, in Marx's terms. From now on, it is not so much the object in itself—what function it serves—which matters, as its novelty or attractiveness, how it stands out from other objects for sale. The commodity is a sign whose value is derived from its monetary price relative to other commodities,

and not from any inherent properties of usefulness or necessity.

(p. 2)

This passage contains several confusions, the most fundamental of which is the equation of "production" with "use value" implied by the statement that the "shift" from "production to selling" is the same as the "ascendancy of exchange value over use value." But within the context of nineteenth-century "industry," that is, within the context of capitalism, production was always production for exchange, never for use. The phrase "production for use" means production for the use of the producer—the very kind of production that was considered irrelevant to nineteenth-century industry in any of its phases. The classical political economists banished use from the legitimate economic concerns of capitalism; hence any shift in concern from production to marketing was certainly not a sign of the ascendancy of exchange over use. The theoretical preoccupation with production in the first half of the century (a preoccupation inherited by Marx) was always an attempt to explain the origins of exchange value without resorting to considerations of use.

Bowlby is right to point out that there is a theoretical shift away from production as the true source of a commodity's value in the second half of the century that parallels a new emphasis on marketing in economic practice. However, that shift is merely a rethinking of exchange value, which was always the central "concern of industry." Indeed, and ironically in the context of Bowlby's argument, it is within this shift away from a stress on production that use is resuscitated as an economic category in the writings of the marginal utility theorists. In short, the suggestion that use might be the source of exchange value is what leads to the theoretical deemphasis on production. Hence, far from use and production being associated phenomena forgotten in a new notion of the autonomy of pure exchange, exchange only gains a theoretical independence from production by attaching itself to use.

The second confusion in the above-quoted passage concerns the source of a commodity's value. Bowlby states that it derives "from its monetary price relative to other commodities." This may, in fact, be her belief, and it is certainly characteristic of an account of economic value modeled on linguistic exchange. However, by invoking Marx, and only Marx, as an authority in the paragraph, she implies that this is Marx's view. But Marx never confused a commodity's value with its exchange value, let alone with its price. Once again leaving aside the category of use altogether, for Marx a commodity's value, its exchange value, and its price can all be different. Moreover, the source of value is certainly not in price but in abstract labor. One might reasonably disagree with Marx on this point, but Bowlby doesn't present her position as disagreement. By substituting a simplified version of Baudrillard for Marx, Bowlby pares down Marx's economics to fit the semiotic model. Repeatedly in the analyses of the novels, the relational nature of value is reduced to the idea of the arbitrariness of monetary price.

The confusion of the emphasis on production with an emphasis on use and its concomitant assumption that exchange is only an issue late in the century and the confusion that places the source of a commodity's value in its price are major theoretical and historical misunderstandings. Unfortunately, they are invoked repeatedly in the analyses of the novels, as is another conceptual

muddle that confronts us in the book's introduction. Naturalism, we are told, is a parallel practice to sociology, for both aim at representations of the social in "objective, impersonal language" (p. 10). Naturalism, we are then told, is thus mechanistic and finally "on the borders between art and industry" (p. 10). Here we have another conceptual elision, this one merging sociology, mechanism, and "industry." In reality, sociology emerged as a discipline to counter what its proponents claimed were the overly mechanical explanations of social life provided by earlier political economists. Like Naturalism, sociology derived in part from a new organicism, and its relationship to "industry" was a complicated one. But Bowlby's analyses do not accommodate such complexities. They take a stark dichotomy to be the ruling scheme of the late nineteenth-century mind: objective analysis, machines, and "industry" face off against sentimental moralizing, feelings, and "art" (pp. 9-10).

It isn't surprising when in novel after novel these dichotomies fail to sustain themselves. Bowlby seems to want to attribute their collapse to the cunning of the form or to the unsustainability of binary oppositions in general. But the breakdowns could just as easily be traced to the fact that such simplistic antinomies are an inadequate substitute for a nuanced understanding of late nineteenth-century intellectual history. Bowlby, then, gives no adequate historical account of the main phenomena she seeks to relate: naturalism and commodity exchange. Like the consumers she describes, she pays scant attention to how the objects of her gaze came to be there, and hence she is sometimes mistaken about exactly what they are.

Nevertheless, *Just Looking* should be commended for linking economic and literary phenomena to late nineteenth-century redefinitions of femininity and masculinity. The first half of the book examines three novels, Gissing's *Eue's Ransom*, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*. They are insightfully, if too briefly, analyzed as works tracing the changes in feminine perception and self-perception demanded by women's new role as consumers in societies devoting more and more of their resources to the lavish display and advertisement of commodities. Bowlby may rely too uncritically on Jean Baudrillard's *La société de consommation* for her description of late nineteenth-century social experience, but she puts him to good use when she combines some of his insights with Freud's to reach her fundamental idea about the connection between women and commodities:

Seducer and seduced, possessor and possessed of one another, women and commodities flaunt their images at one another in an amorous regard which both extends and reinforces the classical picture of the young girl gazing into the mirror in love with herself. The private, solipsistic fascination of the lady at home in her boudoir, or Narcissus at one with his image in the lake, moves into the worldly, public allure of *publicité*, the outside solicitations of advertising.

(p. 32)

If the novels show the contradictions women from the provinces confront in becoming properly feminine (passive but narcissistically desirous) in urban consumer societies, they also investigate the anomalies of masculinity. For masculinity becomes associated with the mastery of women through their

commodification, and the act of selling turns out to imperil stable identities as much as that of buying a self-image. Hence, the man cannot stay in charge of the woman's fantasy life, but instead finds himself disoriented inside a fantasmal reality.

The second half of the book analyzes three different novels by the same novelists: Gissing's *New Grub Street*, Dreiser's *The "Genius"*, and Zola's *L'Oeuvre*. In these novels, the commodity under discussion is the work of art itself, and hence the representation of commodification becomes self-reflective through the theme of the commodification of representation. This is a promising direction for the study to take, but unfortunately it yields relatively superficial analyses. Indeed, this section of the book is dominated by tedious plot summaries designed to show that "broadly speaking, Dreiser, Gissing and Zola are (respectively) for, against and neutral with regard to contemporary developments in commerce and culture and their relations" (p. 12).

In this half of the book, moreover, confusions about the problem of value become most acute, for the economic issues are folded into related but nevertheless separate questions of aesthetic value. There is no doubt that in the last half of the Nineteenth Century writers became fascinated with the relationships between economic and aesthetic value, but Bowlby's account of the several positions on this subject once again simplifies and distorts both the problem and its proposed solutions. Bowlby takes William Dean Howells's equivocation over the concept of value in an essay on "The Art of the Ad-smith" to be typical of the period's ambivalence: is the work of art "need or luxury"; is its value "absolute or monetary?" (p. 92) Here Bowlby has found in Howells an echo or anticipation of the semiological model of value. The relevant opposites are once again imagined to be use value and an "arbitrary" exchange value. This formulation, as we have already seen, is faulty because it assumes that exchange values are arbitrary. But a further confusion arises when "need" and "absolute" aesthetic value are associated. In her rush to assimilate aesthetic and economic discourses, Bowlby implies that an art work's intrinsic value and its use value should be the same thing merely because they are both juxtaposed to exchange value. This confusion of use with absolute value and exchange with "arbitrary" relative value had been lurking around from the beginning of the book when we were told that the commodity's use value is "the object in itself" and its "inherent properties." One would always be hard put to defend such essentialism, since "use" is, quite obviously, a profoundly relational (some have argued "subjective") concept. But when the commodity under discussion is a work of art, this formulation stands out as especially odd, for the idea of "inherent" aesthetic value at the end of the nineteenth century was often asserted in contradistinction to usefulness. Although some thinkers tried to ground aesthetic value in necessity, the cultural elitism that Bowlby rightly detects in Howells and Gissing culminated in the refusal to ground artistic value in utility; that is, it insisted on seeing the work of art as an end in itself. Hence, what Bowlby ignores in her brief look at nineteenth-century pronouncements on the relationship between economic and aesthetic value is the decisive contemporary linking of artistic worth and purposelessness.

The same faulty polarity between use (absolute) value and exchange (relative and arbitrary) value keeps Bowlby from understanding why Trollope,

whom she contrasts to Howells, would have likened himself to a common laborer and even claimed that he sometimes found his work distasteful but performed it for money. Bowlby sees this as a capitulation to the marketplace's imposition of "arbitrary" exchange values. Trollope, however, invokes labor to ground value; it is his bulwark against arbitrariness. He seems to want to assure us that his books, like all other commodities, get their value from the labor invested in them. If the labor is distasteful, that just makes it all the more truly laborious, all the more like the abstract labor of the political economists. Trollope tries to imagine exchange value as relative but not arbitrary by stressing that the system of exchanges is rooted in "rules of labour." That is, his effort is to show that novel writing is productive labor and hence the basis of, rather than simply an instance of, exchange.

Of course, Trollope's productivist solution to the problem of reconciling economic and artistic values is even more obviously problematic than a use-centered solution, for the amount of time spent in writing a novel is clearly in no direct relationship to its literary quality. Abstract labor, a category necessary to the calculation of commodity value, is a common denominator of "life" expended in a given unit of time, almost a biological concept, that leaves all particulars about the producer and the nature of the work out of account. Certain kinds of skill and knowledge can be figured into the calculations, but these must be almost automatically acquirable in some standardized length of time. For example, the training hours of a skilled artisan might be accumulated abstract labor affecting the value of an hour of his or her work. But other qualitative differences among producers—differences in intelligence, talent, perceptual keenness, sense of humor, mathematical aptitude, manual dexterity—elude the productivist theory of value, at least at the level on which most Victorian writers invoked it. Qualitative differences among artificers, though, are what seemed to explain differences in art works. And that is one of the reasons why the standard account of economic value seemed so woefully inadequate to an explanation of literary value. Even if Ryder Haggard had spent as much time on *She* as George Eliot spent on *Middlemarch*, the two novels would not have seemed equally valuable. The point is not that *Middlemarch* is just absolutely a better novel, but that the criteria of social valuation that led to the consensus on *Middlemarch's* superiority were simply not the same as those used to figure either the novels' relative commodity values or their prices. Hence, Trollope's emphasis on labor was even at the time a feeble foundation for a joint theory of value, but it should be understood as an attempt to fix values and not as a celebration of their arbitrariness.

The problem for the late Victorians was not that they saw literary value as "absolute" and commodity value as "arbitrary." Both values could be and generally were seen as relative, but as relative to different things. Economic and aesthetic discussions were increasingly superimposed and counterposed at the end of the century, but the superimpositions and counterpositions were different from and far more intricate than those identified by Bowlby.

Just Looking, then, like many other works that model economic on linguistic exchange, consistently misconstrues or elides the contemporary emphasis on production. In contrast, Norman Feltes's *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*, as the title suggests, takes production to be the primary category of

the cultural history it investigates; "the organization of the market for books," Feltes writes in his first chapter, "was only an extension of the organization of the production of books" (p. 5). Similarly, he warns us in the preface that he does not give "readings" of the novels because he is "trying to discuss each work from the point of view of its production and not . . . as object of consumption" (p. vii). Feltes's main thesis is that the mode of production of a novel is a "determinant ideological structure" that "interpellates" its audience. Moreover, it is this labor of interpellation (and no "arbitrary" process of pricing) that gives a text its economic value: "a commodity-text takes its value from the labor power ('imagination') expended in the very process of interpellation" (p. 9).

Modes of Production of Victorian Novels is, then, a productivist book, but because it analyzes production as an ideological structure, it generally avoids seeming reductive. It is, in many ways, a more thoughtful and demanding book than *Just Looking*. It takes pains to make distinctions between different kinds of literary commodities. It pays close attention to historical detail, especially in recounting and reinterpreting the economic history of Victorian publishing. The brief analyses of the texts are narrowly but effectively focused on their "ideological content," which is arrived at in the process of various struggles that take place over the novels' production. For example, *Pickwick Papers* has an ideological form (the commodity-text produced in monthly parts) with an ideological effect (a sense at once of plenitude and individuation) and an ideological content (a celebration of "corporatism"). Authors in Feltes book are not threatened by a vaguely conceived "marketplace," but are instead attempting to get greater control over specific forms of their work: over the production of triple-deckers for the circulating libraries, or magazine publication in "class" periodicals, or the publication of "net" books.

Despite its precision and its often convincing reinterpretations of the evidence, however, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* concentrates so exclusively on production that it ignores other factors that would seem to be bound up with the economic history. One begins to miss Bowlby's recognition that the economic struggles of nineteenth-century writers were often woven into anxieties about literary value. Whereas Bowlby simplifies and distorts the connections, Feltes is indifferent to them. In his account, Victorians seemed to have no anxiety about the commodification of fiction *per se*; they are only struggling over specific forms, just as they would be as workers in any industry. One might object, in Feltes's own terms, that the ideological production of "literary value" as a concept goes unexplored.

A specific instance of this general problem occurs in the chapter on *Middlemarch*, which analyzes George Eliot's negotiations with her publisher John Blackwood over the format of the novel's publication. Feltes sees the negotiations as a part of Eliot's project of professionalization, a project complicated by her gender. The presentation of Lydgate in the novel, he argues, is determined by a contradiction between Eliot's desire for professional status and the fact that professionalization is a "monopolization of status and work privileges" which was historically excluding women. In response to this contradiction, Eliot thematically tries to turn "profession" into "vocation" and thus to elide the organizational issues even as she proposes a mode of publication that would give her a more exclusive control over the production of her novel.

This analysis has much to recommend it, but it does not address the particular problems of professionalization faced by novelists as novelists. Rather, the contradiction Feltes identifies is one that might be faced by any woman trying to achieve any professional status. Eliot, however, confronted a difficulty in the very concept of the professional novelist. As Feltes points out, there are few references to the organizational project of professionals in *Middlemarch*, but those few emphasize why Victorian ideas of literature would make it a product ill-suited to the monopolistic necessity of professional organization. The references stress that normal professions come into being by withholding, reserving, knowledge. The narrator refers to "efforts to secure purity of knowledge by making it scarce" and to the "expensive and highly-rarified" knowledge of the medical profession. The novelist's self-concept comes into sharp conflict with this model of professionalism, for she emphatically denies being in the business of withholding knowledge while dispensing a service based on that knowledge. Eliot's idea of literature held that there was no difference between her knowledge and her service; her product, her knowledge, her service were all one. And although the value of her products would be in some complicated relationship to its scarcity, she must believe in the theoretical good of their most complete dissemination. To get her knowledge "owned" by as many people as possible was the express purpose of her negotiations with Blackwood's. And it would, indeed, be difficult to insist that Eliot's ideas of the novelist's mission and of the peculiar relationship between knowledge and service in the literary enterprise were mere mystifications. For, to take another instance of the paradox of the "professional author," we might note that the last two decades of the nineteenth century simultaneously saw professional organization (the Society of Authors) and a flood of literary handbooks purporting to tell people how to write their own novels. One can hardly imagine leaders of the Royal Society of Surgeons in the same era putting out advice books about how to begin your obstetrical practice in your spare time.

Hence, if Eliot ignores the monopoly-of-knowledge aspect of professionalization, that may be because it contradicts her occupational identity and not just her gender. But Feltes misses this possibility because he wishes to see Eliot as a woman "selling her intellectual labor power" like any other would-be female professional. He is not interested in what might be specific to the intellectual labor of novelistic authorship or the dissemination of its products. In short, the productivist account leads, predictably, to the abstraction that makes particular kinds of labor and particular kinds of commodities irrelevant. For, as we've seen, only such an abstraction allows the calculation of the values originating in production: commodity value and surplus value. Although he frequently invokes the novels' "overdetermination," his effort is to make an historically specific analysis using only those causes that would fit under an abstractly conceived category of "production."

Feltes, therefore, takes a common historical trajectory of capitalism, the change from petty-commodity production to a "fully capitalist mode of production," and maps onto it the Nineteenth Century's modes of novelistic publication. To the petty commodity mode conforms the "commodity-book" in Feltes's scheme, to the fully capitalist mode conforms the "commodity-text." This is certainly a useful distinction to make, but unfortunately neither the

empirical nor the theoretical grounds for making it are clear. Feltes does not use the book/text distinction to mark simply the difference between what the publisher produces and sells, the physical book, and what the author produces and (sometimes) sells, the text, that "incorporeal property" that one has the right to copy if one owns the copyright. In the early chapters, Feltes seems to be distinguishing instead between novels that were published at the outset in the form of books and those that were published in some other form. He starts with an instance of the latter, Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, and it appears in this analysis that the key to the commodity-text is serial publication: "Whether the commodity-text is to take the particular form of a series of books, a magazine serial or a part-issue novel, series production, by allowing the bourgeois audience's ideological engagement to be sensed and expanded, allows as well the extraction of ever greater surplus value from the very production (or creative) process itself" (p. 9). The commodity-book, on the other hand, generally took the form of the triple-decker, in which the emphasis was on the accumulated physical bulk of the novel: "And thus, whereas the commodity-text interpellates the assumed 'normality' or classlessness of the individual bourgeois subject/reader, the commodity-book interpellates . . . the sense of an exclusive collectivity, as is implied by the 'prestige' and 'grandeur' associated with the three-decker" (p. 27). Most triple-deckers were too expensive for individuals to buy and hence reached the majority of their readers through Mudie's circulating library, but nevertheless Mudie's subscribers felt that the "comforting bulk" of the three-volume novel was giving them "value" for subscription money. The commodity-book is apparently a form of "petty commodity" because it is produced, like any luxury, for a tightly controlled but very limited group of consumers.

Feltes's distinction is intriguing and potentially important; however, the author never thoroughly defines and justifies it. One is left wondering, for example, if the distinction between a known and an unknown audience lines up as neatly and self-evidently as Feltes assumes it does with the distinction between triple-decker and serial forms of publication. One also misses some empirical evidence for the claim that the different kind of control exercised in serial production amounts to a vastly increased *degree* of publisher's control. (Incidentally, the well-known case of Dickens's involvement with *Pickwick Papers* would seem to argue the opposite.) Since in all cases, the novelist was asked to write to certain specifications of the form of publication, the publisher's control was never in doubt. The physical form was an important determinant of the text in all cases, and it seems odd to single out one form as somehow more physical than the others, especially since the novelist producing originally in serial form would normally have had eventual book publication in mind. In all cases, what the author produces is a text and what he sells is an exclusive right to copy that text in whatever form. The theoretical justification for imagining that one kind of reproduction leaves the publisher's commodity more "textual" than does another remains elusive.

Moreover, the distinction becomes even less clear at precisely the moment in the analysis when it seems most useful: the explanation in the last chapter of the disappearance of the triple-decker. For in this chapter, the association of commodity text with serial publication disappears. The commodity-text is now the single-volume "net" book, which also "interpellates an unspecified

'class' of unknown readers" (p. 87). Even though, for example, Forster's *Howards End* was published as a book, its physical bookness was less its selling point than its "reputation-value" as text. One might easily agree that the triple-decker was a more imposing physical object than twentieth-century novels generally are, that it was a "luxury" appealing to a known and select market, but one might still insist that the "reputation-value" of the text was hardly nugatory in the system of production and circulation of triple-deckers. In short, Feltes's very suggestive distinction between kinds of literary commodities seems insufficiently explored and justified and simultaneously too rigidly maintained.

For all of its shortcomings, however, *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* gives us a new way of thinking about the impact of forms of publication on what the novelist actually writes and on the text's reception. It is all the more frustrating, therefore, to see the enormous distance between this book and Bowlby's consumer-oriented treatment of fiction's commodification. The two studies seem to repel each other like a pair of magnets, and one wonders what theoretical breakthrough will be necessary to create a coherent field for the study of literature and economics.

University of California, Berkeley

Catherine Gallagher

Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic by Hazard Adams. Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1983. Pp. xiv + 466. \$17.50, paper.

Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of "Truth and Method" by Joel C. Weinsheimer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Pp. xiv + 278. \$20.00.

From antithetical perspectives, Hazard Adams and Hans-Georg Gadamer (in the first part of *Truth and Method*) tell the same story: that of the contest between symbolic and allegorical interpretation since the Romantic period. In Adams' view, the symbolic emerges as the redeeming basis of literary study; for Gadamer, it represents a doomed attempt to transcend the historical conditions of experience. Time and taste have been on Gadamer's side. The valorization of the symbol, especially in the writings of Cassirer, Langer, and Frye, now appears to have been a passing phase in recent critical history; it occupies the concluding chapters of Wimsatt's and Brooks's *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957) and the first chapters of Lentricchia's *After the New Criticism*. But the claims of theories of the symbolic deserve to be taken seriously, if the history of criticism is to be anything but a history of taste, and Adams is the first writer to have traced their development in detail.

One branch of the tradition constituted by Adams has been crucial in the development of twentieth-century thought: the movement that made the problematics of language central to criticism and philosophy. Here Vico is germane, followed by Herder and Humboldt, who argued that language is constitutive of thought. Croce belongs here too, in that he refused to separate language from literature. Parallel to this philosophic current is the critical tradition that valorized the symbol (Goethe, Coleridge, Carlyle, the French sym-

bolists, and Yeats). To these two streams the twentieth century added an emphasis on myth, evident in Jung, Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, and Gaston Bachelard. Their confluence leads to Cassirer, Langer, Philip Wheelwright, and Frye. Standing apart, analyzing the assumptions and ontologies of the symbolic, are Kant, crucial in framing the terms of the argument, and Vaihinger, who gave currency to the idea that even the sciences are fictions.

Abrams provides a summary and critique of the contributions that each of these writers has made to a philosophy of the literary symbolic. He rejects the religion, occultism, mysticism, and subjectivism that his predecessors have put within or beyond the symbol, which in his view cannot be separated from its material embodiment in the whole poem. To the "negations" that oppose body to soul, subject to object, symbol to allegory, and positivism to idealism, the symbolic is a "contrary": it merges antitheses in "identity." The symbol can be envisioned as a generative linguistic center from which other discourses emerge in a progression from myth to the antimyth of science, thence to the formalism of pure mathematics—at which point the circles can be turned inside out, the purely formal outer rim corresponding to the non-referential core from which the entire creation emerged. In generating culture and meaning, the secular symbolic produces the ratiocination that productively devours it (for example, literary interpretation) and destructively denies it.

Frye, about whom Adams writes with enthusiasm and insight, is the proximate source of this integration; behind both is of course Blake. What must be sacrificed in refurbishing the system for the contemporary world is belief, whether in the form of religious commitment or philosophic idealism: the symbolic is a "fiction." So long as science and referentiality can also be construed as fictions, the secularized symbolic can claim equal credence. Having reduced all to fiction, the theorist of the symbolic still wants to find some ground for the priority of his own fiction. This ground is irony—self-reflexive deprecation of his own claims, a freedom from the illusions that ensnare others. But in these circumstances, one must ask, why insist on the secularity of the symbolic? If one is willing to be ironic about astrology and mediums, as Yeats was, why should the symbolic be "secular"? Are some fictions truer than others?

The new critics also used self-referentiality and irony as defensive devices, but they identified literary language with metaphor—a figure already divided against itself—rather than with a symbolic realm prior to discursive reason. Yet their tendency to describe poems as organic unities or concrete universals based on paradox left them vulnerable, along with the symbolic school, to hermeneutic demystification. As others have noted, Paul de Man's essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969) marked a turning-point in recent critical history, reanimating the Romantic dispute about symbolism and allegory. Behind de Man lay Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960), as well as Benjamin's brilliant analysis of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928).

When the English translation of *Truth and Method* appeared in 1975, critics were caught up in polemics about structuralism and deconstruction. Richard Palmer's *Hermeneutics* (1969) had provided a groundwork for the American reception of Gadamer, as had de Man. But the terminology and habits of mind characteristic of modern German philosophy cannot easily be assimilated.

lated, nor can they simply be interposed in critical debates arising from phenomenological and structuralist thought. Consequently, hermeneutics has remained a peripheral concern in American critical theory. What has been needed is what Joel Weinsheimer, in *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, provides: an interpretation of his thought from an American perspective. This act of appropriation is one that Gadamer can explain: it involves a "fusion of horizons" across what he calls the "philosophical gulf . . . between Anglo-Saxon nominalism on the one hand and the metaphysical tradition on the Continent on the other" (quoted by Weinsheimer, p. 41).

Assaults on the natural sciences have been a hallmark of Gadamer's "meta—physical tradition." During the epoch of logical positivism, such critiques had a stable target: the claim that the method of science, based on theories combining observation statements with logical calculi, provided the only reliable means of identifying what can be called truth. As Weinsheimer shows in his admirable synopsis of the philosophy of science since the 1930s, that claim has been thoroughly discredited. In one sense, then, Gadamer's arguments against method were obsolete when published in 1960. But in another sense, his position has been strengthened by evidence from within the school of thought he opposed.

By viewing Gadamer and his tradition through American eyes, Weinsheimer bridges a gulf that has forestalled commerce between philosophic and critical traditions. After having done so in his sixty-page introduction, he undertakes a detailed, sympathetic reading of *Truth and Method* in three long chapters on aesthetics, historicism, and "Being at Home in Language." The first concerns the conception of aesthetics that we inherit from Kant. For Adams, the failure of Kant lay in his refusal to recognize in art a constitutive power of symbolic formation, identifiable with that of language itself. Instead, Kant drew back and attributed art's powers to "genius," springing from nature. Gadamer, like Adams, argues against this subjectification of aesthetics—but for entirely different reasons. Lodging art in the creator cuts it off from the audience as community and from the common sense, tact, and judgment that were Kant's heritage from the humanistic tradition. Literature is thus cut off from language—here conceived not as Adams would have it, but as a conventional means of attaining understanding through dialogue and rhetoric. By claiming access to a higher truth through a union of meaning and being, the symbolist saves art, but leaves mundane reality in the hands of pragmatists and scientists. Gadamer sees art as rooted in this reality, from which science is an abstraction. Allegory, a mode that moves from one meaning to another through shared conventions and traditions, is the paradigmatic figure for this conception of literature.

To trace the argument of *Truth and Method* in the compass of a review is impossible; Weinsheimer has condensed it to half its original length with exemplary lucidity. His footnotes mention criticisms that others have made of Gadamer, but he does not comment on the points at issue. At times Weinsheimer's tact and judiciousness cannot assuage a prejudiced reader—for example, one who thinks that Gadamer misrepresents the Schleiermacher who said that "the linguistic heritage modifies the spirit" and who, like Gadamer, sees conversation as the ideal model of hermeneutics. While Weinsheimer does note some of the points at issue between Gadamer and Derrida, he does

not attempt to highlight them. In explaining art through its analogy with festivals, and concluding his book with discussion of insight as "an event, the experience of understanding," Gadamer implicitly appeals to modes of authentication that cannot be derived from the identity of language and consciousness that he posits elsewhere. A textuality based on writing would deconstruct such traditional topoi.

But these arguments lie outside the scope of the task that Weinsheimer undertook. Gadamer's conception of interpretation and his concomitant rehabilitation of history and tradition can help resolve many of the problems that we inherited from the bifurcation of criticism and literary history in the 1930s. That division has been exacerbated in current polemics opposing sociopolitical to structuralist and deconstructive criticism. Weinsheimer shows that *Truth and Method* is as relevant today as it was when first published. And in his introductory discussion of the philosophy of science, he has provided a valuable corrective to the superficial and misleading references to the subject that are all too common in criticism. Once the importance of Gadamer's thought has been recognized, it will attract the serious discussion it deserves in this country. Weinsheimer's book sets the stage for this discussion.

University of Toledo

Wallace Martin

The Bible and the Narrative Tradition edited by Frank McConnell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Pp. 152. \$16.95.

An arresting visibility is given, by this collection of essays, to the convergence nowadays of literary scholarship and biblical exegesis. These two kinds of scholarly interest differ not only in method but also in orientation to biblical texts; the former relates the analysis and interpretation of the material to issues of literary history and theory while the latter relates them to religion and theology, particularly, in this book, to Protestant Christianity. This difference, along with the provocative quality of their work for which most of its contributors are known, strains the unity of the volume. But despite diversity, common preoccupations occur. Three stand out: narrativity, textuality, and canonicity. The current importance of these topics for both literary and biblical scholarship greatly enhances the book's stature.

On the question of the status, nature, and function of narrative discourse, these scholars, with one exception, agree that narrative is indispensable for human life and that narrative theory has deep epistemological consequences. The editor signals this theme when he remarks in his introduction that narrative and narratology, to the degree that they challenge the empiricism and rationalism of the culture, suggest that people perceive and share a human world not by common facts or ideas but by narrative (p. 17). Harold Bloom, treating the "uncanniness" in the "J" writer's depiction of the divine, argues that the narratives will always frustrate any attempt to develop from them some rationally consistent theology. "Yahweh is," says Bloom, "an uncanny personality, and not at all a concept" (p. 24). Herbert Schneidau puts his weight behind this point when he says that "the narratives transcend, even

evade, theology, more surely than they serve as vivid embodiments or dramatizations of it" (p. 133). And James Robinson, along with Donald Foster, relates the basic theological meaning of the four gospels to the role of the narrative form itself, Robinson by discussing the way in which the synoptic gospels, especially Matthew and Luke, secure the unity within early Christian belief between the experiences both of Jesus the man from Nazareth and the ascended Lord and Foster by describing how the Gospel of John allows itself, as a narrative, to play the role of consummating the life and work of Jesus (p. 127).

While these scholars agree that the narrative form is basic not only to the meaning of much biblical literature but also to the meaningfulness of human life itself, Hans Frei, a Protestant theologian, takes exception. For him the Christian Scriptures just "happen to be narrative" (p. 72), and the less made of this coincidence the better. He fears the loss of particularity with which the approach of narrative theory or literary criticism threatens the texts (p. 73).

The question to ask those who stress the primacy of narrative for an interpretation of biblical texts and an understanding of human life is why narrative has so fundamental a status. When answers to this question appear at all, as in Schneidau's essay, they seem neo-Kantian, and such answers seem inadequate to the epistemological claims made for narrative, especially over against modern rationalism. The question to ask Professor Frei, who discounts the form, is why, if it is Christologically incorrect to discount the form of divine appearance, biblical texts, along with what they may reveal about God, cannot also be taken to reveal something about the status and nature of narrative.

The topic of textuality is no less central to this book. Harold Bloom assumes it in his comments on interpretation as a power move. More interestingly, he implies that textuality refers us to the past, forgetting, it seems, that the future of "anxious expectations" (p. 28) is also textual. James Robinson builds his analysis of the synoptic gospels on assumptions concerning the relation of "Q" and Mark to textuality and of Luke and Matthew to the two of them. Foster's study of the Gospel of John hangs on the textual positioning of John and the use of textuality to defy its chronological position as the last of the four. And for Schneidau the iterability which textuality provides grants to biblical narratives a recurring role in Western history as subversive and de-centering.

On this topic Hans Frei again stands alone. He discounts textuality as much as narrativity and calls for the primacy of the "referent" which the "literal" reading of the Gospels (normative for Christians, he believes) upholds. In this he agrees with his principal adversary in this essay, David Tracy, who also, despite his use of the literary term "classic" to refer to biblical texts, moves behind the texts to the "classic event." The question to ask Frei is whether or not he is himself putting the horse before the cart, as he accuses others of doing. Do Christians read the Gospels because these texts refer to Jesus, who, they know by some other means, is authoritative, or do they know that Jesus is authoritative because the texts tell them so? The question to ask the others is how and why narrativity and textuality are inter-related, even inter-dependent.

Canonicity, the third of the interwoven topics, has a major role in McConnell's introduction. He attributes a cultural centrality to biblical texts: "... to read *this Book* is to learn to read" (p. 6). He traces Western writing as well as reading to a biblical source: the "variation, growth, exfoliation unprecedented among most of the great literary traditions of the world" he attributes to the Bible (p. 10). Canonicity plays so fundamental a role in Frei's essay that he does not address it directly, but it determines his interest in protecting the texts from "outside" readings. Robinson discusses the canonical transformations of Q and Mark, and Foster takes canonical status, even primacy, as the goal of the fourth Gospel. Finally, canonicity is the explicit topic of Frank Kermode's essay. He describes the attack of James Barr on Brevard Childs in order to get at the problem of fixed or closed and various or open Scriptures. Kermode is looking for an understanding of canonicity congenial to literary scholars who cannot have the authority and fixity which Christian communities confer on biblical literature.

The question to ask Kermode and the other literary scholars assembled here is whether or not canonicity or textual centrism is avoidable. What would they say to the charges of ideological and psychological repression which have recently been brought against the institution of literary canons? It would be useful to assemble these scholars and ask them to address directly this question: What is the common literary and theological stake in and defense of textual authority or centrality and what do both groups say about the possible consequence of canonicity, namely, the introduction of cultural or religious idolatry in the intertextual field.

Duke University

Wesley A. Kort

Diderot: Thresholds of Representation by James Creech. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986. Pp. x + 213. \$25.00.

In *Diderot: Thresholds of Representation*, James Creech takes up the awesome task of tracing and interpreting Diderot's exploration of representation; that is, Diderot's itinerant search for an answer to "the basic epistemological issue of how to know that we know" (p. 139). Professor Creech defines his approach as "anachronistic and 'anepistemic'" (p. 45). In other words, his analysis also takes to task Foucault's theory of the Classical *épistémé* (knowledge as transparent, mimetic representation of ideas and things, broken down and organized) and offers instead a "deconstructive" approach to the problem of representation which can account for what Creech calls the "space" between: all quests for adequate representation are bound to fail since the "gap" between *signifiant* and *signifié* can never be breached—at best, merely truncated through metaphorical writing.

The book is divided into two parts, the first section studying representation as a problem of aesthetics and Part II evaluating Diderot's epistemology. This division appears at times arbitrary since Creech often anticipates the epistemological debate in earlier chapters. However, the author successfully groups numerous difficult and eccentric texts around the question of representation,

revealing a formidable cohesiveness to Diderot's *opus* which might otherwise go unnoticed (or remain forever problematic to say the least). Here, Creech brings together nicely fiction and philosophical writings: the *fil conducteur* or question of representation threads a "nexus" of metaphors and investigations that are ultimately illustrated to represent the very "knot" of Diderot's work.

Part I on aesthetics begins by looking at representation through metaphor. Chapters 1 and 2 use the figure of the magic ring (*Les Bijoux indiscrets*) to illustrate the thorny relationship of "knowing" to representation. On the one hand, Mangogul's ring offers its owner an infinite and transparent access to knowledge, at the same time its presence and use translate an ever-widening gap or "obscurcissement" of knowledge (embodied here by Mirzoza and the growing chasm between Mangogul's mistrust and desire for her). The more knowledge Mangogul acquires, organizes, and classifies on the subject at hand (women) the less he knows about his own mistress; Creech's point here being that the model of the classical *épistémé* falsely translates the Enlightenment's "representation" of representation. At this point, the author embarks on a highly critical debate of Foucault (*Les Mots et les choses*) suggesting that Foucault falls prey to a sort of historical positivism which acknowledges and confirms the idea of an Enlightenment as the triumph of empiricity over ignorance. The suggestion that Foucault grossly miscalculates epistemological arguments of the eighteenth century seems rather harsh since it is unlikely that Foucault ever meant to define the classical age once and for all as much as he attempted to reproduce its epistemological "project," however utopic in nature it became. In *Les Mots et les choses* (pp. 218-224 for example) Foucault is aware of a "gap" in the classical conception of representation which appears towards the end of the century with Sade. Professor Creech would certainly be more generous with Foucault had the latter marked this "break" twenty years earlier with Diderot. (Does not Foucault do this to a large extent in his *Histoire de la sexualité* when he speaks of Diderot's magic ring—a text to which Creech refers himself)? Foucault's project being immeasurably more vast than Professor Creech's study perhaps justifies this oversight concerning Diderot.

More interesting is Creech's discussion of the "ideal model" which surfaces in several of Diderot's texts. On the one hand, Diderot acknowledges the need for an ideal model upon which our judgments concerning *le Beau*, for example, are based. Yet, far from repeating the Platonic ideal or reformulating a "sensible" explanation of our perceptions, Diderot posits an ideal model as a model of *différence*. Diderot's example of the artist who "accepts and affirms the discrepancies between his painting and his real model . . . is proof that there is another 'model,' but a model that the artist feels in/as the difference between the general idea of beauty and the real exemplar before his eyes." "Alterity" becomes key to understanding Diderot's discussion of an ideal in *De la poésie dramatique*: an alterity ironically based not on any model of pure ideality, but rather on a representation of an "other" that is created, nurtured and "corrected" by the imagination of the beholder.

In the second part of his study, Creech develops both a more convincing and interesting argument following the same idea of representation as "différence." Again, we find another key unlocking Diderot's epistemological model of knowledge: *le truchement*. Representation is defined negatively, dia-

lectically, diacritically. Or, to use an example from Diderot, the metaphor of blindness as "(in)sight" conveys the notion of *truchement*: "The representational process of vision proceeds from this possibility of seeing perfectly and yet seeing 'nothing'; that between objects and their resemblance on the retina there is again a kind of 'nothing'—a 'truchement,' an agency, a difference—that guarantees accurate representation of objects upon the retina." The metaphor of blindness (or the veil, the gap, the blindspot) translates a breach that forever resides between the object and its representation, or between ideas and language. Yet, the very existence of a breach or "lack" between the world of objects and subjectivity also (ironically) creates the very possibility and confirmation of knowledge. As Creech points out in Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles*, Saunderson's blindness causes (equals) his knowledge (insight). Creech's argument, which remains persuasive, is that Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles* and *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets* "deconstructed" the Enlightenment's philosophical tradition and turned upside down both the idealist and sensualist theories of representation in favor of a theory of representation as metaphor. Or, just as Rameau's nephew (as Creech aptly argues) explains, theory has no *a priori* basis ("Uncle Rameau's theory of the 'basse fondamentale'") and is only built upon dissonant, discordant pieces linked together in a new sound or representation we "see" as whole. Thus, Creech concludes, "Again, the unreliability of representations—linguistic or other—derives from their difference from what they represent, but that difference is precisely what must be marked—both in the real and in its image—in order for the representation to be efficacious. In a word, representations depend for their effect on the difference that makes them unreliable (p. 167)."

In conclusion a few critical remarks seem necessary. Professor Creech's project—in itself a highly ambitious and difficult one—has been somewhat muddled by the author's attempt to tackle all facets of critical theory. For example, one finds altogether misplaced, a Lacanian model of representation (see pp. 150–153 on the article, "Encyclopédie") and a rather superfluous development of the notion of "violence" and the "sacred and profane" in dramatic representation that do little to help the author's arguments. Added to this, the text tends at times to be repetitive and is replete with marketable critical terms which only end by creating obstacles to one's reading of an otherwise fine analysis. A few of the author's conclusions also come close to restating earlier commentaries on Diderot. (J. Mehlman's *Cataract* and C. Vance McDonald's article on "Encyclopédie" [see p. 204, note 13 of the text for reference] play heavily on Creech's analysis in Chapters 6 and 9 respectively).

This is not to undermine the fact that Professor Creech's study invites new questions and offers many answers to complex issues surrounding Diderot. His book is certain to draw a wide audience for its contribution to the study of this most difficult Enlightenment thinker.

Newspaper Columns by W.E.B. Du Bois, compiled and edited by Herbert Aptheker. White Plains, New York: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1986. 2 vols. Pp. xxv + 1150. \$235.00.

Before a group assembled on March 2, 1958 for a belated celebration of the ninetieth anniversary of his birth, W.E.B. Du Bois used the occasion to offer the lesson of his long life. "The thing which has been the secret of whatever I have done," he said, "is the fact that I have been able to earn a living by doing the work which I wanted to do and that work was what the world needed done" (p. 1006). Though neither the one thousand people listening to his address, nor the many more who would read it as a contribution to the *National Guardian* for March 10 needed to be reminded, Du Bois might have added for the benefit of the recently born great-grandson to whom he presented his remarks in the form of advice to the young that, by the simple measure of its bulk in published record, the work he had wanted to do turned out to be immense and the world's need for it still apparently deep despite the calumny of detractors.

It has taken no less than 36 volumes to collect the published writings of Du Bois under 31 titles in a uniform edition, with the final installment of the project being these two volumes containing 544 of the newspaper columns he wrote from 1883, when at the age of fifteen he became the Great Barrington correspondent for T. Thomas Fortune's *New York Globe* (later *New York Freeman*), until on the point of departure for new projects in Ghana in 1961 he published the last of the irregular pieces he wrote for the *National Guardian*.

Du Bois's prolific writing actually includes well over 700 pieces written for newspapers, including those he produced while a student editor of the *Fisk Herald* in the 1880s and the articles and texts of speeches he published in specialized newsletters such as the organ of the Council on African Affairs, but the editor Herbert Aptheker has conscientiously avoided redundancy by omitting from these volumes columns that consist of correspondence (available in the three volumes issued under his direction by the University of Massachusetts) and newspaper writing incorporated into the magazine articles or books printed in other volumes of the Kraus-Thomson project. In any case we are not deprived of the opportunity to learn of all the writings in their extant form, since each is noted and accompanied by well-informed commentary in Aptheker's indispensable *Annotated Bibliography of the Published Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois* (1973), which appears as an independent volume in the series.

It is not editorial decision, however, that explains why after 23 contributions of the teen-aged correspondent these volumes present newspaper writing that became a steady output only in 1936 when Du Bois was 68 years of age. Rather, the explanation lies in the fact that after completing his doctorate with a distinguished study of the slave trade Du Bois was occupied for the period of an average person's working life with an extraordinarily active career in sociological and historical research, preparation of landmark books, and activist editing and writing for magazines, particularly *The Crisis*, which was his responsibility from 1910 to 1934. Even during that busy time Du Bois found opportunity to write for weekly newspapers. In 1927 he briefly pro-

duced a column of book reviews for the *Amsterdam News*, for four months in 1931 supplied articles to the Eastern Features Syndicate, which distributed items to Black urban newspapers, and in 1932 gave two columns to George Schuyler's *National News* (none of these are included in these volumes), but Du Bois began writing regularly for newspapers with the "Forum of Fact and Opinion" that began in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in February 1936 because he needed a medium for advocacy and analysis to replace the accustomed forum of *The Crisis*, lost to him through leadership disputes in the NAACP.

Du Bois at once took advantage of the eminence of the *Courier* as an influential Black newspaper to present his readers concise historical background pertinent to the Italo-Ethiopian war; summary accounts of the evolution of colonial imperialism out of the African slave trade and the consequent importance of colonies to industrial powers; a report on his recent European trip including an analysis of the rise of Nazism drawing attention to its distortions of socialism, virulent anti-Semitism, and reactionary treatment of women; discussion of the racial motive in Japanese economic and military actions; and, with an eye to the domestic needs of Afro-Americans, he repeatedly wrote about the Co-Operative Movement, frankly acknowledging how long it had taken him to overcome his orthodox training and to appreciate that the right to vote was insufficient unless careful thought was given to creating an economic foundation for the franchise.

In 1939 DuBois switched his column to the *Amsterdam News* of New York City, reviving for his new paper the title "As the Crow Flies," which he had used in *The Crisis* and the 24 issues of *The Brownies' Book* he edited for children in 1920-21. Writing for the *News* until 1944 he was naturally preoccupied by World War II, but rather than focusing directly on campaigns, victories, or defeats Du Bois stressed the challenge that peace would present to Black Americans and to Africa, providing Hitler was defeated. In making predictions for America he continued to promote the social definition of wealth, demystifying the race riots of 1943 by analyzing their origin in economic conspiracy against Black labor, and offered such direct guidance to the Black community as a popular discussion of the learning theory he believed should underlie formal education and cautionary remarks on the crimes Blacks commit against each other. The prospects for Africa he treated largely by consideration of the meetings among the wartime leaders of the Allied Powers.

Since the necessity that required Du Bois to redirect his writing into newspaper columns had little effect on his preference to write primarily for a Black audience, and since nothing could affect the mission he saw his work serving, one inevitably finds Du Bois's columns confirming his long-held views. Thus, both "The Winds of Time" running in the *Chicago Defender* from January 1945 until May 1948 and the reports he filed under the headline "Pan-Africa" for Adam Clayton Powell's *People's Voice* during 1947-48 include discussions of African affairs that amplify the declaration in the preface to *The Souls of Black Folk* that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line." It might have seemed in 1903 that Du Bois spoke his prophecy with only the descendants of the African diaspora in North America in mind, but since seven of his books and many of his magazine articles address either the history or contemporary state of the home continent,

when he became a newspaper columnist the linkage between American domestic affairs and expectations for the Third World was as characteristic of his analyses as it was of his sustained efforts to foster a Pan-African movement.

Underlying Du Bois's global perspective was an impulse to deepen analysis of issues and expand their parameters. It was that impulse that produced the changes that can be mapped in the record of his thought and accounts for some of the development to be seen in the newspaper columns. For example, in his handling of the theme of racial uplift, Du Bois continued the practice traditional in Black journals of memorializing notable leaders, recommending edifying books, and summarizing American Negro history with an emphasis on the achievement and protections of citizenship. To these expected features, however, he added discussion of race consciousness as a foundation of universal labor solidarity and observation of the promise he saw for Blacks in the world trend toward socialism. Though he had spoken favorably of socialism as early as the days when he helped to found the Niagara Movement, Du Bois would recall in later years that his first essays and research suffered for lack of the tools of Marxism. By the time he became a newspaper columnist the lack had long since been repaired, so that the drive to totalize issues by viewing them in the context of economic formations reinforced the disposition to link Afro-American and international affairs with the result that the columns replace the compartmentalized treatment of current affairs typical of most journalism with writing that because of its characteristic breadth and insight is genuine news.

Still it is not enough to read these columns only as applications of Du Bois's scholarly perspective to the contemporary events that are the currency of newspapers. It is just as important to see that his contributions to the press are also the material of biography showing the contours of a mind impelled by historical, and very decidedly personal, experiences to pursue its inherent logic. The outline for such biography becomes startlingly evident in the columns Du Bois wrote between 1948 and 1961. In the texts for speeches and the articles he contributed to the *National Guardian*, a newspaper born in support of Henry Wallace's third-party candidacy and directed, therefore, toward a multi-racial and left wing audience, Du Bois summoned history to explain the necessity of minor parties as means of exposing the debasement of democracy; presented a defense of the Peace Information Center unchastened by his own indictment as one its "unregistered foreign agent[s]"; campaigned as the American Labor Party candidate for United States Senator from New York; and championed the Soviet Union against the charges of cold warriors. However readers feel about the merits of his political choices, they will see in these writings the courage of a man who believed his thought must become integral to action.

During these same years Du Bois also wrote for the *Chicago Globe*, published by a former member of the *Defender* board, where for nine months in 1950 he revived "As the Crow Flies" to present brief items on Africa, Asia, and the Korean War, and for *Freedom* a monthly newspaper founded in support of Paul Robeson, to which Du Bois contributed between 1951 and 1954 a further statement of defense against his indictment by the government and analysis of 100 years of struggle for Negro freedom notable for its rejection of

the term nation for American Negroes in favor of an international class analysis.

The biography adumbrated through the topics Du Bois discussed includes also his responses to new developments in the struggle for Black liberation such as the use of Gandhian tactics in the Montgomery bus boycott, about which he was a bit dubious because of the pathology he attributed to the South; the sit-ins that he welcomed because students had acted against the "daily, unending series of petty, senseless insults" of racism; and the glimpses of life in Great Barrington provided by the teen-aged reporter along with the reflections he offered 60 years later about the ethnic strife he witnessed in 19th century New England.

Of course at best biography can only be intimated in newspaper columns. By the nature of their genre they respond to immediate events and provide neither the time nor space to express elaborated argument. Yet, for a man who told the NAACP convention in 1926, "I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda. . . I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" the column was an unusually congenial form, since however plainly functional or concise the prose may be—and Du Bois wrote his columns in direct expository style—the form and its rhetoric can engage both the head and the heart of the writer in the same way as serious politics do.

As emblems of his political career these newspaper columns tell us as much about Du Bois the complete man as any of his writings do. For instance in that ninetieth birthday speech he illustrated the importance of choosing work because of its mission by retelling the story of Richard Allen who in 1787 responded to orders to leave St. George's Church in Philadelphia by saying he was going to finish his prayers and then never return. Because of this experience Allen proceeded to found the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the largest Negro organizations in the world. It was not that Allen wished to live in segregation or to repudiate the faith he shared with white Christians. Rather, he had to respond creatively to racism. Du Bois wrote frequently of the Black church as a model of institutional life. It gripped his imagination much as did the experience of double consciousness, which is a conceptualized restatement of the experience of Richard Allen and W.E.B. Du Bois. The story of Bishop Allen, thus, served Du Bois as an exemplum combining in one affecting anecdote analysis of racial experience with practical programs that might direct head and heart consistently toward full freedom.

Setting aside the emotional quality of the writing and abstracting his ideas from their historical and personal context, critics of Du Bois have made it a commonplace to say that he was limited by paradox, sometimes seeking self-segregation but also arguing passionately for the right to participate fully in national life. They might have said the same of Bishop Allen. Perhaps the newspaper columns, if not the other volumes in the Complete Published Works of W.E.B. Du Bois, will give new readers opportunity to see, in place of an abstraction, all that Du Bois put into his writing of mind, heart, and character. If they take that opportunity they will find not paradox but a heroic effort to master reality in the best tradition of Afro-America.

The Visual Arts, Pictorialism, and the Novel: James, Lawrence, and Woolf by Marianna Torgovnick. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. Pp. xii + 267. \$26.50.

This well-informed but ill-crafted book on the novel and the visual arts is most rewarding in its last two (of six) chapters. Here Marianna Torgovnick focuses on a series of pictorial scenes in the fiction of James, Lawrence, and Woolf—pictorial in the sense, amalgamated from Hagstrum and Gombrich, that they are either "directly based on the historical visual arts" or are "capable of being imagined as a painting or sculpture like those in movements known to the author" (p. 28). The emphasis on a firm historical ground, meant to tether flights of irresponsible comparative fancy, is an instance of Torgovnick's care throughout to set prudent boundaries for her work. While the strength of her general design remains to be considered, her regard for the proper artistic context of the novels—based on a clear understanding of what artworks, artists, and artistic movements the novelist admired or loathed—yields a practical criticism fresh and interesting in its approach to familiar texts.

In these final chapters we are asked to imagine a (hypothetical) contemporary painting of the scene in *The Portrait of a Lady* where Isabel Archer stops short "[j]ust beyond the threshold of the drawing-room," having received an ordinary but vaguely unsettling "impression" of Gilbert Osmond and Serena Merle in conversation by the fire within (pp. 166–67). In the style of Victorian narrative painting (by Egg, Millais, or Calderon), Torgovnick observes, such a scene would suggest an intimate relationship. Indeed, with Isabel herself in the picture—"identified as the lady of the house" and conventionally portrayed to reveal her "thoughtfulness and uneasiness" at what she sees—the "viewer of this painting would no doubt interpret the piece as showing a wife in the unpleasant process of discovering her husband intimately associated with an older, less attractive, but still threatening woman" (pp. 172–73). That Isabel fails to "read" this meaning in the scene—fails, in effect to comprehend her own 'portrait'—generates a tangle of ironies about her own situation and comments indirectly on James's preoccupation with the role of visual "impression" as a precarious form of knowledge on the border between art and life.

The "tableau" in *Women in Love* of Gerald Crich's mare at the railway crossing is seen from an equally revealing perspective. Torgovnick argues that this crucial passage resolves itself into "two different imaginary 'paintings' in dramatically different styles." The first is a realistic treatment of Gerald as "the 'picturesque' master horseman, bringing his horse to a stop at the railway and saluting the two handsome women," Ursula and Gudrun. The second, harshly superimposed as the mare recoils from the approaching locomotive and Gerald forces her "as if . . . magnetically" back, suggests a Futurist canvas filled with violent motion, "flashes of vivid color," and the juxtaposition of mechanical and organic forms (pp. 206–07). With the sudden contrast, heightened by the pictorial analogy, between the scene's placid, nostalgic opening and its jarringly Modernist end, Lawrence registers his horror at the domination of the machine over natural instinct—in opposition to the rhapsodic manifestos of the Futurists, whose imagery he here turns against them.

Lawrence's view of much modern art is summarized in a letter, noted by Torgovnick, to the painter Mark Gertler. Acknowledging a photograph of Gertler's *The Merry Go Round*, which would serve as the model for Loerke's factory frieze in *Women in Love*, Lawrence wrote that the painting was "great, and true," but also "horrifying and terrifying" in its exposure of contemporary society (p. 193). In Torgovnick's triad of writers, Lawrence's impassioned split response to the Futurists echoes James's suspicion of the Impressionists as well as his more delicate ambivalence about the visual arts. Lawrence's skepticism stands in contrast to Virginia Woolf's belief that the impressionist and abstract innovations of the painters she admired, transmuted into language, afforded the modern novelist a new palette of techniques for representing the "essence of reality" (p. 138).

The choice of these three is a fruitful one, and not merely because artists and artworks appear prominently in their fiction. They were themselves all variously accomplished as art critics. Lawrence pursued his painting as seriously as his writing, and Woolf, of course, was at the center of a movement that reverberated across the arts. Sometimes their "uses" of the visual arts were intensely personal, as for James in the recently published fragment of a short story entitled "Hugh Merrow," which breaks off before the 'parents' who have commissioned a portrait of their ideal child are forced to decide on its gender. Or for Woolf, who according to Torgovnick, "worked out her sense of competition" with her sister in *To the Lighthouse* by appropriating and absorbing Vanessa Bell's art into the character of the painter, Lily Briscoe (p. 122). Such individual gestures, as Cynthia Ozick observes of the James fragment, point inward to the "marrow" of the writer's intimate concerns (*New York Times Magazine*, October 26, 1986, p. 55). But taken together, James, Lawrence, and Woolf mark out three key coordinates—Joyce would be the fourth—for plotting a more comprehensive history of the novel just at the moment when it comes to confront an unprecedented ferment of the new in the visual arts. In the long view of the relationship between *Pictura* and *Poesis* in England, the weaker sister—whose role since Hogarth had been to conform to the verbal standards of narrative or "history," or to "illustrate" the world of fiction—suddenly declares her independence, offering both a challenge to the primacy of the word and an opportunity for experiment.

It should not diminish Torgovnick's achievement to say that this larger history—a history, in effect, of the modern novel reconceiving itself in reaction to, and in emulation of, a revitalized visual art—is one she chooses not to attempt, preferring the more subtly detailed if narrower field of the individual writer's opinions and influences and their reflection in particular texts. Within these limits, she is very shrewd in the actual or "imaginary" paintings offered as glosses on the novel (although, through no fault of hers, the illustrations reproduced in the book look like they were photographed through a cataract). She also gives us a firmer hold on that elusive notion of literary "pictorialism," distinguishes between superficial and more deeply significant uses of the visual arts, and offers a number of fine moments of local insight. She alerts us, for example, to determinedly unpictorial passages in Lawrence, where the emphasis on the felt and the unseen taps the power of a vital realm below or beyond the level of visual experience.

My reservations about the book stem rather from its insistence on display-

ing, or splaying, its authors on a jerry-built analytical framework that predetermines the shape of the whole argument. Torgovnick maintains that a novelist's uses of the visual arts can be plotted along a continuum running from the "decorative" and the "biographical," through the "ideological," to the "interpretive." This last category is subdivided into the "perceptual" (or "psychological") and the "hermeneutic," the former specifying the characters' experience of art objects within the fiction, the latter indicating the reader's response to the same material (pp. 22-23). Again, the "interpretive" is split along another axis into "insinuation" and "visual rhyme," terms intended to "describe the function in interpretation of the repetition of visual elements" (pp. 23-24).

"Insinuation" names the process "in which covert or subversive ideas are introduced into the fiction encoded in art works or pictorial monuments." Lawrence, cited later (p. 199) as the source of the term, speaks of "insinuation" as the life of "the image as it lives in consciousness, alive like a vision but unknown." Torgovnick's chief example of an "insinuated" idea is the "taboo" intimation of "sado-masochistic, homosexual, and other unconventional sexual practices" encoded but never overtly acknowledged in the African statue that fascinates Gerald and Birkin in *Women in Love* (p. 194). "Visual rhyme"—the interpretive process "in which are objects or pictorial monuments accrue meaning in a way similar to that of iconographic elements in painting" (a similarity never satisfactorily explained)—is in some sense the opposite of "insinuation" in that the meanings it reveals are apparent rather than encoded. At the risk of introducing a note of synaesthetic confusion, one might propose 'dissonance' and 'assonance' as terms that more clearly suggest these alternative modes of interplay between the pictorial and the verbal aspects of a text. Both processes "render meaning dynamic and relatively unstable, insofar as the perceiver's mind constantly reinterprets visual stimuli, and the visual stimuli constantly regroup to provide further interpretive data" (p. 24). At the same time, such interpretive activity offers the character/reader a pictorial means for gathering the threads of the narrative, as it were, into a unified tapestry, an "image" of the novel's total significance that captures—yet, potentially, also undermines or exceeds—the meaning generated by the purely linguistic medium that has brought the image into being.

This design does well enough for the practical tasks at hand but does not seem capable of bearing the load of additional inquiry or providing a blueprint for other builders. However virtuous the "humility" that leads the author to "resist the imperialistic urge" toward large-scale theorizing (p. 25) as well as the "idiom" of contemporary critical fashion in favor of "[r]esearch, description, and analysis" (p. 227, note 24), her homemade working model might well be strengthened by being more securely connected, if not appended, to the major critical statements it seems to evoke. Torgovnick is very responsible about noting, and often refining for her purposes, the main critical studies (Viola Winner on James, Keith Alldritt on Lawrence, and others) that bear on her immediate subject. The notion, though, of "the perceiver's mind constantly reinterpret[ing]" a narrative along a chain of "visual stimuli" appears to call for Iser or Mitchell or Genette, or Hillis Miller, but none such are summoned. A term like "ideological," presented in no particular critical context and covering the "use of the visual arts" to embody "major themes

of the fiction," including "its views of politics, history, society, or more generally, of 'reality'" (p. 19), seems too blunt a critical tool. Surely, Torgovnick's best points could still be made without benefit of the encumbering apparatus, which quickly takes over as the yardstick against which an author's career is measured. By chapter five, we are not surprised to find James ascending, from novel to novel, "well up the continuum that guides this study" (p. 190).

The result is most unfortunate in the organization of the book. Chapters move along the points of the "continuum," surveying bits of one or another of the major figures en route. With the discussion of the writers so dispersed, there arises the constant and annoying need for cross-referencing. In chapter four, we are told what pieces of Lawrence, who was partially assembled in chapter one, will be given here, and what must wait for chapter six (p. 192). This very useful study could have been more gracefully and cogently presented if the elaboration of the "continuum" were confined to the introduction or the conclusion and the body of the book devoted instead to unified chapters on the three novelists.

New York University

Ernest B. Gilman

Postmodernism and Politics, edited by Jonathan Arac. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Pp. xliii + 171. \$29.50, cloth; \$12.95, paper.

Intellectuals in Power: A Genealogy of Critical Humanism by Paul Bové. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Pp. xx + 340. \$27.50.

Jonathan Arac's genial, rambling introduction to *Postmodernism and Politics*, a collection of essays culled from *boundary 2*, hardly defines postmodernism, or its connection to politics. Arac's essay, like the book, seems most concerned to touch all bases. The one hundred and twenty-nine item bibliography attached to Arac's twenty page essay proves his most substantial contribution; the volume itself offers intelligent discussions of John Berger and Raymond Williams by Bruce Robbins and John Higgins respectively, the obligatory comparison of Adorno's negative dialectics to poststructuralism (the work of Rainier Nägele in this case), an unreadable essay by Dana B. Polan on cinema as spectacle, a Derridean reading of Pound's anti-semitism by Andrew Parker that is both predictable and wildly at odds with the political and theoretical choices that inform the other essays, and three superb essays that deserve wide-spread attention: Mary Louise Pratt on reader-response criticism, Cornel West on Fredric Jameson, and Paul Bové on the attempt to forge a pluralistic Marxism, especially in Stanley Aronowitz's work.

These last three essays worry a question that is the subject of Bové's *Intellectuals in Power*: the proper role of humanist intellectuals in the struggle against the dominant power structures of our time. The difficulties raised by this question become apparent immediately upon commencing to wade through Bové's book. Bové, a critic whose intelligence and intellectual orientation I greatly admire, has produced a poorly written, horribly organized,

repetitious, and confusing book. (How the book got through copy-editing in its current shape must remain a mystery.) For all that, this book should not be ignored. Its faults stem from the author's conscientious attempt to characterize what intellectuals in the humanist tradition do. Through an examination of the careers of I. A. Richards, Erich Auerbach, Edward Said, and Marshall Hodgson, Bové argues that humanists inevitably reproduce the figure of "the sublime leading intellectual" (p. 144) whose magisterial presence necessarily works against "the struggle for self-management and cultural autonomy" (Bové, in Arac, p. 13) by various groups within the culture. "Even the most revisionist, adversarial, and oppositional humanistic intellectuals—no matter what their avowed ideologies—operate within a network of discourse, institutions, and desires that . . . always reproduce themselves in essentially anti-democratic forms and practices" (pp. 1-2). Foucault's anti-humanism, in particular his refusal to assign "the intellectual a leading role" and his attempt "to produce theories and research methods, as well as new forms of knowledge, which might be useful to others engaged in their own confrontation with . . . power" (p. 23), provides Bové's model for "intellectual work" that serves "political struggles for self-determination" (p. xvii).

Bové's problems are partly organizational. Discussions of Said and Foucault are scattered throughout the book, which leads to annoying repetitions, while the two chapters on Auerbach seem endless, with the key issues buried amidst a thousand qualifications and digressions. But the problems are also theoretical. Pratt and West both share Bové's uneasiness with the intellectuals' arrogation of power to themselves, even within liberationist politics. All three want to shatter totalizing, masterful discourses in favor of a heterogeneous pluralism that restores a voice to excluded sub-groups and a (currently) passive populace. Pratt and West work to show how reader response theory and Jameson's Marxism do not recognize their own coercive power; Bové is out to prove that humanism as a whole cannot tolerate the division of power and its distribution among various groups. But it proves extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, for these critics to avoid totalizing concepts of their own, the most obvious of which is "power."

Pratt provides one egregious example. She faults Stanley Fish for adopting "a kind of innocence for interpretation," instead of recognizing that "knowledge is interested, and interest implies conflict; to advance an interpretation is to insert it into a network of power relations" (p. 52). Yet, in the very next paragraph, she objects that Fish's position eventually rests "interpretive authority on nothing but pure power, turning criticism into the 'supremely cynical activity'" (p. 52). Fish has plenty of problems of his own, thank you, but here Pratt is burdening him with her own. Pratt's insistence that all knowledge is connected to power condemns her to cynicism, or to dreams of disinterested transcendence that are by definition impossible to fulfill. She both wants and denies the possibility of a knowledge separated from power and interest.

Bové recognizes the problem here much more explicitly than Pratt does. He considers at length Said's argument with Foucault on just this point. In "Travelling Theory," Said chooses Chomsky's position over Foucault's because Chomsky "makes difficult discriminations and supports the struggle of an oppressed proletariat when he is certain that 'an ideal of justice, is its

goal" (p. 231). Bové supports Foucault's contention that all such transcendent ideals maintain "the regulative authority of intellectuals" (p. 231). "It would not be difficult to do a modern genealogy of 'justice,' but such a genealogy might make it difficult for intellectuals to employ such a term because it would suggest the burden of self-interest and complicity with power . . . that could minimize its value as an 'ideal'" (p. 231). If "ideals" are those concepts that manage to slough "the burden of self-interest," then we can never have any ideals. And Bové recognizes the stern negativism this imparts to the criticism that he advocates. "The point is that neither Foucault nor, as far as I know, any of those who take his work seriously suggest that intellectuals should play a prophetic role or offer an alternative vision of the future. Said and others implicitly recognize this reluctance on Foucault's part and often mark it as one of his limits. On the contrary, I think it one of his peculiar virtues" (p. 325). A stern asceticism—perhaps even silence?—best guarantees the intellectual's withdrawal from humanism and from arrogant intervention in the lives of others.

To some extent, Bové is aware that his position invites the kind of Nietzschean or Derridean reading that emphasizes how the Foucaultian intellectual must identify as a lie something that he must also live by. This awareness surfaces intermittently in the text when Bové worries about humanism's "uncanny ability to renew, reposition, and sustain itself" (p. 299) and questions to what extent we can expect to get completely outside this tradition. But Bové's book also supports a Derridean reading in less conscious ways. In his preface, he rejects the "traditional or conservative humanists'" insistence "on subordinating the role of power, interest, and politics to some more assuring notion of 'reason,' 'communication,' or 'practice'" (p. xii). Throughout the book, however, Bové continually appeals to a "rationality" that is never defined, but is usually contrasted to the "irrationality" of positions that are ideologically and interestedly motivated. Kant's *Anthropology* "typifies modern humanism"; "his text . . . obscure[s] its own irrational suppressions, ideological distortions, and its situation within an entire constellation of events constituting the anthropological attitude" (p. 252). Humanism "needs to be contested in two ways: by marking its irrationality and violence, and by producing knowledge of a sort unassimilable to its unitary, imposing tendencies" (p. 286). Bové's non-humanist will "write a discontinuous history as engaged history of the present and . . . bring the skills of *rational*, scholarly inquiry to bear on the present social and political conditions" (p. 208, my emphasis). Yet later we learn that "'reason' appears as at least dependent on power and, more realistically, as power's projection, its innocent mask and its most effective weapon for defense and expansion" (p. 296). Obviously Bové could clarify things immensely here by defining what he means by "rational," "irrational," and "reason" in the passages just cited, but I suspect the real trouble lies with the all-encompassing notion of power he employs. Power is both all-present (the ultimate ground of all actions) and always perceived negatively—as something to be contested. This conjunction generates the book's most dramatic blind spot. Bové takes the good of self-determination for granted, yet explains at length how humanism has provided intellectuals with power and privilege. Why, then, given his notions of interest and power, would any intellectual have even the slightest inclination to abandon humanism? In the name of what?

I am hardly happy with some such Nietzschean/Derridean impasse, and we must understand that Bové is struggling to avoid the quietistic implications of such positions. But if there really does exist a group of intellectuals who care if their work helps to protect "oppress[ed] groups, classes, and sexes and . . . their *right* to history and self-representation" (p. 302, my emphasis), a theoretic of power is not going to explain their existence or justify their appeal to rights. At this point, Said's impatience with the torturous byways of theory, as well as his often stated belief that such theories tend to produce static and monolithic portraits of the world that discourage a belief in critique's or political action's efficacy, might finally prove more fruitful than a stringent Foucaultian abdication of any positive role for the intellectual.

Cornel West's essay proposes to release us from these theoretical dead ends by pointing toward a different understanding of criticism's relation to politics. West faults Jameson's Marxism for missing its aim of "transforming present practices" when it "resurrects, attacks, [or] attempts to 'go beyond' the 'metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical problems' of the Western tradition (p. 138). Let the dead bury the dead is West's advice. "More substantive reflections on 'practical' political strategies seem appropriate. My plea here is not anti-intellectual or anti-theoretical, but rather a call for more sophisticated theory aware of and rooted in the present historical and political conjecture in American capitalist civilization" (p. 141). Despite the disclaimer, West obviously owes much to neo-pragmatism and its attack on theory. His suggestion of a Marxist pragmatism is intriguing, and after struggling through Bové's admirable but finally unsatisfying agonies, the suggestion that political discourse turn to specific struggles at specific sites comes as a relief.

If there is a postmodern politics, this last prescription appears to be its identifying mark. The support and fostering of local discourses—often associated with minorities and culturally disadvantaged groups rather than with economic classes—against the powers vested in large governmental, corporate, or social institutions is undertaken in the name of democracy. Bové, in his essay on a new Marxism along these lines, "advocates a self-managed society formed from an alliance of autonomous, sometimes competing groups" (p. 9). West and Bové both apparently believe that this "antihegemonic politics" (p. 13) is Marxist, but that term appears mostly a talismanic formula to indicate radical intentions and discontent. Certainly almost all the economic and materialistic content of traditional Marxism is missing here. Revisions of Marx or positions that take certain cues from his work are fine, but some truth in labelling would be nice, too. To call oneself a Marxist, even when one's position resembles liberal pluralism more than anything else, surely obscures the issues, even if it does substantiate one's desire to be thought radical. If the academic left could manage to overcome its phobic shunning of all things liberal, it might not only do us the service of explaining how the vision of a socialist democracy derives from and differs from liberalism as well as Marxism, but might also discover that, under current conditions, being a liberal is highly likely to foster radical opinions and action.

Drama, Metadrama, and Perception by Richard Hornby. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1986. Pp. 186. \$26.50.

Drama, Metadrama, and Perception "deals with the way in which drama relates to reality, to itself, and to culture generally" (jacket). Since plays necessarily "interpret life" (p. 17) through a dynamic representation of the codes of cultural signification, metadrama not only examines the operation of drama, it also has the potential to dramatize how cultural meaning is produced. Taking "metadrama" as a defining instance of dramatic semiosis, then, this book claims to relate dramatic representation to the procedures of cultural communication, to examine what Professor Hornby terms the "drama/culture complex." This would be a sweeping project, indeed—to investigate how drama is embedded in the means with which a culture represents itself to itself—and one clearly beyond the scope of this slim book. Instead, Hornby provides a meticulous description of a range of metadramatic techniques, while leaving the specific relations between drama, metadrama and the processes of cultural representation largely in abeyance. As a result, the book is frequently suggestive, but falls short of achieving its larger—and justifying—aims.

To establish metadrama as the epitome of dramatic representation, Hornby first challenges the "realistic doctrine," which measures a play's effect according to "how 'close to' or 'far from' everyday life it seems" (p. 13). This gambit, though, proves more telling as rhetoric than as theory. For Hornby proceeds only so far as to suggest that "realism" is an effect of signifying conventions—"No plays, however 'realistic,' reflect life directly; all plays, however 'unrealistic,' are semiological devices for categorizing and measuring life indirectly" (p. 14)—stopping short of the more searching inquiry into how the encoding of "realistic" representation is implicated in the wider practices of cultural transmission. Since drama—even "realistic" drama—is "a means of thinking about life" rather than of "mirroring life passively" (p. 26), metadrama provides the most direct way to illuminate the place of drama in the design of our lives. Although Hornby's definition of metadrama is perhaps less rich than those offered by critics of Shakespeare, Pirandello, or Beckett—"metadrama can be defined as drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, the drama itself" (p. 31)—it does enable him to uncover the "extraordinary ubiquity" of metadramatic opportunities. Rather than defining metadrama as a genre, Hornby identifies five metadramatic strategies that produce moments of "estrangement" from the dramatic fiction: the play within the play, the ceremony within the play, role playing within the role, literary and real-life reference within the play (such as Strindberg's reference to the *Doll House* controversy in *The Father*), and theatrical "self reference" (Cleopatra's "I shall see/Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness," for example). Devoting a brief chapter to each type, Hornby provides a detailed and synoptic overview of how each technique operates in an impressive array of classic and contemporary plays. Yet, since he offers no new precision to our sense of metadrama (or method for reading metadramatic strategies in relation to other cultural codes), his conclusions often seem much more familiar than his observations:

the play within the play explores "existential concerns," the ceremony within the play addresses "social concerns," and "role playing within the role is a device for exploring the concerns of the individual" (p. 85).

Of course, critics have long treated plays, roleplaying, and ceremonies as instances of a metadramatic self-reflection; the principal virtue of Hornby's study is its careful description of metadramatic moments buried within plays not usually seen as self-reflective. Fittingly, the consideration of theatrical "self-reference" gives rise to the most theoretically ambitious portion of the argument, where Hornby directly engages the relation between the procedures of drama and those of the "culture complex." Rather than situating the means of dramatic representation—plot structure or characterization, for instance, or even acting style—within the ideological order through which culture is reproduced, Hornby offers an eclectic theory of dramatic "perception." Drama requires of its spectator a "bifurcated field of thought" (p. 110), a special double vision that alternates between an "intuitive" or "primary process" understanding of the symbolic, analogical or metaphorical events of the fictive drama (the foreground), and a rational, "logical," "secondary process" awareness of the workings of the world outside the theater (the background). The metadramatic moment serves to "estrangle" the spectator from the dramatic fiction, to enforce an oscillation "between foreground (the dramatic illusion) and background (the 'realities' that define the illusion). What happens is that there is a shift in perception that turns the field of thought inside out. What had been background is foregrounded, and vice versa" (p. 116). It is at this moment, presumably, that the "drama/culture complex" comes into view, as "fictive" and "real" structures of apprehension are theatrically juxtaposed. It is also at this moment that Hornby's penchant for generalization becomes the most frustrating: Hornby refuses to clarify how drama is integrated into the production of cultural meaning in any specific manner, other than to imply what we may already know, that there is a mutually correcting symbiosis between the interpretive models we apply inside the theater and those we apply outside its walls.

This problem is compounded in the second section of the book, devoted to a sixth type of metadrama—"drama and perception"—and to brief exemplary readings of *Oedipus the King*, *As You Like It*, *Woyzeck*, *The Father*, *The Master Builder*, and *Betrayal*. "Since drama is always addressing itself to the ways in which society views reality," Hornby suggests, "human perception is a latent theme of all drama. Sensing this, the serious playwright in particular moves toward perception as an overt theme, making explicit what is always implicitly in the background. Drama, which is a means of perception, turns upon itself and becomes about perception" (p. 121). Indeed, "perception" is a latent theme not only of all drama, but of all human experience; a problem phrased at this level of generalization is hardly problematic at all. But Hornby seems to promise more, that it's not the theme of "perception" that interests him, but the process of perception as it is articulated by the drama—how the "means" of a specifically "dramatic" perceptual process becomes thematized, becomes itself what the play is "about." This epistemological reading of dramatic form, however, frequently eludes Hornby, who reads his chosen plays as instances of how the playwright "directly and explicitly investigates the way in which his society views itself and its world" (p. 121).

Thematised in this manner, "perception" assumes its status as "one of the great themes" of drama, and so leads to a series of familiar conclusions: characters in *As You Like It* "see life in the way that they want to see it"; Woyzeck's motives are often difficult to interpret; *Betrayal* deconstructs dramatic realism, setting up characters and situations that lead us to psychologize, but the psychologizing yields only emptiness" (p. 177). That is, Hornby rarely follows through on his best insight, that in offering the perceptual structure of drama itself up to inspection, metadrama invites us to consider how that structure is related to structures of knowledge provided in the "background" outside the theater, in the "drama/culture complex."

Drama, Metadrama, and Perception is thus frequently irritating in the formulation—or evasion—of its central argument. Categories of discrimination are often less than illuminating, as in the repeated distinction between "serious" and "hack" playwrighting, or the application of Freudian "primary" and "secondary" processes to the act of dramatic interpretation. On the local level, the argument frequently belabors the obvious, as when we learn that Hamlet's madness, Horner's emasculation, Monsieur Jourdain's nobility, and Enrico IV's madness are "false faces that reveal deep inner truths about their characters" (p. 67). Conversely, questionable generalizations are presented with the startling air of the commonplace: "Because society has grown ever more complex since the Renaissance, identity continues to fascinate us" (p. 79). More troubling, though, is Hornby's inattentiveness to terminological precision. Theoretically incommensurate explanatory models—Suzanne Langer's formalism, Freudian primary and secondary process, Saussurean *langue* and *parole*, Gestalt phenomenology, and Frye's theory of modes, for example—are assimilated to Hornby's description of theatrical perception with astonishing ease (pp. 105–114). This carelessness extends to dramatic theory as well. Since the self-reflexiveness of metadrama is what distinguishes "the serious work of art and the work of a hack" (p. 23), it's not surprising that Brechtian "alienation" should provide a central example of Hornby's case: "Thus both the serious and the conventional play will be full of traditional elements, but the serious play will call some of those very elements into question, making them seem strange—'alienated,' to use Brecht's terminology, or 'defamiliarized,' in the terminology of the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky" (pp. 23–24). Of course, Brecht's appropriation of Marx's *entfremdung* in the *verfremdungseffekt* is intended to prevent this easy assimilation of his revolutionary technique: Brechtian "alienation" defamiliarizes the familiar precisely to reveal the working of an ideological process in the construction of an everyday reality—not all acts of "estrangement" or "defamiliarization" qualify as "alienation" in Brecht's sense. "Deconstruction" is invoked with similar nonchalance, as when Hornby suggests that the "reverse timetable" of *Betrayal* is a "radical deconstruction for Pinter" (p. 172), or that *The Master Builder* is "a deconstruction of Ibsen's own realism" (p. 166). Hornby's use of "deconstruction" to mean a "self-conscious reflection upon" here again misses the point to be argued—that Pinter and Ibsen offer an inquiry into the construction of realism as a signifying convention. Finally, one may feel that Hornby's fondness for homely illustrations—voting for Reagan as an example of "primary process" thought (p. 108)—distract attention from an argument already much too diffuse.

Drama, Metadrama, and Perception immediately assumes the select company of provocative books recently written on dramatic theory, notably Bert States's *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), and Austin Quigley's *The Modern Stage and Other Worlds* (London: Methuen, 1985). Like both of these books, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* examines the epistemological process of the drama, and suggests how that process can be articulated through a critical reading of dramatic texts. But while States offers an inventive, idiosyncratic commentary on a host of theatrical phenomena, and Quigley attempts an account of the function of epistemological horizons in modern dramaturgy, Hornby's book is neither strikingly original in conception nor attractively precise in method (compare Hornby's reading of Pinter's *Betrayal* with Quigley's, for instance). In part, perhaps the weakness of the book stems from an unclear conception of its audience, a typical problem insofar as dramatic theory addresses not only literary and dramatic scholars, critics, and theorists, but also students of plays, theater, and acting as well. Surely, though, a contemporary professional audience needs no introduction to Northrop Frye, to structuralism, or, for that matter, to the action of *Oedipus the King*, yet Hornby provides textbook-like summaries of each. A rigorous consideration of how the process of dramatic signification can be conceived within the wider terms of cultural production is badly needed, and meta-drama may well provide access to that difficult and challenging arena. *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*, unfortunately, more often than not seems to obscure the way.

The University of Texas at Austin

W. B. Worthen

The Writing of the Disaster by Maurice Blanchot. Translated by Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. Pp. xiii + 150. \$19.95, cloth; \$7.95 paper.

In the past few years, English translations of many Blanchot texts (both criticism and fictions) have finally become available. Ann Smock's beautiful and moving translation of *L' Ecriture du désastre* will contribute, among other things, to the re-evaluation of Maurice Blanchot's role in the definition of contemporary French thought. Blanchot's relentless concern with death and foreboding has a troubling relevance today: not only to the unspeakable disasters which have marked the twentieth century, one of which may yet destroy all life on the planet, but also to the seemingly more gentle, if problematic act of writing. Writing "of" the disaster means writing both *about* disaster and writing *by* or *from* it. Hence the fragmentary form of this book. Disaster (Hiroshima, the camps, nuclear war), whose ineffable presence now inhabits all thought, also takes the form of fragments, what remains before or after the unimaginable.

The relationship between *imagination* and disaster is perhaps stated most clearly in Blanchot's reading of the Narcissus myth (pp. 125 ff.). In Blanchot's view, "Narcissus falls 'in love' with the image because the image as such—

because every image—is attractive: the image exerts the attraction of the void, and of death in its falsity" (p. 125). What makes the image attractive *as such* would therefore not be its perfect resemblance to a model, but its utter lack of resemblance to any model, its uniqueness. The fatal seduction of the image would lie in the fact that nothing in the world resembles it. After all, Tiresias had predicted that Narcissus' life would depend upon his never knowing himself, that is, upon his never acquiring that self-sameness or identity which is the basis (however illusory) of life. In this sense, what Narcissus sees is therefore not himself but the divine, incorruptible aspect of the image, that aspect which is also his, even though he does not have the right to see it (p. 128). In this paradoxical sense, *The Writing of the Disaster* is narcissistic writing. For "[t]he poet is Narcissus to the extent that Narcissus is an anti-Narcissus: he who, turned away from himself . . . , dying of not recognizing himself—leaves the trace of what has not occurred" (p. 135).

The "Translator's Remarks" provide a helpful supplement to her brilliant general introduction to the earlier *Space of Literature* (University of Nebraska Press, 1982). All writing is, as Blanchot wrote long before Derrida, already a form of translation.

Amherst College

Jay Caplan